



Building Alliances That Deliver

THE ART & SCIENCE OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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Building Alliances That Deliver

- National Postal Forum 2026
- Track: Direct Mail Reimagined
- Moderator: Cathy Leibrock, AAA Life Insurance

Meet Our Panel of Alliance Experts



Andrea St. Thomas

Quad Graphics

VP Marketing Solutions

Integrated print, data & marketing solutions at scale



Carl R. Fischer

Betty Direct Creative

VP, DM Agency

Strategic direct mail & omnichannel agency leadership



Tom Murray

Pitney Bowes

VP Strategic Alliances

Postal technology, logistics & presort optimization



Dean DeCencio

GrayHair Software

Sr. Consultant
Head of Business Development

Mail tracking, analytics & postal intelligence platforms

Session Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be equipped to transform how you build and sustain partner relationships

1

Master Strategic Partnership Frameworks

Move beyond vendor contracts into value-creating, performance-multiplying strategic alliances.

2

Identify High-Performance Alliance Traits

Recognize the hallmarks of partnerships that consistently outperform benchmarks.

3

Unlock Innovation Through Collaboration

Discover how co-creation and shared risk-taking drives competitive advantage.

4

Apply Takeaways Immediately

Leave with an Alliance Blueprint and a scorecard ready for day one back at the office.

Alliance Advantage!

Four real-world scenarios. Four rounds of expert insight. One transformational hour.



The Cost Crunch

How collaboration neutralizes 18%+ cost pressure through strategic supplier alignment



Speed to Mailbox

Compressing 21-day campaign timelines through upstream partner integration



Crisis Mode

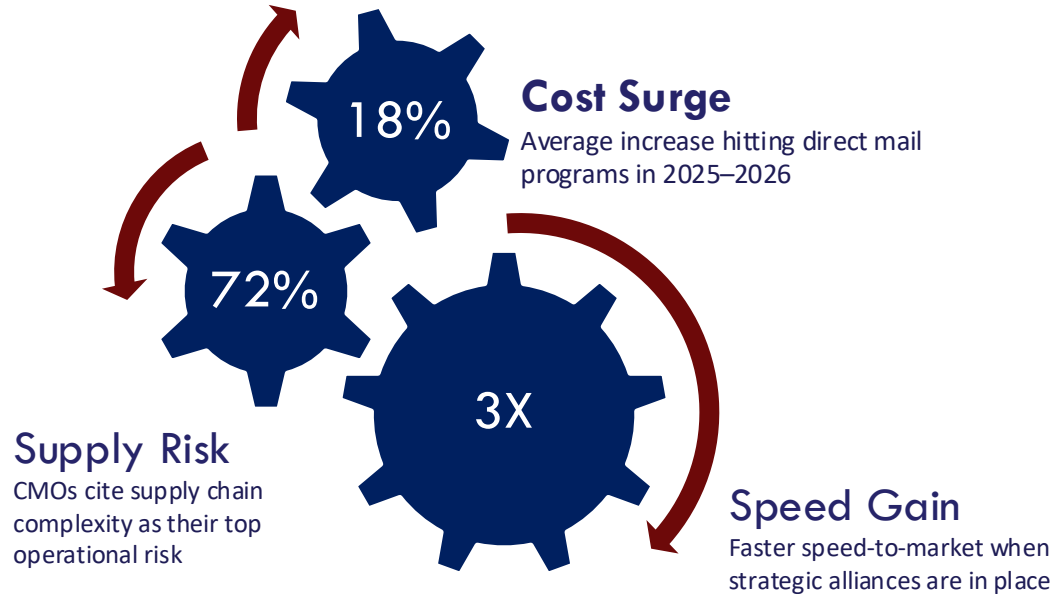
Building resilience before disruption strikes — supply chain, outage, regulation



Innovation Ignition

AI personalization, omnichannel, advanced postal — where your next breakthrough lives

Why Alliances Matter More Than Ever



4 FORCES RESHAPING OUR INDUSTRY

- 1 Rising Paper & Production Costs — commodity volatility demands supplier depth
- 2 Postal Rate Complexity — changes require agile postal optimization partners
- 3 Speed-to-Market Pressure — consumer expectations are outpacing solo execution
- 4 Data-Driven Personalization — technology integration is now table stakes

The Art of Partnership

"Great alliances are not signed — they are built, brick by brick, through trust, transparency, and shared purpose."

Trust & transparency

Open books, honest conversations, no surprises. Partners who share hard news early are your most valuable ones.

Shared vision

Aligned goals that extend beyond the contract term. Co-planning sessions that look 12–24 months ahead.

Aligned incentives

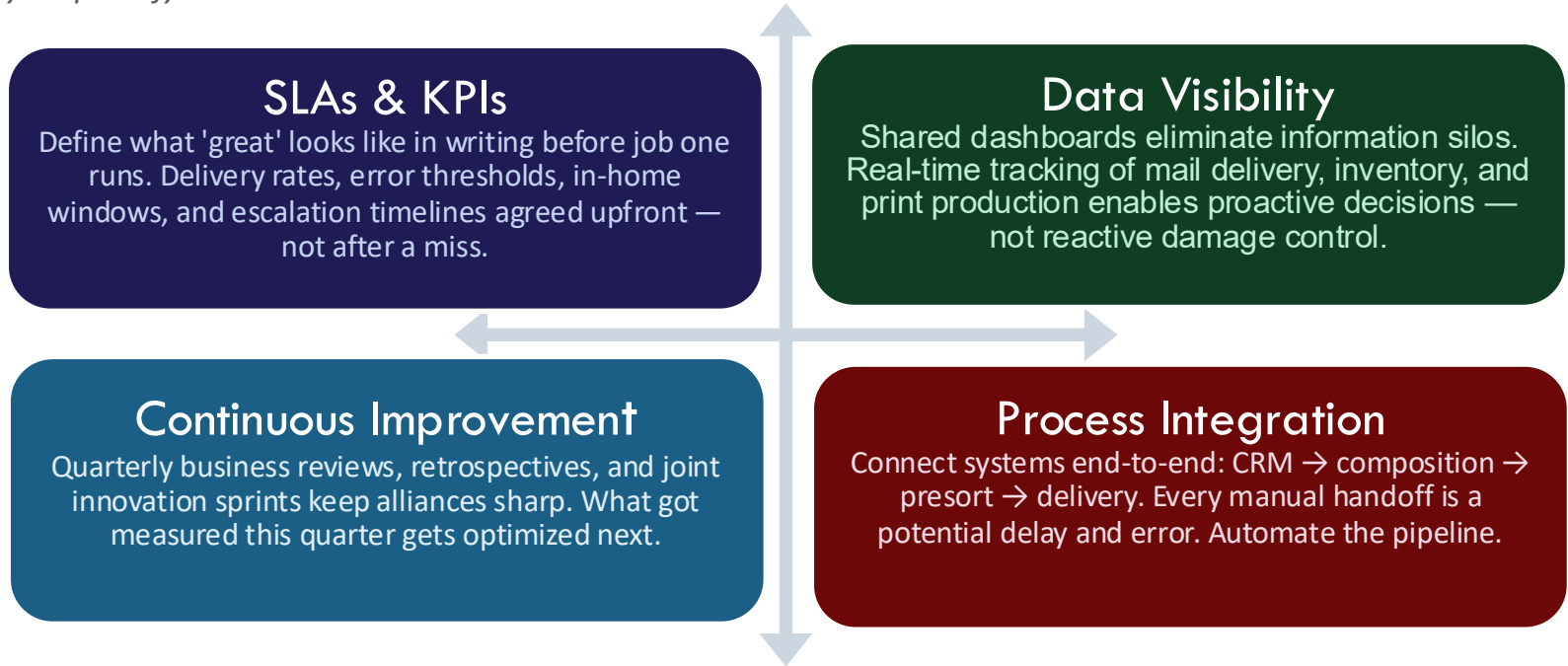
Win-win deal structures. Performance fees, shared upside, outcome-based pricing that binds your success together.

Executive sponsorship

Leadership commitment at the highest level on both sides. The relationship lives or dies at the top.

The Science of Partnership

How do you quantify success?



Round 1: The Cost Crunch

How does collaboration reduce cost pressure?

SCENARIO: Your program costs jump 18% overnight. Paper is scarce. Postal rates just changed. Your budget is frozen. Your partners are your only lever.



Paper Shortages

Pre-committed inventory agreements, multi-vendor sourcing strategies, and substitute stock protocols negotiated in advance — not in crisis.

8–12%

cost savings



Postal Rate Change

Presort partners with deep USPS relationships optimize sortation, co-mingle mail, and surface automation discounts unavailable to solo mailers.

5–15%

postal savings



Frozen Budget

Shared analytics identify lowest-performing segments to suppress. Co-funded testing programs let you innovate without new spend approval.

2-4X

program ROI

Audience Poll – What’s Your Biggest Cost Driver?

Which cost category is putting the most pressure on your direct mail program right now?



Paper



Postage



Labor



Technology

Round 2: Speed to Mailbox

How early do we align and engage?

SCENARIO: Campaign approved. Launch in 21 days. Complex personalization. Five stakeholders. What do you do FIRST?

Day 1



Alliance War Room

All partners on one call. Data, print, postal, and fulfillment locked into a shared timeline with clear owners and decision rights.

Day 3



Data Pipeline Open

Segmentation files, personalization logic, and suppression lists delivered via integrated pipeline — no email chains, no delays.

Day 21



Mail Drops On Time

Full personalization. On budget. Trackable from presort to in-home delivery. The alliance made the impossible routine.

Best Practice: Early Alignment

THE NUMBERS PROVE IT

40%

Faster Execution

with upstream partner alignment

60%

Fewer Revision Cycles

with pre-integrated data pipelines

4-Day

In-Home Window

compressed through alliance coordination

Involve Partners Upstream

Brief print, postal, and data partners at campaign kickoff — not after creative is approved. Their input shapes feasibility, cost, and timeline.

Collaborative Planning Calendars

A shared, live campaign calendar visible to all partners eliminates the 'I didn't know' problem and creates collective accountability.

Integrated Data Pipeline

Automate file delivery from CRM to composition to presort. Every manual handoff is a potential delay and error — remove them all.

Round 3: Innovation Ignition

Where is the biggest innovation opportunity in the next 24 months?



HIGHEST IMPACT

AI-Driven Personalization

Partners who share behavioral data enable AI models predicting next-best offer, optimal timing, and creative versioning at scale. Impossible without alliance-grade data access.



FASTEST GROWTH

Omnichannel Integration

Direct mail no longer lives alone. Alliance partners bridging physical mail with digital — triggered email, Informed Delivery, QR journeys — drive 2–3× response lifts.



PROVEN ROI

Advanced Postal Optimization

Bypass, Drop shipping, co-mingling, intelligent presort - through deep USPS partnerships unlock postage savings that fund innovation.

Alliance Innovation Model

A structured approach to turning partnership into a competitive innovation engine

Co-Creation Workshops

Quarterly sessions where your team and partner teams solve problems together — not in separate silos. Joint ideation, shared ownership of outcomes.

Shared Pilots

Test new capabilities jointly — split cost, share learnings, and scale what works across both organizations. No solo risk.

Risk Sharing Models

Performance fees, revenue sharing, outcome-based pricing. When partners have skin in the game, they play to win.

Innovation Scorecards

Track ideas generated, pilots launched, and innovations scaled. Make innovation a measurable expectation — not a wish list.

Bonus Round: Crisis Mode

When a crisis strikes, is your alliance a safety net or a liability?



Supply Chain Disruption

Paper plant goes dark. Alliance response: pre-negotiated alternate sourcing activates within hours. Pre-committed inventory protocols mean production never stops.

Zero Days Downtime



System Outage

Composition platform crashes at peak. Alliance response: shared backup environments and documented handoff protocols keep production running through the failure.

Continuity Maintained



Regulatory Change

USPS rate restructure announced. Alliance response: postal optimization partner immediately models impact and reconfigures sortation for minimum cost exposure.

Savings Captured

Resilient Alliance Traits

What separates alliances that endure from those that collapse under pressure?

Redundant Suppliers

Never single-source critical materials. A resilient alliance has a depth chart — pre-qualified alternates ready to activate within 24 hours of a disruption.

Escalation Clarity

Every stakeholder knows the decision tree. No ambiguity about who calls what — and when — under pressure. Document it before you need it.

Real-Time Dashboards

Shared visibility into mail tracking, inventory, and production status eliminates blind spots. Proactive response beats reactive damage control every time.

Quarterly Business Reviews

Structured QBRs move the relationship from reactive to strategic — surfacing issues before they become crises. Make it mandatory, not optional.

Turning Vendors into Strategic Allies

Shifting from RFP mentality to relationship mentality – the single most powerful pivot in your partnership strategy

SUPPLIER	STRATEGIC ALLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaged only at RFP time• Price is the only success metric• No visibility into their roadmap• Relationship resets every contract• They solve their problems – not yours• Disputes end in legal, not resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embedded in your campaign planning• Shared KPIs – speed, quality, innovation• Joint business planning sessions• Relationship built over years, not quarters• Executive engagement at both organizations• Problems solved together, before escalation

Performance Multiplier Effect

Alliance strength amplifies performance across lifecycle



99%

Quality

On-time delivery rate via aligned SLAs and partner accountability



40%

Speed

Faster campaign execution vs. non-alliance production models



15%

Cost

Average reduction in total program spend through collaborative sourcing



3x

Innovation

More new capabilities launched by mature alliance organizations

Building Your Alliance Blueprint

Self-evaluation – how does this stack up to your current model?

1



Assess Current Partnerships

Score your top 5 partners on trust, transparency, performance, and innovation. Identify gaps and champions honestly.

2



Define Shared Metrics

Co-create a scorecard with each strategic partner. Agree on KPIs, reporting cadence, and the definition of mutual success.

3



Establish Governance

Schedule quarterly business reviews. Assign executive sponsors. Document escalation protocols and decision rights before a crisis demands it.

4



Commit to Innovation

Launch one co-creation workshop in your first 90 days. Make innovation a standing agenda item — not a once-a-year conversation.

Alliance Scorecard Exercise

Rate your most strategic partner 1–5 on each dimension, then share your score and why.



Trust

Do they deliver on commitments without being chased?

1

2

3

4

5



Transparency

Do you have real visibility into their operations and challenges?

1

2

3

4

5



Performance

Do they consistently hit SLAs and proactively flag issues?

1

2

3

4

5



Innovation

Do they bring you ideas and solutions you haven't thought of yet?

1

2

3

4

5

Key Takeaways

01 Partnership Is Strategy

Your alliance portfolio is a competitive asset — manage it with the same rigor, discipline, and investment as your media plan.

02 Alignment Drives Performance

Shared KPIs, joint planning, and executive engagement aren't soft skills. They are the operating model of top-performing organizations.

03 Collaboration Fuels Innovation

The next capability that transforms your program will not come from solo effort. It will emerge from your best alliance relationship.

04 Resilience Requires Integration

Organizations that build alliance infrastructure before a crisis are the only ones still mailing when everyone else goes dark.

Lightning Round: 60-Second Wisdom

One piece of advice from each panelist



Audience Q&A – 10 Minutes

- What alliance challenges are you facing?
- What innovation are you exploring?

Thank You – Let's Keep Building Alliances That Deliver

