# Building Cybersecurity Partnerships That Truly Deliver

Discover proven strategies and real-world insights from **Ignacio Sbampato** — a **global cybersecurity partnerships expert** with 20 years of experience. Learn how to create relationships that not only last but drive measurable growth and trust in an increasingly complex digital world.

# What's Inside This Guide

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## What You Will Learn

This guide provides cybersecurity professionals with actionable insights to build impactful partnerships and drive growth.

- Gain expert insights into cybersecurity partnerships.
- Understand key partner dynamics and market trends.
- Recognize the crucial role of implementation partners.
- Discover essential requirements for effective engagement.
- Define partnership value beyond financial metrics.
- Measure partnership health using key performance indicators.
- Leverage events for a lean go-to-market strategy.
- Master advanced strategies for scaling partnerships.
- Apply actionable steps to enhance your market position.

These concise takeaways will equip you with practical knowledge to cultivate robust, mutually beneficial partnerships in the dynamic cybersecurity industry.

# Meet Your Expert Guide

## Ignacio Sbampato

**Partnerships Leader at [BridgerWise](#)**

With over two decades of experience in cybersecurity partnerships, Ignacio Sbampato has a proven track record of driving scalable growth through indirect sales.

As the former Chief Business Officer at ESET, he played a key role in expanding the company's revenue from €260M to €700M. Today, Ignacio lends his expertise to European scale-ups as an advisor at BridgerWise and ECSO, helping them develop channel strategies that not only look good on paper but also deliver results.

| 20+ Years | Driving Growth | Scaling Revenue |
|---|---|---|
| Cybersecurity partnership ecosystem expertise | Achieving scalable growth through indirect sales | Proved scalable revenue with ESET |

He recently joined us for a live Q&A that sparked many of the ideas explored in this guide. His perspective helped inspire the cybersecurity frameworks and strategies we've expanded on here.

## Watch the Complete Session



### ▶ YouTube

**Kiflo Q&A Live: How to Build #cybersecurity #partnershi...**

In cybersecurity, scaling through partnerships isn't optional — it's essential. However, vendors often struggle to turn partnerships in...

# Understanding Partner Dynamics in Cybersecurity

The cybersecurity partner ecosystem has evolved into a complex network of specialized roles. Success begins with understanding that **everything starts from the customer**. Rather than randomly pursuing partners, identify your ideal customer profile (ICP) first, then determine who they already work with and buy from.

### System Integrators

Large enterprises typically work with major SIs like Accenture or regional players. These partners handle complex implementations requiring significant technical expertise.

### Value-Added Resellers

Traditional resellers serve SMBs through distributors like Ingram Micro or Tech Data. They buy, sell, and implement solutions, providing a proven channel for mid-market reach.

### Managed Service Providers

Increasingly popular among SMBs, MSPs manage IT and security services. They represent a growing trend as businesses outsource security operations to specialized providers.

The partner landscape continues shifting as customers seek comprehensive managed services over point products. Understanding these dynamics helps you align your go-to-market strategy with how customers actually make purchasing decisions.
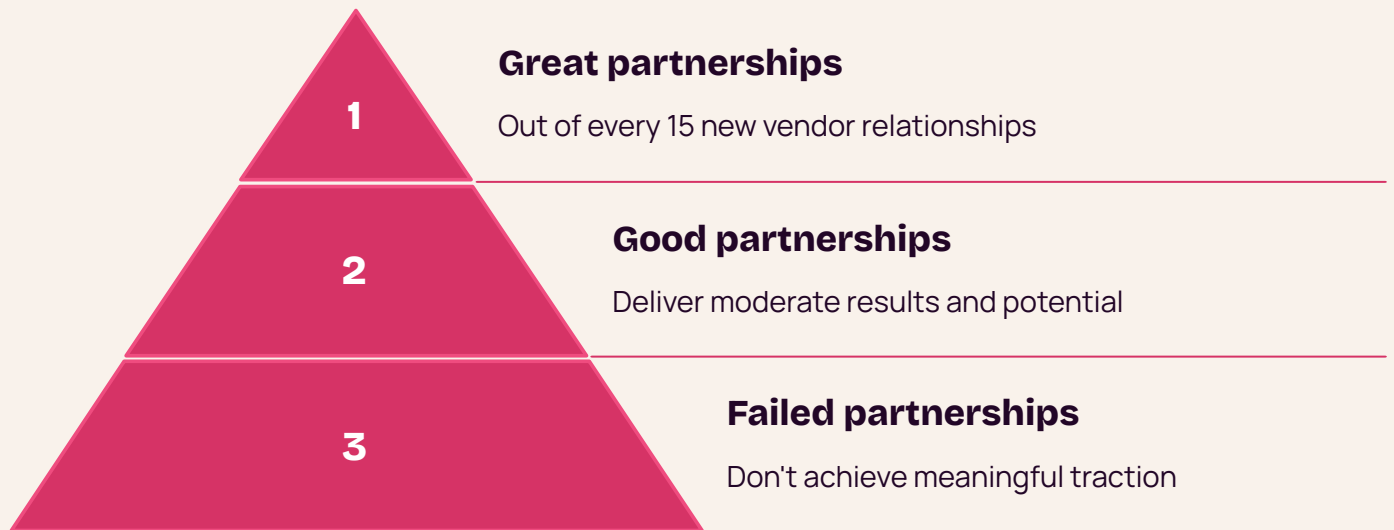
# The Four Kingmakers of Cybersecurity Partnerships

To succeed in cybersecurity, you must engage with four critical partner types that act as kingmakers in the industry. These partners control market access and determine which vendors gain traction.

## Global/Regional System Integrators

Essential for reaching enterprise customers who rely on trusted implementation partners

## Value-Added Distributors

Companies like Ingram, Tech Data, or regional specialists who provide scale and support

## Hyperscale Marketplaces

AWS, Azure, and other cloud marketplaces where customers increasingly make purchases

## Specialized Marketplaces

Emerging platforms from QBS, Ingram Micro, and regional players creating new buying channels

"The majority of customers buying from hyperscalers are big cloud consumers with their own security teams. Smaller teams need implementation partners." — Ignacio Sbampato

# The Harsh Reality of Partnership Success Rates

**1**

**Great partnerships**

Out of every 15 new vendor relationships

**2**

**Good partnerships**

Deliver moderate results and potential

**3**

**Failed partnerships**

Don't achieve meaningful traction

This sobering insight from a senior leader at Softcat, one of Europe's largest VARs, reveals why partnership alignment matters more than product quality alone. The failed vendors weren't necessarily bad, they simply lacked the right fit with the partner's capabilities, customer base, and go-to-market model.

**The key lesson:** Success requires matching your solution's complexity, implementation requirements, and target market with partners who naturally serve that profile. A technically superior product will fail if partnered with organizations lacking the expertise, customer base, or motivation to sell it effectively.

# Driving Partner Engagement: The Critical Success Factor

**70%**
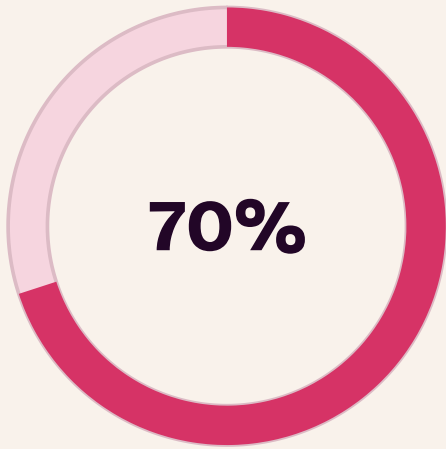
**Partner Engagement**

Identified as the #1 partnership challenge

**30%**
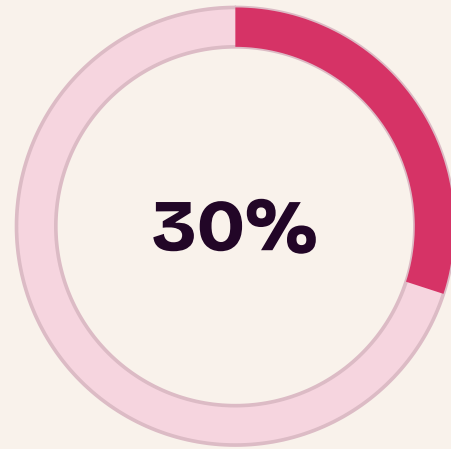
**Partner Recruitment**

Secondary but still significant concern

Most partner programs fail at the engagement phase and die slowly. The data shows that finding partners is less challenging than keeping them actively selling your solution. The first 3-6 months are make-or-break. If you don't drive meaningful engagement during this critical window, you've essentially lost the partner.

## Two Essential Requirements for Engagement

→ **Dedicated Partnership Resources**

You need at least one person focused exclusively on partners. Not a Chief Revenue Officer juggling direct sales, partnerships, and alliances—but someone whose sole job is building and nurturing partner relationships. This person must be a relationship-builder, not a traditional hunter.

→ **Internal Partner Champions**

Within each partner organization, identify someone passionate about your solution who will advocate internally. This champion doesn't need to be C-level—often the best champions are sales engineers or salespeople who believe in your product and have the time and motivation to promote it.

# The Triangle of Partnership Success

Every successful partnership requires maintaining relationships with three distinct roles within the partner organization. This triangle creates stability, enables problem-solving, and ensures continuity even when individuals change roles.

## Decision Maker

The executive who controls budget allocation and strategic priorities. Essential for resolving conflicts, adjusting incentives, and demonstrating revenue potential. They provide top-cover when challenges arise.

## Champion

Your internal advocate who promotes your solution daily. This passionate believer navigates organizational politics, identifies opportunities, and keeps your product top-of-mind. The relationship quality here often determines success.

## Technical Expert

The implementation specialist who understands your product deeply and can deploy it effectively. They provide feedback on product improvements and ensure smooth customer delivery.

🗒 **Pro Tip:** Sometimes these three roles are fulfilled by one or two people in smaller partners. That's acceptable, but always know who fills each function and maintain regular contact with all three.

When a partner imposes an ineffective contact, use your relationship with the decision maker to resolve the situation. Show them the revenue potential and work together to realign incentives or reassign responsibilities.

# The Value Equation: Beyond Margins and Features

Successful partnerships require delivering value to three stakeholders simultaneously: yourself, your partner, and the end customer. But value isn't just about money or technical superiority. Partners evaluate opportunities using three critical variables:

### Margin & Revenue

The financial reward from selling your solution, including both immediate commissions and recurring revenue potential

### Effort & Time

Resources required to learn your product, sell it effectively, implement it, and provide ongoing support to customers

### Delight & Brand

Intangible benefits like working with a respected brand, enjoying excellent vendor support, and feeling confident recommending the solution

## The Cribble Bible: A Masterclass in Reducing Partner Effort

Cribble, an American telemetry and observability vendor, demonstrates this principle perfectly. Their partners love working with them—not because they offer the highest margins or most well-known brand, but because of the "Cribble Bible."

This comprehensive, regularly updated document contains solutions to every implementation challenge partners might face. Technical teams find answers immediately without contacting support, making them completely self-sufficient. **This single resource dramatically reduces the effort variable, making Cribble partnerships highly attractive.**

> "Partners don't care about having the best solution. They want a solution that's good enough, doesn't waste their time, and the time invested is compatible with the money they'll make." — Ignacio Sbampato

# Key Performance Indicators for Partnership Health

## Start With the Right Question

Before tracking any metrics, ask every partner: **How many existing customers do you have that match our ICP?** If they have 10, 50, or 100 customers similar to your ideal profile, your first goal is maximum penetration of that existing base.



## The Critical 3-6 Month Window

Monitor penetration rates during the first quarter to half-year. If you don't see movement—POCs, proof-of-value engagements, demos with their existing customers—the partnership health is poor.

**Warning sign:** If penetration isn't increasing within 3-6 months, the partnership is likely failing. Don't wait longer hoping things improve—they rarely do.

### Month 1

Identify partner's ICP-matching customers. Establish baseline and initial outreach plan.

### Month 4-6

Measure penetration rate improvements. If stagnant, reassess partnership viability.

**1**    **2**    **3**

### Month 2-3

Track POCs, demos, and proof-of-value engagements. Should see clear activity indicators.

This approach requires knowing upfront whether the partner has sufficient customers matching your ICP. Expecting partners to acquire new customers on your behalf, especially early in the relationship, typically leads to disappointment. Start with their existing customer base—it's the fastest path to partnership ROI.

# Lean Go-to-Market Strategy: The Power of Events

When building partnerships in cybersecurity, face-to-face relationship building remains unmatched despite digital alternatives. The industry still runs on trust, and trust requires personal connection. A lean, effective GTM strategy leverages events to create these critical relationships without excessive spending.

### Intimate Networking

Host breakfasts, lunches, or dinners with partners and their customers. Small, focused gatherings create meaningful connections and demonstrate you're a real company with real people.

### Educational Sessions

Bring in experts to present how your solution solves specific problems. Provide genuine value while showcasing capabilities—not just product demos, but thought leadership.

### Industry Conferences

Attend regional events like Spain's NISE conference (€750-€1,500 for startups). Meet the entire cybersecurity ecosystem in your target market at minimal cost.

## Target the Existing Customer Base First

Your partner's current customers represent the fastest path to revenue. Design events and activities that help partners showcase your solution to accounts they already serve. Generating quality leads for partners dramatically increases engagement—when you provide opportunities for them to make money, they'll prioritize your solution.

> **Remember:** Events don't need to be expensive. Focus on quality of interaction over production value. A well-facilitated roundtable with 10 key decision-makers often delivers better results than a lavish conference booth.

# Advanced Partnership Strategies: Distribution and Scaling

## When to Introduce Distribution

If you're managing thousands of transactional resellers who demand disproportionate support relative to their revenue contribution, it's time to consider value-added distribution. But timing and control matter enormously.

### Segment Your Partner Base

Identify strategic/platinum partners who transact regularly and promote your product actively. Keep direct relationships with these top performers. Move occasional transactors to work through distributors.

### Ensure Distributor Commitment

Consider funding a dedicated headcount at the distributor initially. This ensures they'll prioritize your partners and solution rather than redirecting them to competitors. Without this control, you risk losing the partners you transfer.

### Maintain Visibility

Even when partners work through distribution, maintain mechanisms to monitor their satisfaction and success. Regular check-ins and feedback loops prevent silent attrition.

# The Next Steps?

We've explored the "Kingmakers" of successful alliances, unveiled the critical role of partner engagement, and presented actionable strategies to drive real ROI. The core takeaway is clear: success hinges on reducing partner effort, leveraging their existing customer base, and fostering genuine relationships.

Now, it's time to translate these insights into tangible results. Here are your next steps to optimize your partnership strategy and achieve exponential growth:

### 1  Optimize for Partner Effort

Conduct a thorough audit of your current partner enablement materials and processes. Identify areas where partners expend unnecessary effort and implement solutions, such as comprehensive knowledge bases or streamlined technical support, to reduce friction.

### 2  Re-evaluate Partner ICP Alignment

Prioritize partners who have a significant existing customer base that aligns perfectly with your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). Shift focus and resources to maximize penetration within these relationships first, before pursuing broader market expansion.

### 3  Implement 3-6 Month Health Checks

Establish rigorous KPIs and check-in cadences to monitor partnership health within the critical first 3 to 6 months. Be prepared to reassess or adjust strategies for partnerships that fail to show traction in customer penetration or engagement.

### 4  Adopt Lean GTM Event Strategies

Plan and execute targeted, intimate events (breakfasts, lunches, educational sessions) that bring partners and their ICP-matching customers together. Focus on delivering value, showcasing thought leadership, and building personal trust rather than lavish production.

### 5  Strategize for Scalable Distribution

As you scale, strategically introduce value-added distribution for transactional partners. Crucially, ensure distributor commitment through dedicated headcount and maintain direct visibility into partner satisfaction and success to avoid silent attrition.

# Skyrocket your Cybersecurity Partner Program with Kiflo

You've read all the tips & tricks on how to improve your cybersecurity program. Now, see how Kiflo helps partner teams **measure, scale, and optimize** that impact across every motion: from onboarding to revenue.

## What You'll See in our Demo

### Track and Measure Revenue

Gain full visibility into partner-sourced and influenced deals to understand your ecosystem's true impact.
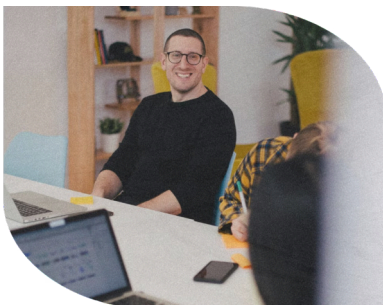
### Empower and Engage Partners

Collaborate seamlessly through partner portals, deal registration, and real-time performance dashboards.

### Automate and Integrate Everything

Sync partner data with your CRM and streamline enablement, payouts, and reporting, all from one platform.

### Ready to build stronger partnerships?

Unlock your 14-day free trial and experience how Kiflo can scale your partner program.

**Book Your Demo →**

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