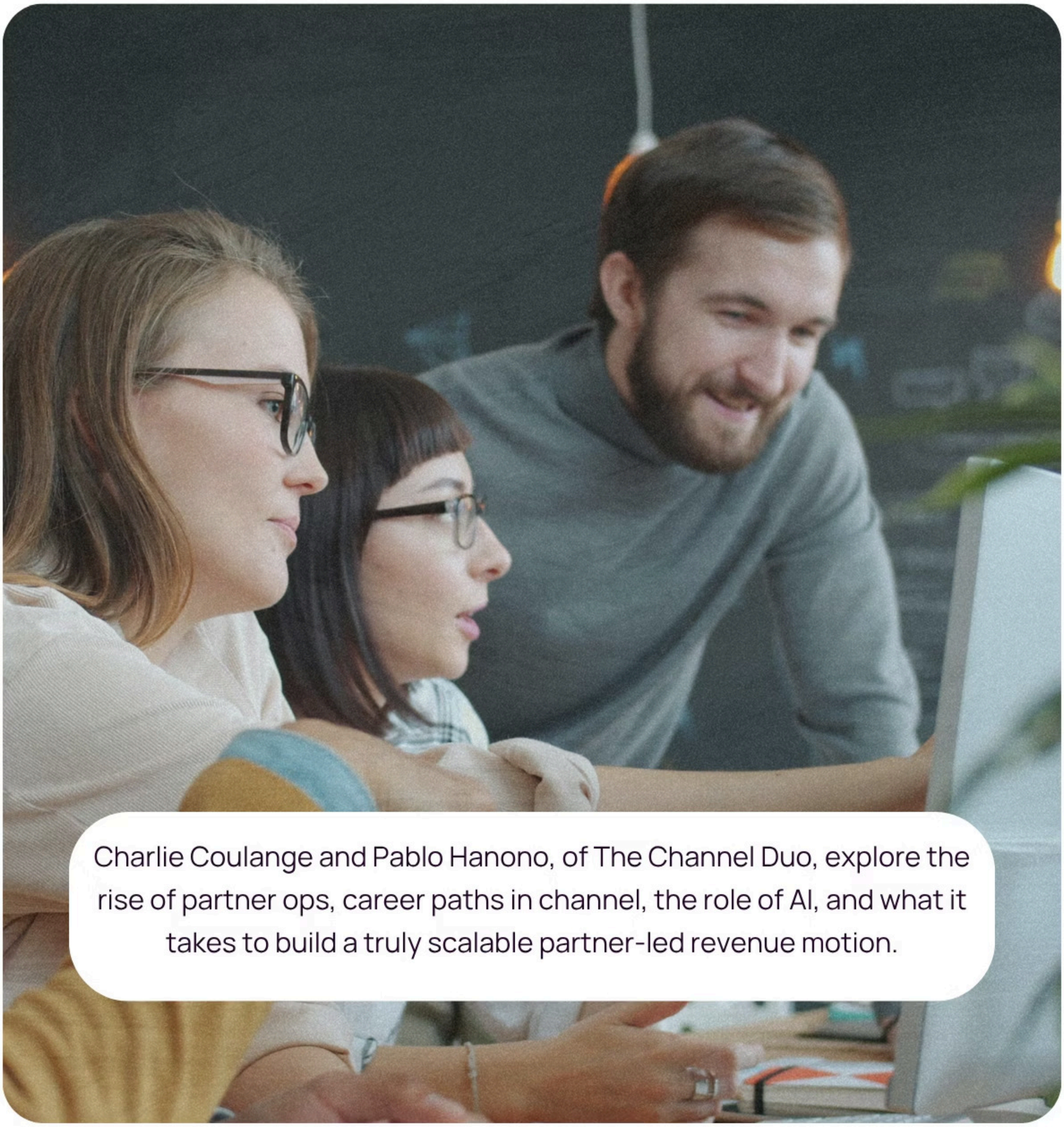
Partnerships Have Evolved. Has Your Operating Model Kept Up?



Charlie Coulange and Pablo Hanono, of The Channel Duo, explore the rise of partner ops, career paths in channel, the role of AI, and what it takes to build a truly scalable partner-led revenue motion.

What's Inside This Guide

Table of Contents

What You Will Learn

This guide explores how partnership professionals can build scalable, credible partner programs by investing in the right infrastructure, developing clear career paths, and using AI as an accelerator rather than a replacement for strategy.

- Understand why partner ops is a strategic function, not administrative, and how it makes partner-led revenue measurable and credible inside the business
- Discover the three investment gaps holding most channel programs back: technology, dedicated ops teams, and cross-functional enablement
- Learn the five distinct career tracks in partnerships and how to navigate between them with intention
- See how to build a leadership business case by connecting partner program needs to the outcomes executives actually care about
- Understand how to shift partner ops from reactive to proactive, focusing activation efforts where they'll have the most impact
- Learn where AI genuinely accelerates partnership work — and where human judgment, trust, and strategy remain irreplaceable

These insights will help you build a partner program that is properly resourced, professionally structured, and designed to scale.

Meet Your Experts

Charlie Coulange

Strategic Partnerships Leader at The Channel Duo

Charlie is a sales leader with 15+ years of experience helping technology organizations construct, optimize, and scale global partner ecosystems. Based in North America, her expertise encompasses channel strategy, program execution, and go-to-market strategy, working across cybersecurity, business development, and revenue growth.

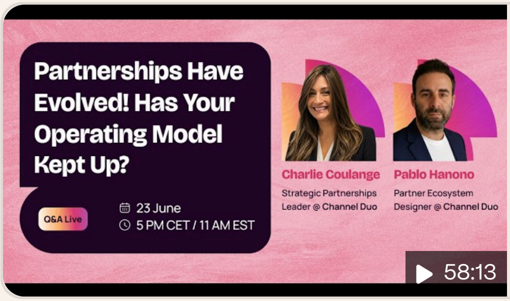
Pablo Hanono

Partner Ecosystem Designer at The Channel Duo

Partnerships practitioner with 20+ years of experience building and scaling global partner programs across the technology industry. Based in Buenos Aires, he has held global positions at Oracle, Pega, Avaya, Cisco and Intel — working across partner ecosystem strategy and execution.

Charlie Coulange and Pablo Hanono recently joined us for a live Q&A on the changing world of partnerships, the rise of PartnerOps, building scalable ecosystem strategies, and the role AI may play in the future of partner-led growth.

Watch the Complete Session



YouTube

Partnerships Have Evolved. Has Your Operating Model Ke...

Partnerships have evolved. What began as traditional channel sales has grown into complex ecosystems involving technology...

The Rise of Partner Ops

Partnerships have evolved faster than the operating models built to support them. The challenge most companies face isn't a lack of talented partner teams; it's that the **structure behind the partner motion** is simply not ready to scale. Partner ops is frequently misunderstood as an administrative function: portals, forms, reporting, chasing updates. In reality, it is far more strategic than that.

Partner ops is the infrastructure that allows partnerships to prove their impact. It governs sales execution, improves partner experience, and, critically, makes partner-led revenue **credible inside the business**. Without it, attribution is unclear, partner data is inconsistent, sales teams don't know how to engage with partners, and leadership struggles to understand what the ecosystem is actually contributing.

Without Partner Ops

- Partnerships become too manual
- Attribution is unclear and disputed
- Partner data is inconsistent
- Leadership can't measure ecosystem impact

With Strong Partner Ops

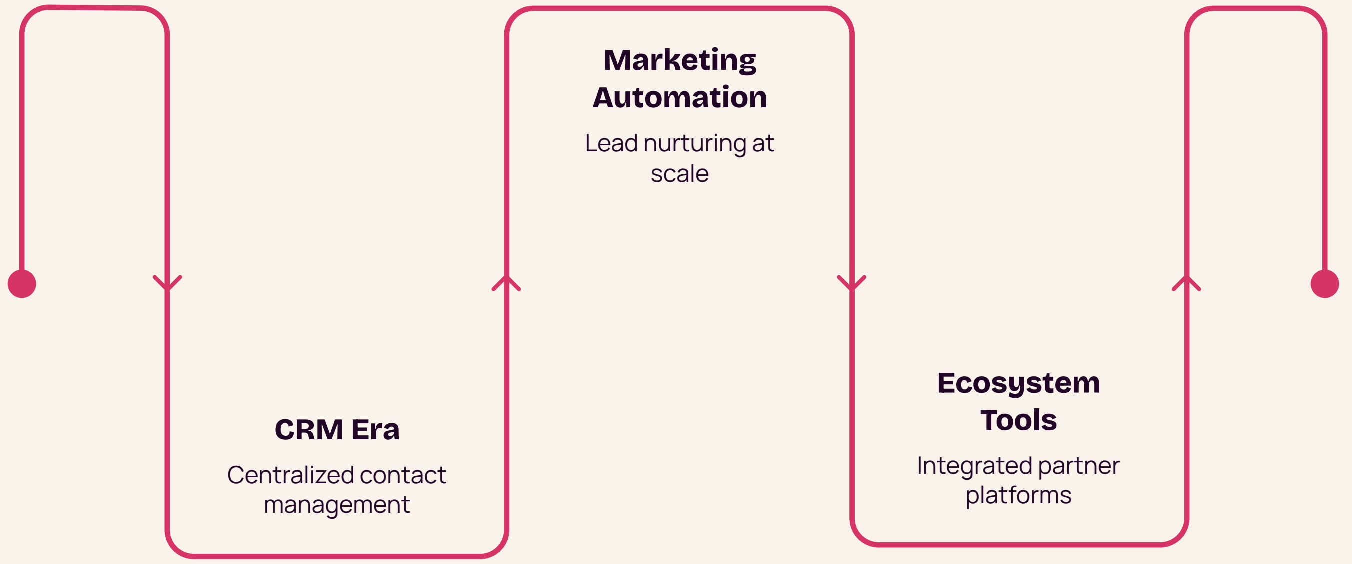
- Strategy and execution are connected
- Influence is tracked with clear processes
- Co-sell programs are properly supported
- Business gets a clear view of partner contribution

Partner Ops as the Engine of Growth

Pablo frames the partner program as a **highway**: when you design a partner program, you're building the guardrails — creating the space for business to grow. But the cars on that highway need two things: fuel and an engine. Partner economics provide the fuel — the incentive structure that motivates partners to move. But **operations is the engine**. Without a strong engine, the car doesn't move, no matter how well-designed the highway is.

The evolution of sales operations offers a useful lens. In the 2000s, Salesforce and CRM adoption transformed sales. The 2010s brought marketing automation. Now, in what many call the **decade of ecosystems**, a new generation of tools exists specifically to run partnerships more effectively. The complexity of doing business with partners has grown — spreadsheets and old models simply can't keep up.

Perhaps most importantly, Pablo highlights a critical mindset shift: partner ops teams must move from **reactive to proactive**. Rather than waiting for partners to apply and then processing requests, strong ops teams use smart systems to identify which partners are producing, which aren't, and where to focus activation efforts. Operations is no longer a back-office function — it is an active participant in revenue strategy discussions.



This progression mirrors the maturity curve of partnerships as a discipline — each decade demanding more sophisticated infrastructure to support increasingly complex go-to-market motions.

The #1 Mistake Companies Make in Partner Ops

According to Charlie, the single most common and damaging mistake is straightforward: **companies refuse to invest**. They claim to be channel-friendly. They say they sell through the channel. But they continue to struggle because they won't commit the resources — in tools, in teams, or in enablement — that a functioning partner program actually requires.

> Most companies keep saying the same thing and the polls keep showing the same results. Companies are not doing the right investment into the tools. They try to put band-aids on problems instead of resolving them from the root. — **Charlie Coulange**

The investment gap shows up in three critical areas. First, **technology**: despite the abundance of purpose-built partnership tools available today, companies still rely on workarounds. Second, **teams**: hiring a partner manager is not the same as having a partner ops function. When ops is absent, partner managers are forced to rely on other departments — and that's where things get messy. Third, **enablement**: sales teams, finance teams, and operations teams that touch the channel must understand what a partner is, how a partner motion works, and what value partners actually bring. Without that shared understanding, the system is broken before it starts.

Invest in Technology

Purpose-built PRM and ecosystem tools exist — use them instead of spreadsheets and workarounds.

Invest in Teams

A partner manager is not a partner ops function. Dedicated ops resources are non-negotiable for scale.

Invest in Enablement

Every team that touches the channel — sales, finance, ops — must understand how partners work and why they matter.

Convincing Leadership to Invest

Pablo's advice for getting leadership buy-in starts with going back to basics: **what outcomes does leadership actually need?** Is it revenue coverage in a specific geography? Implementation quality? New marketplace listings? The answer to that question determines what kind of partner program to build — and what tools are required to support it.

The attribution dilemma is a concrete example. A salesperson tagging a partner in a CRM and claiming credit will never satisfy a CFO. Finance teams require proof. If your KPIs are tied to partner-influenced revenue, you have no choice but to invest in the infrastructure that makes that attribution credible and auditable. As Pablo puts it: *"If you want me to deliver X, then Y is the list of things I need."*

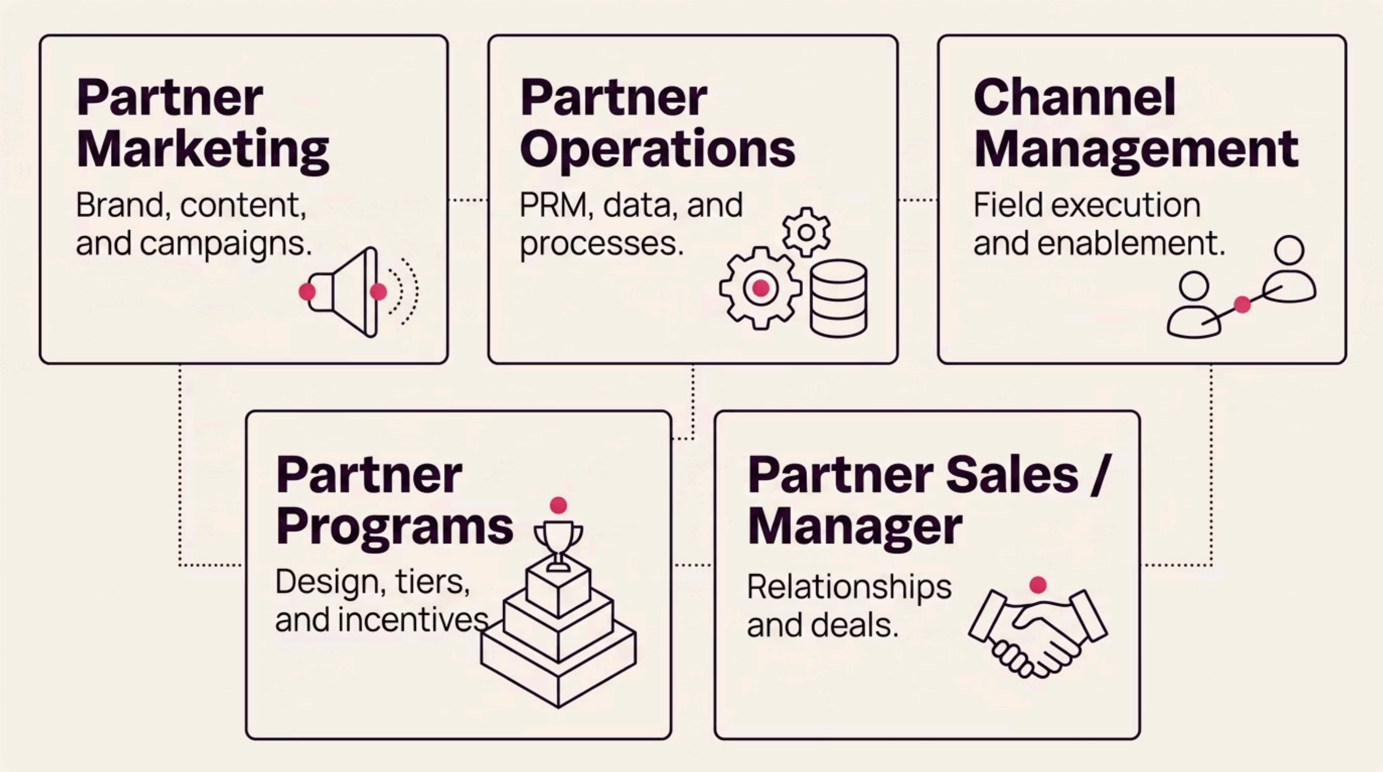
> The strong partnership leaders of today have a very strong business vision. Knowing strategy isn't enough — you need to know how to build the infrastructure to run a partnerships organization effectively. Leaders who understand that are the ones who are succeeding. — **Pablo Janono**

The leaders of the past were celebrated for their relationship skills — knowing the top partners, commanding a room at events, building alliances. Those skills still matter. But they are no longer sufficient. The partnership leader of the future must **equally understand how to build teams, run infrastructure, and get things done** — not just articulate a vision to the board. Strategy developed in a vacuum, handed off to operations with a "do this for me," simply doesn't work anymore.

The Career Path Problem in Partnerships

Partnerships is no longer a side role — it is a genuine career category. But the path into and through that career remains unclear for most practitioners. Unlike sales or marketing, there is no standard map. People enter partnerships from engineering, from sales, from marketing, from business development, from customer success — and sometimes entirely by accident, as Charlie herself did.

Pablo identifies several distinct career tracks that many practitioners simply aren't aware of: **partner marketing, partner operations, partner sales, partner programs, and channel management**. In smaller companies, one person often does all of these simultaneously — which means they never develop a clear sense of what specialization looks like or where they want to grow. Seeing the bigger picture, through training and peer conversations, is the first step toward intentional career development.



Growth in partnerships doesn't always mean moving up — lateral moves are equally valid and often more strategic. Moving from partner management into program design, for example, can dramatically expand impact without requiring a larger headcount. The key is understanding your own strengths: are you energized by partner-facing relationship work, or do you thrive building the systems and infrastructure behind the scenes?

What the Future of Partnership Careers Looks Like

Charlie is direct: clearer career paths in channel are not just good for professionals — they are good for companies. Investment in career development builds stronger teams, retains talent, creates more predictable performance, and helps practitioners understand the genuine value of their role. Too many partnership professionals feel like a side note in their organization, operating in a function that isn't formally recognized or developed.

> People are now building entire careers in partnerships, but the paths to those careers are not always clear. What skills do you need? What training? What courses should you take to develop yourself? That's what Pablo and I are working to answer. — **Charlie Coulange**

This is precisely the gap that **Channel Duo** was built to address.

Charlie and Pablo first worked together nearly 20 years ago at a company called Next Level (later acquired by The Channel Company). They reconnected at an industry event last year, discovered a shared perspective on what the partnerships profession needs, and launched Channel Duo to formalize and share that knowledge. The platform offers research, consultation, courses, and community — curated by practitioners, not generated by algorithms.

Career Clarity

Helping practitioners understand the full landscape of partnership roles and how to navigate between them intentionally.

Structured Training

Pablo's *Partner Ecosystem Fundamentals* course covers partner economics, program design, and the operational basics every practitioner needs.

Expert Consultation

Charlie and Pablo offer direct advisory support to companies and individuals navigating partnership strategy and program design.

AI in Partnerships: Useful, Misunderstood, and Overhyped

The question from the audience was sharp: now that generative AI has created the perception that everything can be automated, how is that impacting the partnership role? Charlie's answer was equally sharp — she is excited about AI, but she is also practical. **AI will not fix a broken partner strategy. It will expose it.**

There are genuine use cases: research, partner segmentation, content personalization, enablement, partner communications, follow-ups, account mapping, pattern recognition in data. These are real and valuable. But AI cannot build trust with a partner. It cannot hold a partner's hand through a deal close. It cannot negotiate discount terms, explain why a deal registration was delayed, or convince a partner to close this quarter instead of next. These are human problems requiring human judgment.

AI Can Help With

- Partner segmentation and research
- Content personalization and enablement
- Communication automation and follow-ups
- Data pattern recognition and insights
- QBR preparation and reporting

AI Cannot Replace

- Building trust and partner relationships
- Negotiating deal terms and discounts
- Fixing weak partner segmentation or messy data
- Explaining broken processes to partners
- Setting strategy aligned to business outcomes

> If your partner segmentation is weak, your data is messy, your processes are unclear, or your sales team isn't aligned to the partner motion — AI will not solve that. What it will do is make the confusion move faster. The real opportunity is to use AI as an accelerator, not a replacement for strategy. — **Charlie Coulange**

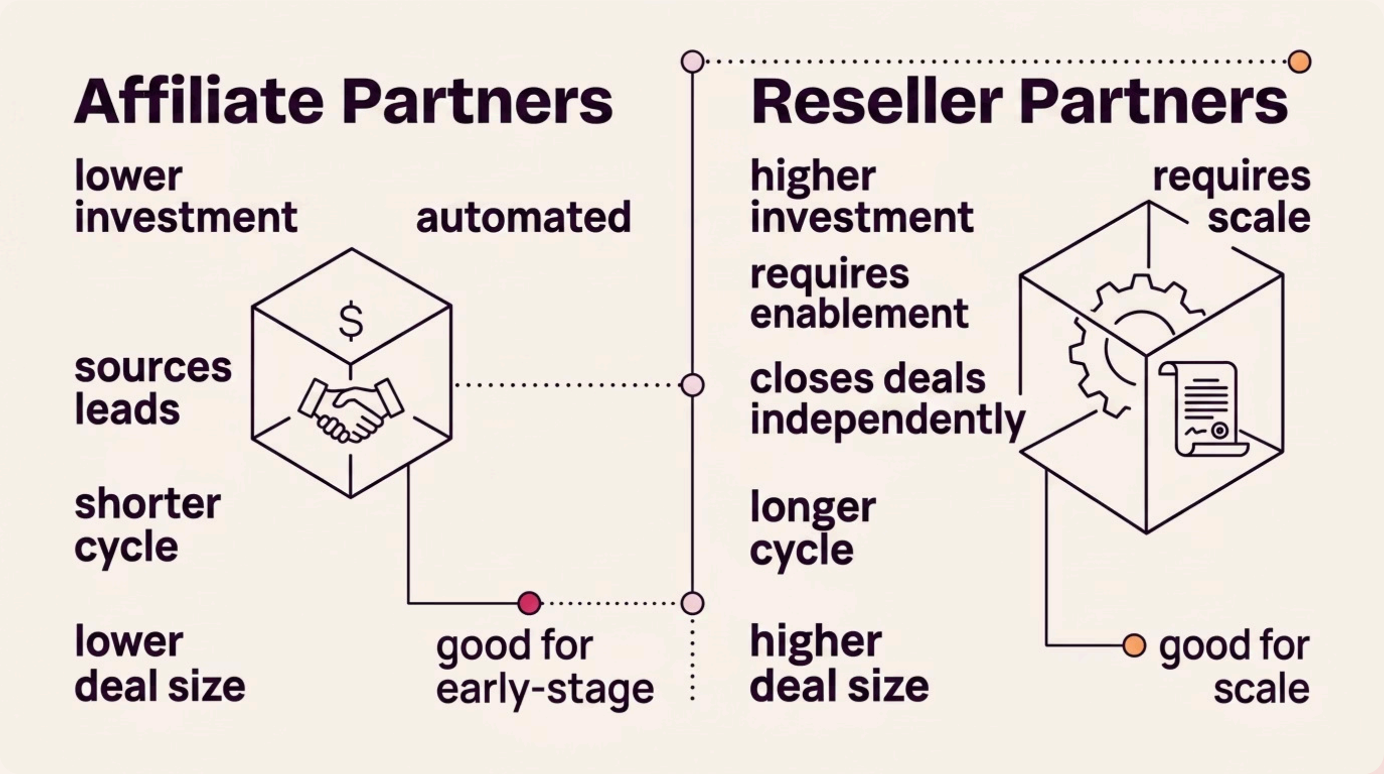
AI Adoption Layers & Affiliate vs. Reseller

Pablo adds important nuance to the AI conversation by identifying **layers of adoption**. At the personal level, most professionals are already using LLMs daily. At the company level, adoption varies dramatically — smaller companies and those newer to partnerships often have more agility to adopt AI tools, while large enterprises face regulatory, political, and security constraints that slow implementation. This mirrors the on-prem to SaaS transition, where cloud-native partners often outpaced traditional resellers in adapting to new models.

Pablo is also careful to distinguish between **AI and automation** — they are related but not identical. Many partnership processes can be automated through a well-configured PRM without requiring AI at all. True AI value in partnerships comes from the next layer: personalizing content at scale, surfacing deeper insights from partner data, and helping teams make smarter decisions faster. For partner ops professionals specifically, Pablo's advice is direct: become an expert in the tools. That expertise is your competitive advantage in an AI-shaped future.

Affiliate vs. Reseller — Which Drives More Growth?

The honest answer from both Charlie and Pablo: **it depends**. Affiliates source opportunities and are easier to manage with automation — lower investment, lower lift. Resellers do the heavy lifting on sales but require significant investment in training, enablement, and marketing funds. Reseller deals can be larger in total value (think multi-million dollar government or telco bids), while marketplace and alliance models can generate more recurring revenue once established. Many companies begin with an affiliate model and graduate into reseller or value-added partner programs as they mature. The right model is determined by your product complexity, your investment appetite, and the outcomes your leadership is asking for.



Key Takeaways Channel Duo Giveaways

Today's conversation covered a lot of ground — from the strategic importance of partner ops infrastructure, to the career path challenges facing partnership professionals, to the real and realistic role of AI in the ecosystem. The through-line across all of it: **investment, intentionality, and infrastructure** are what separate partnership programs that scale from those that stall.

1 Partner Ops Is Strategic, Not Administrative

It is the infrastructure that makes partner-led revenue measurable, scalable, and credible inside the business.

2 Investment Is Non-Negotiable

Companies that refuse to invest in tools, teams, and enablement will keep getting the same broken results.

3 Career Paths Exist — But Need Clarity

Partnerships is a real career category with multiple distinct tracks. Understanding them is the first step to growing intentionally.

4 AI Accelerates, It Doesn't Replace

Use AI to scale what works. It will expose — not fix — broken strategy, weak data, or misaligned teams.

Keep Your Partner Program Up-to-date with Kiflo

You've discovered all the tips & tricks how to evolve your partner operating system. Now see how Kiflo helps partner teams **track revenue, keep partners informed, and scale relationships** without drowning in spreadsheets and emails.

What You'll See in our Demo

Track Every Partner Deal

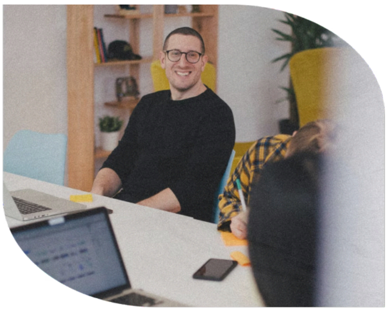
Get clear visibility into partner-sourced and influenced revenue, from lead submission to closed deal.

Keep Partners Engaged

Give partners a simple portal to follow deal progress, see updates, and stay confident in the relationship.

Scale Without Manual Work

Centralize partner data, reminders, payouts, and CRM workflows so your team can focus on building stronger partnerships..



Ready to build stronger partner relationships?
See how Kiflo helps you create more transparent, profitable partnerships.

Book Your Demo →

kiflo