

Ecosystem Design Guide

A practitioner's guide to mapping, prioritizing, and activating a partnership ecosystem aligned with your go-to-market motion.

What is Ecosystem Design?

Ecosystem design is the deliberate process of mapping, structuring, and activating the network of partnerships that will drive your company's growth. B2B organizations are increasingly relying on partner ecosystems to fulfill buyer and customer expectations, advance innovation, and achieve revenue objectives.¹

With 75% of world trade flowing indirectly through channels and partnerships, the structural decisions you make about your ecosystem have direct revenue implications.²

<h3>Phase 1</h3> <p>Map: Understand your ecosystem landscape</p>	<h3>Phase 2</h3> <p>Design: Build the architecture</p>	<h3>Phase 3</h3> <p>Activate: Turn design into revenue</p>
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"An ecosystem is not a list of partners. It is a system — with architecture, operating logic, and measurable outputs."

Phase 1: Ecosystem Mapping

Before you can design your ecosystem, you need to understand the landscape. This phase is about generating a comprehensive map of partnership opportunities.

1

Define Your Partnership Universe

Start by mapping every category of partner that could theoretically be relevant to your business — technology partners, channel partners, strategic alliances, referral partners, resellers, systems integrators. Don't evaluate yet — just map. The goal is a complete inventory of the opportunity landscape before you begin filtering.

2

Map to Your ICP

For each partner category, ask: Does this partner type serve our ideal customer? Is there a natural intersection in the customer journey? Map each category against your ICP and flag high-overlap categories. These will form the foundation of your core ecosystem.

3

Identify Specific Candidates

Within your high-priority partner categories, identify specific companies that are strong candidates. For technology partners, use tools like G2, Capterra, and your own customer base. For channel partners, look at who is already serving your ICP with complementary services.

4

Assess the Competitive Landscape

Map your competitors' ecosystem strategies. Which partners are they investing in? Where are they creating 'better together' narratives? Competitive ecosystem intelligence helps you prioritize candidates and identify market gaps you can own.

Phase 2: Ecosystem Architecture

With your map complete, you now design the structure of your ecosystem. This phase is about making deliberate choices about what to build and how to build it.

1

Partner Type Mix

Define the mix of partner types in your ecosystem. Most high-performing ecosystems have a deliberate mix — technology partners who co-sell into joint customers, channel partners who extend geographic or segment reach, and strategic alliances that provide market access. Define the role of each partner type in your GTM motion.

2

Tiering Structure

Build a tiering model that reflects investment priority. Tier 1 (Core): 10–20 partners receiving deep investment. Tier 2 (Growth): 20–40 partners in structured development. Tier 3 (Passive): Self-serve relationships monitored for promotion.

3

Co-Sell Scenario Design

For each partner type, define specific co-sell scenarios. What is the joint value proposition? How does the sales motion work? Document 2–3 co-sell plays per partner type before you activate.

4

Operating Model Design

Define how the ecosystem will run. Who owns Tier 1 partner relationships? What is the QBR cadence? How is the partner pipeline tracked? The operating model converts your design from a strategy document into a functioning revenue system.

Phase 3: Ecosystem Activation

Design without activation is a slide deck. This phase converts your ecosystem architecture into live, revenue-producing relationships. Companies with significant channel motion decrease average sales cycles by 25% — but only after structured activation.³

1

Prioritize Your First 5

Do not try to activate your entire Tier 1 simultaneously. Identify your top 5 highest-potential partners and activate those first. Build and refine your activation playbook with these relationships before scaling.

2

The First 30 Days

The first 30 days of a new partner relationship are disproportionately important. Build a structured onboarding experience: executive intro call, joint value proposition workshop, enablement on your product and sales motion, and identification of 2–3 initial co-sell opportunities.

3

First Deal Focus

The single most important milestone in any partner relationship is the first co-sold deal. Everything before it is overhead. Everything after it builds momentum. Prioritize getting to a first joint opportunity within 60 days of activation.

4

Build the Feedback Loop

At 30, 60, and 90 days post-activation, conduct a structured review with each new Tier 1 partner. What is working? What is not? Where are the friction points in the co-sell motion?

5

Instrument as You Go

From day one, instrument the relationship. Log co-sell activities in your CRM. Track joint pipeline. Record enablement completion. The data you generate in the first 90 days will tell you more about the relationship's potential than any qualification conversation did.

10 Principles of Ecosystem Design

1. Design your GTM motion first. Your ecosystem should enhance your go-to-market, not create a separate one.
2. Start with the customer. Every partnership must have a clear, specific benefit for the customer. If you can't articulate it, the partnership lacks a solid foundation.
3. Plan the architecture before recruitment. Outline the ecosystem structure before recruiting partners.
4. Choose fewer, deeper collaborations over many superficial ones. Depth of engagement consistently outperforms broad coverage.
5. Every partner needs a co-sell plan. If you can't define a specific co-sell scenario, it's not a true partnership — it's just an agreement.
6. An operating model is essential. Without governance, accountability, and process, even the best-designed ecosystem will struggle with execution.
7. Set your metrics from the beginning. Define KPIs before starting; you can't optimize what you can't measure.
8. Continually curate your ecosystem. It's not a one-time setup — review and refine your partner roster quarterly.
9. Partner experience influences engagement. How partners feel about working with you affects how much effort they put in.
10. Treat your ecosystem as revenue infrastructure. Partnerships aren't just a channel; they're a revenue system.

Ecosystem Design Checklist

Use this checklist to assess the completeness of your ecosystem design before moving to activation.

— PHASE 1: MAPPING

- Partnership universe mapped across all relevant partner types
- High-ICP-overlap categories identified and prioritized
- Specific partner candidates identified for top 2–3 categories
- Competitive ecosystem landscape assessed

— PHASE 2: ARCHITECTURE

- Partner type mix defined with clear GTM role for each type
- Tiering structure designed with criteria and investment levels
- 2–3 co-sell plays defined for each Tier 1 partner type
- Operating model documented: ownership, cadences, processes

— PHASE 3: ACTIVATION

- Top 5 activation priorities identified
- 30-day onboarding experience designed
- First deal milestone defined with 60-day target
- Partnership KPIs defined and instrumented in CRM/PRM

Ready to design your ecosystem?

Evoque's Ecosystem Opportunity Assessment delivers a complete ecosystem map and design architecture in 3–4 weeks.

Book a Strategy Session → evoque-partners.com

Sources

¹ Forrester Research, "The State of B2B Partner Ecosystems, 2025," forrester.com, 2025. Available at: forrester.com/report/the-state-of-b2b-partner-ecosystems-2025

² Breezy, "112 Stats You Never Knew About Strategic Partnerships," breezy.io — citing multiple primary partnership research sources including Demand Gen 2022 Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey.

³ ICONIQ Growth, "2024 Channel Research" — companies with significant channel motion (>30% revenue from channel) decreased average sales cycles by 25% between 2023 and 2024.