



# INBOUND CHANNEL MARKETING BLUEPRINT

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# INTRODUCTION

In the past, selling through channel partners was as simple as a phone call or face-to-face interaction; companies used events like golf outings and dinners with customers to connect with them on a personal level. Personal relationships were key to many sales processes and vital to gain market share. Outbound marketing strategies (direct mail, targeted print newsletters, product flyers, and catalogs) were also highly effective in channel sales. But widespread accessibility to the internet and the rise of digital marketing forced the channel marketing landscape to evolve significantly over the last twenty years.

Despite this evolution, personal relationships remain key to effective channel marketing efforts. Social activities and events with customers still important; however, they're just one example of how channel partners market their goods and services. Today, inbound marketing is the tool of choice for those looking to effectively market online. With inbound marketing, companies are bringing prospects to them instead of interrupting prospects' daily activities with advertisements. A company attracts prospects to their website and blog by offering thoughtful, relevant content for their target audience, and, once they arrive, engages them with conversational tools like on-site chat and opportunities to exchange contact information for continued valuable content offers.

Unlike outbound marketing, with inbound, you don't need to fight for your potential customers' attention. You attract qualified prospects by creating content that's designed to address the problems and needs of your ideal customers—and that content helps build trust and credibility for your business, too. While you may find it most effective to use a combination of outbound and inbound tactics, this guide will provide a comprehensive plan for implementing inbound strategies within your distribution channel that you can alter based on your industry and channel partners.

In order to succeed with any channel marketing strategy, your business channel partners need clear direction on what you expect from them. We've created the following framework that lays out the actions needed from you and your channel partners. The three phases of this framework—Engage, Guide, and Grow—will help you create and communicate an inbound marketing plan with your channel partners.



Creating your program



Communicating within your program



Measuring the program's results

## CHAPTER 1: THE ENGAGE PHASE

As you move through the **Engage** phase, the goal is to prepare you with research, information, and examples on how best to create and communicate your inbound marketing program to your channel partners.

In most cases, it is best to engage your channel partners in the construction of your plan rather than develop it without their insight. There's a direct correlation between how involved people are with the process of creating a strategy and their ultimate involvement and engagement in its execution.

Creating a program for your channel can have many facets. You need to decide what you want the program to look like. This guide will walk you through a process and give best practices along the way.

Through the **Engage** section, you will learn tactics for:

- Creating your program
- Communicating within your program
- Measuring the program's results



Co-Marketing Efforts



Campaigns-in-a-Box



Knowledge Bases



Technology Platforms

## CHAPTER 2: THE GUIDE PHASE

The next phase is what we refer to as the Guide phase. Reason being, you must guide your channel partners through this phase by helping them create materials necessary for a successful program.

People are naturally competitive (if only with themselves), so help them compete by giving them (or helping them create) goals. Whether the work is highly creative or more mundane and repetitive, goals drive satisfaction, results, and fun.

In the Guide phase, you will learn about:

- Co-Marketing Efforts
- Campaigns-in-a-Box
- Knowledge Bases
- Technology Platforms



Lead Distribution



Lead Nurturing



Feedback

## CHAPTER 3: THE GROW PHASE

The final phase is the **Grow** phase. The goal with this section is to help your channel partners set realistic, attainable goals, so they will be able to grow their business and see results.

Encourage them to set multi-year business plans, track results against those plans, and modify them when necessary. If you don't set goals you have no way of measuring yourself, your team and your company against some predetermined objectives. When everyone understands clearly what the overall goals of the organization are, it allows everyone to rally together and take pride in successfully accomplishing them.

In the **Grow** phase, you will learn more about:

- Lead Distribution
- Lead Nurturing
- Feedback

This inbound channel marketing blueprint will guide you through implementing a successful channel partner inbound program.



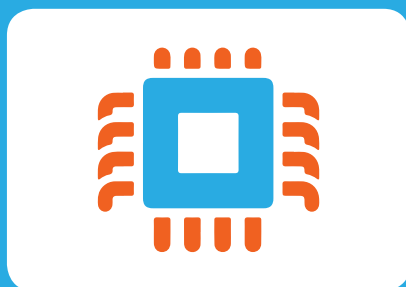
# CHAPTER ONE

## Demystifying Modern Channel Programs

Generally, you will find a partner program in 1 of 3 common categories or a hybrid combination of each. This content is primarily for companies who sell through or with partners. However, there may be helpful information for those who sell to partners. The 3 channel program categories are:

1. Programs Selling to Partners
2. Programs Selling Through Partners
3. Programs Selling With Partners





Programs that are **selling to partners** typically embed your product inside theirs and resell it. In essence, these partners are your customers, and you generally have very little to no visibility to their end customers. This partner is either 1.) a sales and marketing partner using marketing and sales resources to promote your product to new markets, or 2.) a value added reseller (VAR), using your service as part of their own service offering. This provides additional value in the operation of that service, instead of simply selling it.

This is the case in any distribution partnership, from your local supermarket, to more traditional distributors. This is also the case in an OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) partnership, much like how Dell sells computers with Intel processors inside.





Programs **selling through partners** are typically dealers or distributors. Channel Partner Managers (CPMs) may have some visibility on these partners' end customers, but don't actively engage with them. The key is to work with partners that already have customers needing your product. For example, the AppStore for Apple. This is a powerful selling strategy, acting as a source of potential customers as your partner grows.



+



Lastly, in programs **selling with partners**, the CPMs generally play an integrated support role to these partners sales teams, and they have a high degree of visibility on these partners' end customers and prospects. Any company that offers your service as a way to expand their offering would fit into this category. For example, a car reseller might work with a bank to upsell a car loan, or a software vendor might complement its offering with another partner.



Regardless of whether an organization chooses to sell-to, sell-through, or sell-with, many industries have a channel program by different names (see appendix). Channel partnerships are a high impact strategy for growing your company, and a good partnership can provide access to new customers and references that bring in business.

Several different industries are using channel marketing - auto manufacturers, insurance companies, software as a service (SaaS) and technology companies. Many of these industries have business models that sell through indirect sales channels. A channel partner strategy should align with how people find, buy, and recommend products and services.

Due to the complexity of the channel or partner programs, a Channel Partner Manager (CPM) may have to play multiple roles in supporting partners.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Engage Channel Partners By Creating An Effective Inbound Marketing Program

This chapter is has been designed to share ideas of what your program could look like. By packaging together the guidelines listed below, you can offer your channel partners a full program that will enhance your brand(s) and strengthen your partners' commitment to you. You may want to offer an incentive (co-op dollars or payouts) to your channel partners who complete all guidelines.

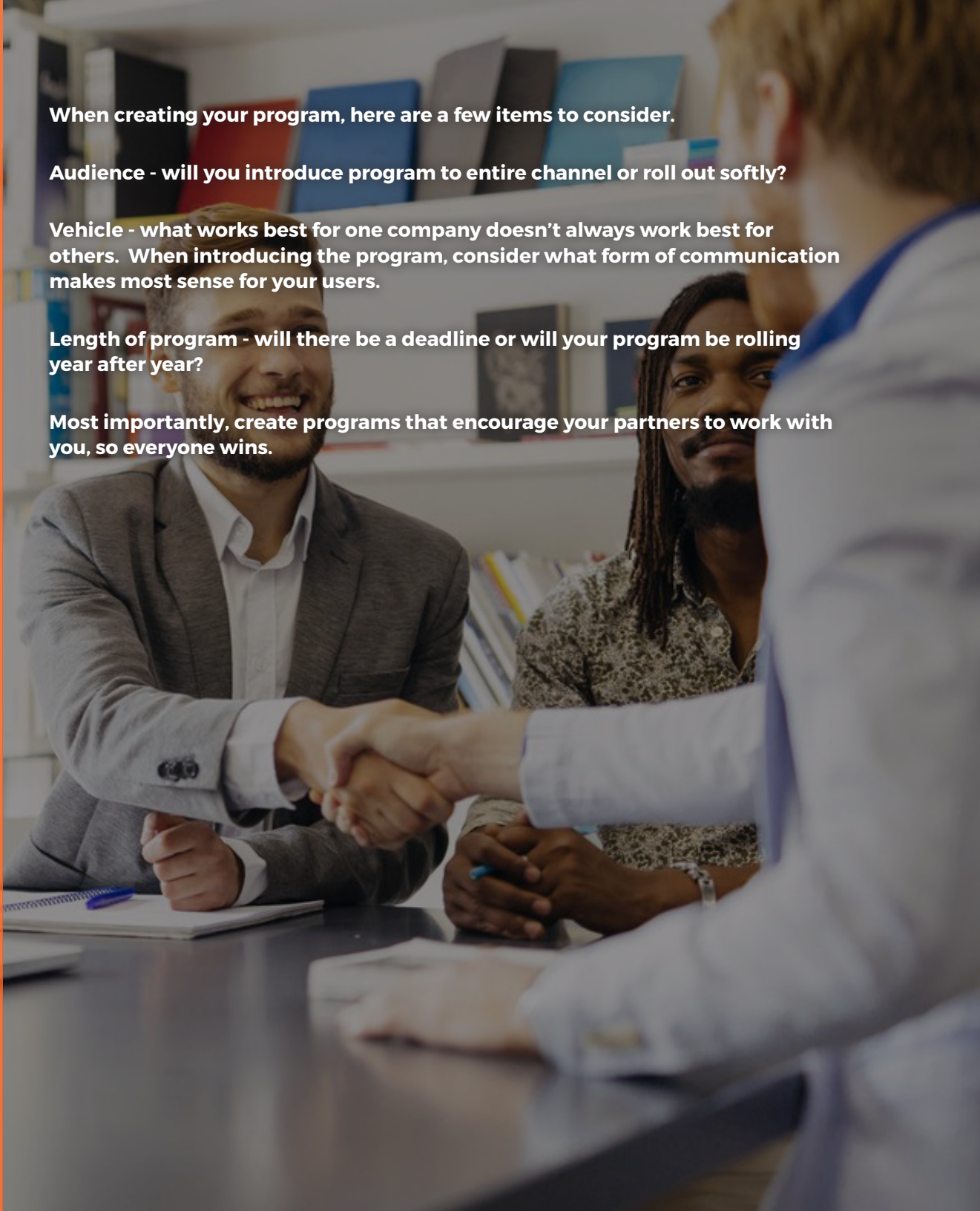
**When creating your program, here are a few items to consider.**

**Audience** - will you introduce program to entire channel or roll out softly?

**Vehicle** - what works best for one company doesn't always work best for others. When introducing the program, consider what form of communication makes most sense for your users.

**Length of program** - will there be a deadline or will your program be rolling year after year?

**Most importantly, create programs that encourage your partners to work with you, so everyone wins.**





# PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Guidelines for a program should be specific to your company/situation. The following are suggestions.



## SALES GOALS

These are set by you at the start of the program.

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- Reach a market share threshold of at least 3%
- 6% growth over the prior year



## FINANCIAL STRENGTH

how financially stable are the partners

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- Show net profit before taxes of at least 12.5% for the current year or the most recent three-year average sales.
- Complete a benchmark survey
- Submit CPA-prepared financial statements within 105 days of calendar year end. This will allow you to confirm the financial goals that were set are legit.



## SERVICES

- Embrace Diversity + Inclusion Demonstrate that your organization embraces diversity + inclusion, as reflected in any of the following ways:
- Maintain a workforce that is representative of the marketplace you serve, with particular emphasis on including underrepresented groups in dealer leadership, sales and design positions.\* Submit evidence to indicate how these positions represent your market.
- Offer development, advancement, and ownership opportunities for minority employees.



## POSITIVELY IMPACT YOUR COMMUNITY

Demonstrate that you positively impact your community in any of the following ways:

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- Provide volunteer leadership in your local community.
- Create an environment that encourages employee engagement in the community.
- Provide support for community organizations (financial or in-kind)

## COMMUNICATING YOUR PROGRAM

When introducing a channel program like this, communication is key. Communicating the details of the program can happen in many ways, with the most common being through webinars. Webinars allow the program to spread to many users at one time, each receiving the critical information at the same time. Other ways to not only communicate, but keep information at users' fingertips includes: creating a space on the company's extranet platform to house program materials, e-newsletters, and email blasts. You might also find it valuable to host events, both in-person and online, to promote new ideas/products, answer questions and provide two-way feedback.

## MEASURING PROGRAM SUCCESS

Participate in Customer Satisfaction surveys or an annual Relationship Survey (View Point CEM, as an example). These surveys help you gain insights about your business and customers and demonstrate your focused efforts on satisfying customers. Set goals ahead of time to capture the right amount of information.



Include customers that account for at least 90% of your sales volume with X COMPANY, or your top 100 X COMPANY customers, in your survey pool.



Receive at least X responses from your survey requests.



Achieve a Net Promoter Score of 45 or above, or an overall satisfaction score of at least 8.0



# CHAPTER THREE

## Guide and encourage your channel partners

### with supporting marketing materials

When it comes to helping your channel partners, you can provide all the content in the world, but if they don't know what to do with it, then it is a big waste of time. Providing useful content is key to guiding your partners through a successful program.

Instead of sending them content and hoping for the best, consider bringing in outside help or creating a step-by-step checklist on how to maximize content so your channel partners know exactly what to do with it and understand how content can boost sales.

Don't underestimate how important it is to have a really solid base of core content assets that your channel partners can share with current and potential customers. And by "core content assets," we are talking about truly engaging content, such as high-quality infographics, articles, and whitepapers that educate people. You can pair that core content with sales collateral, but you have to make sure that sales content still offers actual value. No one likes to be sold to all the time.

Below are some tactics to share with your partners and help guide them through the program.



## CO-MARKETING

Co-marketing (Collaborative Marketing) helps brands build a new audience, and get a new type of content in front of their audience. The most common form of co-marketing is for two companies who have similar audiences to work together on a piece of content, and promote that content to both audiences.

Co-marketing is a fantastic way to gain new contacts without having to wait for organic search to kick in...but it's not always an easy job. The challenging part of co-marketing typically boils down to one thing: your partner. Can you find partners who launch campaigns with the same strategy and thoughtfulness you do? Oftentimes, it's a struggle. Here are a few tips to help navigate through those challenges:



Partner with a brand your customers would love



Look for partners with similar customers, but not similar products



Find partners who you enjoy working with



Find partners who have the capacity to perform the work



Find partners willing to share workload



When building the brands together, a challenge could be the branding of the content you are creating, and the promotional materials you are using. Not only do you want the branding to be visually appealing, you also need to comply with branding regulations of each company. But be careful not to have one stand out more than the other. Focus on the following as you build your brand, engage customers and highlight your partnership in the local market(s).

Suggestions are:

- Showroom
- Website, Marketing materials and Social Media
- Events/Webinars
- Training

Build a bridge with your channel partners. Co-marketing offers great benefits because you can play on each others' strengths. As the parent company, you have the name recognition, and your channel partners have the local market knowledge. Together, you are better.





Campaign Plan



Looks Matter



Content as an Incentive

## CAMPAIGNS-IN-A-BOX

The most cost-effective and time-efficient solution is to create campaigns-in-a-box. These all-in-one resources can be leveraged by both partners who don't have a marketing team and those who have their own resources. A campaign-in-a-box will help you position yourself as a thought leader, build more credibility with existing customers and make cross-selling even easier! Services or product launches can be great topics when creating and executing these campaigns.

### CREATING A CAMPAIGN

#### Campaign Plan

Before you create a campaign, you need to list desired outcomes—what do you want this campaign to accomplish? Plan goals whether they be increased sales or brand awareness. Include places on the marketing materials for the partners to add their name and contact information.

#### Looks Matter

Partners don't want to use a vendor's branding, they don't want to use the colors associated with the vendor, and they certainly don't want the vendor's logo screaming at the top of a marketing sheet while theirs whispers in the footer, if at all. Vendors must create an unbiased look and feel that provides partners with equal billing for their logo in the header, and colors that may be in the vendor's approved branding guidelines but aren't the colors it uses for its direct marketing.

#### Content as an Incentive

While every partner might not use every piece within a campaign-in-a-box, a vendor should be sure to include the staples. Emails are an obvious, but those emails need to point to a piece of content—this is the carrot at the end of the stick! That content can be from corporate if it doesn't simply scream "We're so Awesome!" Event emails are also huge. Many of partners and channel account managers use these to promote live and virtual events, so make sure they are clear and to the point. Banner ads help point visitors to the great piece of content or event and, of course, signage and materials for an event such as presentations and telemarketing scripts are incredibly important as well.



## EXECUTION OF A CAMPAIGN

### Launch time:

You have a great campaign ready to go, but how do you effectively launch it? There are several ways, one being providing partners with a marketing automation tool that can edit their content before it's sent out or printed is key. Not only does this tool allow you to edit, but it also saves time and reduces human error. Perfect for any size business.

## MEASURING CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

The key to measuring campaign success should simply be to go back to your campaign plan - pull out goals and synchronize them with your Inbound Marketing campaign results.



## KNOWLEDGE BASE

A knowledge base is a centralized repository for information. In the case of channel marketing, this database supplies information about inbound channel marketing that can be utilized by channel partners to address common issues or concerns.

## WHY A KNOWLEDGE BASE IS IMPORTANT

A knowledge base allows multiple users to reach the same resources no matter where they are. A knowledge base is only as useful as the content it contains. Thus, it is essential that you have procedures in place to ensure that your knowledge base is populated with excellent content that meets the needs of your audience. Effective content should be in your knowledge base. Some examples are relevant timely articles, blog posts, links to references and resources, white papers, FAQs.

## TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

There are several platforms you can follow depending on your channel's needs. When searching for a technology platform, consider how you collect and store contact information from leads and customers, distribute leads, and communicate with your channel partners—or how you want to do these tasks differently in the future. Find a platform that fits your organization and will give you the outcomes you are looking for.





- **Partner Relationship Management (PRM):** System for channel managers to organize and communicate with channel partners using tools and software like content management, sales metrics, lead distribution and deal registration, customer databases, partner portals, ect. For use between channel managers and partners.
- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM):** Is software that helps with organizing information on prospects and customers such as contact information and tracking where customers and prospects are in the buyer's journey. CRM's are for use in an organization to save time when customers are working with multiple people within an organization.
- **Lead Management Software:** Software that's centered around gathering, tracking, and organizing leads with functions like lead scoring, data verification, batch import capabilities, and integration with landing page forms.
- **Account-Based Marketing (ABM):** A form of business marketing where a campaign focuses on a specific prospect (a single organization or company, not an individual) and works to generate and target content for that single account.
- **Partner Portals:** Often accessible through a channel manager's company website, partner portals allow channel partners to access product information as well as pricing and inventory, marketing and branding material, and training/certification services.
- **Marketing Automation:** Software used to automate some tasks within the marketing process. An example includes email automation, where emails can be crafted ahead of time and set to be sent to certain lists of email addresses at certain times based on personalization and user activity.

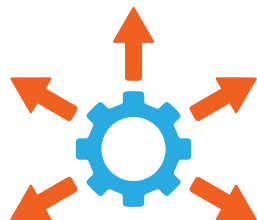
## CHAPTER TWO

# Grow Your Channel Partners' Sales Success

Successful channel management is about influencing channel partners on how they develop, manage and optimize sales opportunities, while also influencing and leading change initiatives and investments that drive indirect channel revenue. Manufacturers need to be able to qualify and forecast opportunities in their channel partners' sales pipeline.

Channel partners boost sales, decrease time to market, and provide access to competitive markets. So get started on building channel partnerships today.





Lead distribution



Lead nurturing

## LEAD DISTRIBUTION

Lead distribution can come in different formats varying from one business to another. Minimize human error through an automated distribution system while also implementing an analytical way to effectively distribute your hard-earned leads. There are several methods of lead distribution to choose from; it is critical that you have done due diligence in determining the best process for distributing your leads.

## LEAD NURTURING

Lead nurturing is the process of developing relationships with buyers at every stage of the sales funnel, and through every step of the buyer's journey. It focuses marketing and communication efforts on listening to the needs of prospects, and providing the information and answers they need.

It takes a lot to turn a lead into a customer: multiple interactions on multiple channels, good third-party coverage and reviews, a solid sales team, and much more. So it can be daunting as a marketer to try to build lead nurturing that has a significant, measurable impact on the process. <https://blog.hubspot.com/customers/hubspot-lead-nurturing>

Every single visitor to your website is a potential customer. To warm those leads up, you have to invest in lead nurturing workflows. Lead nurturing, through automated email workflows, keeps your leads engaged and continues to offer them your high quality, useful content at the right time.

Workflows help nurture leads until they are ready to talk to a sales person. By analyzing where your prospects are in the buyer's journey and what content they will engage with, Manobyte can create the best emails that avoid the dreaded trash and spam folders. The result is that those leads are more likely to convert into customers and eventually become promoters, which all adds up to more of your marketing efforts becoming dollar bills and measurable ROI.



Feedback

## FEEDBACK

Validation is critical to make sure the work that you're doing is paying off. Knowing how to measure customer satisfaction is important because not all customers will reach out to you, good or bad experience. Three common types of surveys to gauge customer experience are the Net Promoter Score (NPS), Customer Effort Score (CES), and customer satisfaction survey (CSAT). The HubSpot Service Hub offers a Customer Feedback feature that allows you to create, send, and track responses from all three types of surveys to help you stay in tune to how your customers are doing.



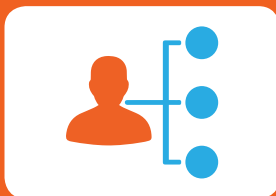
# APPENDIX

What is channel  
marketing  
(clarification of terms)





Partner



Distributor



Dealers



Supplier and a vendor



Manufacturer

## PARTNER

A channel partner is one, who partners with a manufacturing company, to market and sell a manufacturer's product.

## DISTRIBUTOR

Distributor usually a wholesaler who sells to dealers. The distributor is an independent selling agent who has a contract to sell the products of a manufacturer. The distributor cannot represent themselves as the producer, but may display the producer's trade name in signage and on sales documentation.

## DEALER

Dealers usually retailers who sell directly to the public. A dealership is sometimes called a retail distributor. It is similar to a distributorship, except that a dealer usually sells only to the public. Unlike other types of franchisees, including some distributors, a dealer rarely carries a single product line. Example: in the auto industry, a major dealer will carry competing products, often on the same site, but these will be differentiated by being each in its own building.

**NOTE:** Both distributors and dealers actually purchase the goods they sell—the distributor from the manufacturer, the dealer from the distributor. Distributors and dealers have rights to use the manufacturer's trademarks and logos—but not as their own. Ref: <https://www.inc.com/encyclopedia/distributorships-and-dealerships.html>

## SUPPLIER/VENDOR

A supplier and a vendor are both entities that supply goods or services, but the term vendor can be used for both business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) sales relationships, while the term supplier is typically only used for B2B relationships.

## MANUFACTURER

Manufacturer with a channel participates down to the retail level, by marketing programs, incentive programs for distributors and dealers, discounts for the consumer, and also by providing technical training programs for distributor and dealer personnel.





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