

# The Future *of Partner Communications*

# There are a few things *that characterise the indirect channel.*

Firstly, the partner ecosystem deploys cutting edge technologies to help customers achieve their business outcomes.

Secondly, partners understand the importance of customer relationships, often taking deep dives into their businesses to really understand their needs and pain points.

That level of two-way communication between partner and customer is critical to building long-term customer loyalty and it's often the development of these relationships that is expertly demonstrated by partners.

So why then are partners themselves often forced to put up with inadequate communication from vendors?

Why has partner communication hardly evolved in 20 years?

For companies that have made their names from enabling their customers to build better businesses, why is it that we still so often see the main method of to-partner comms being a once-monthly email newsletter?

These partners bring in hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, in new and recurring business revenue. Yet, it seems they're only deserving of a once monthly newsletter, often rushed together and crammed full of general news that is possibly out of date by the time the email gets sent.

**It's certainly somewhat of a contradiction.**

The issue is, there's often no dedicated role 'Partner/Channel Comms Manager' within the vendor to execute and manage genuine, regular, timely partner comms and engagement plans. As such, the resulting to-partner comms end up being nothing more than an ad hoc email or a clunky, end of month newsletter.

Based on global data\* from LinkedIn we found the following job functions:

<b>216</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>653</b>
Past or present Partner Comms Managers	Past or present Channel Comms Managers	Past or present Partner Comms/ Marketing

When you consider the vast number of vendors and distributors that exist worldwide, these figures demonstrate how under-represented partner communications are.

Often, Channel Marketing Managers are tasked with grabbing some last-minute content each month to send out in the partner newsletter – on top of their already overloaded job function. Unfortunately, the content is rarely personalised or segmented to a partner's business beyond job title, meaning these email newsletters are rendered largely irrelevant to the partner and end up as just another unread email in an overflowing inbox – alongside 10, 20 or however many other vendor newsletters competing for space and mindshare.

**Until now, the only way partners can choose what they receive is to opt in or out of the entire communication – meaning the relationship is entirely one-directional.**

\*As at September 2022.

# Partner engagement *is plummeting.*

Current 'to-partner' comms or monthly partner newsletters are almost entirely dictatorial based on what content the vendor wants to push on their partners, and when they want (or remember) to send it.

However, in today's busy world, our inboxes are more crowded than ever before and a large majority of emails go ignored. Consequently, more traditional, linear methods of communication are causing partner engagement to take a nose-dive.

Since vendors have only ever used email sends and monthly partner newsletters as the default for to-partner comms, they have found themselves tracking comms engagement simply via the traditional email metrics of 'opens' and 'clicks'.

The problem is, vendors are looking to 'industry standards' of anywhere between 2% and 5% — stretching out an extra few percentage points — to validate, justify and report back on a 'better than average' result when these figures aren't a true reflection of their partner engagement rate.

## **The Channel model has changed – but to-partner comms haven't**

We are already embracing a move away from the traditional, one directional model of the channel, which sees the vendor at the top, distribution in the middle, and partners and end users at the bottom.

Moving away from that top heavy, linear model of channel to an ever-evolving, ever-moving ecosystem of interaction, interoperability and collaboration is where the future of the channel lies.

So, if the whole channel is evolving at a rate we have never seen before, there is no way vendors can continue to rely on an outdated method of running to-partner comms.

If vendors continue to fall behind the curve, they will not only continue to miss the mark, but the gap will just get bigger and bigger between what they are doing and what they need to do.

As with the evolving channel model and eco-system movement, the future of partner communications has to also become multi-directional and multi-dimensional. In other words, the best way to encourage engagement and interaction with your partners is to offer them choice.

By giving your partners choice, you give them freedom to consume. And, with freedom to consume, they're far more likely and willing to do something rather than feel like they're being pressured to do it. Therefore, vendors who trust in their partners' ability to choose can enjoy a significant boost in partner engagement.

True engagement comes from people choosing to do something without being told, or asked, to. Ironically, forcing more content on partners (in a way that only works for vendors) has the complete opposite from desired effect. Partners will start to feel bombarded by irrelevant information and disengage – something no vendor can afford in a world where partners are increasingly surrounded by choice of vendor.

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*If you feel like your partners are not engaged, the last thing you should do is tell them to engage more!*

*Understand, if partners aren't engaged with you, they definitely will be engaging with one of your competitors.*

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**“Finding, engaging and recruiting these different partner types requires a move from traditional models of partner communication, to-partner marketing and the focus on internal communities (‘build it and they will come’).**

**The pandemic finally moved channel marketers from the legacy ‘fishbowl’ event-driven approach to more modern and expansive digital engagements.”**



**Jay McBain**

Chief Analyst - Channels, Partnerships & Ecosystems  
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# Switching the *narrative*

Historically, partners have had to earn the right to sell vendors' products, so it may seem odd to place so much importance on partner engagement. But, we believe a switch is happening where vendors now have to earn the right to work with partners, flipping the traditional dynamic on its head.

Gone are the days where a vendor could simply dictate what products to sell and when, or share the content they wanted when they wanted.

**Instead, the power now lies with the partners.**

The good news is, vendors can provide partners with openness and the freedom to choose how and when they receive communications, they will achieve deeper, wider and stronger partner engagement in the long term.

For the last 2-5 years, the focus has been on TCMA (Through Channel Marketing Automation), which deals with the 'through partner' piece.

Whilst TCMA is supporting the 'enablement' part of Partner Experience (PX), we believe that the '**GoToPartner™**' piece has gathered significant speed over the last two years and therefore will see equal, if not greater, importance for vendors moving forward in the ever-moving quest for increased and improved Partner Engagement as a key metric of Partner Experience.

We believe that, when partners are communicated with in a way that meets their needs and is based on their preference and choice, they will engage more. With increased engagement, PX has a greater chance of being optimised. And, when both engagement and overall PX increases, sales and revenue do too.

With our newly developed GoToPartner™ communications platform, **Viewpoint**, vendors can share content whenever it is ready, current and relevant.

No waiting until the end of the month and no long newsletters. Give your partners a choice over the content they access and consume, when they consume it and how. Then watch your engagement levels skyrocket.

We also understand, for vendors to gain a true understanding of how successful their communication efforts are, we must progress beyond measuring engagement using metrics that are based on response and reaction, and towards the more inclusive, proactive approach of the evolving channel ecosystem.

Essentially, if a vendor's partners are being proactive and choosing to do something without being asked, it's a sign that they've achieved an excellent engagement level.

The new, evolving channel ecosystem is not telling partners what to do, not dictating to them. Vendors need to democratise communication by offering partners the choice to access and consume vendor information, content and news on their terms.

Ultimately, for the modern vendor, choice and freedom over communications will be what drive success. We have seen freedom of choice make monumental progress in our personal and professional lives as the two have merged closer than ever before in the last few years. And that same freedom is what will also drive future partner engagement.

# Are you ready to boost your partner engagement?

*Get in touch to learn more  
about GoToPartner™ and  
book a demo of Viewpoint.*

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## Purechannels The Channel Agency

Founded in 2005, we work with global vendors, distributors and partners across the entire indirect eco-system to create opportunities for more engaged relationships, increased sales and maximised revenue.

Having worked with numerous vendors on partner communications, and written and managed to-partner comms for the last 17 years, we believe the coming months and years will be a defining period in Channel/to-partner comms.