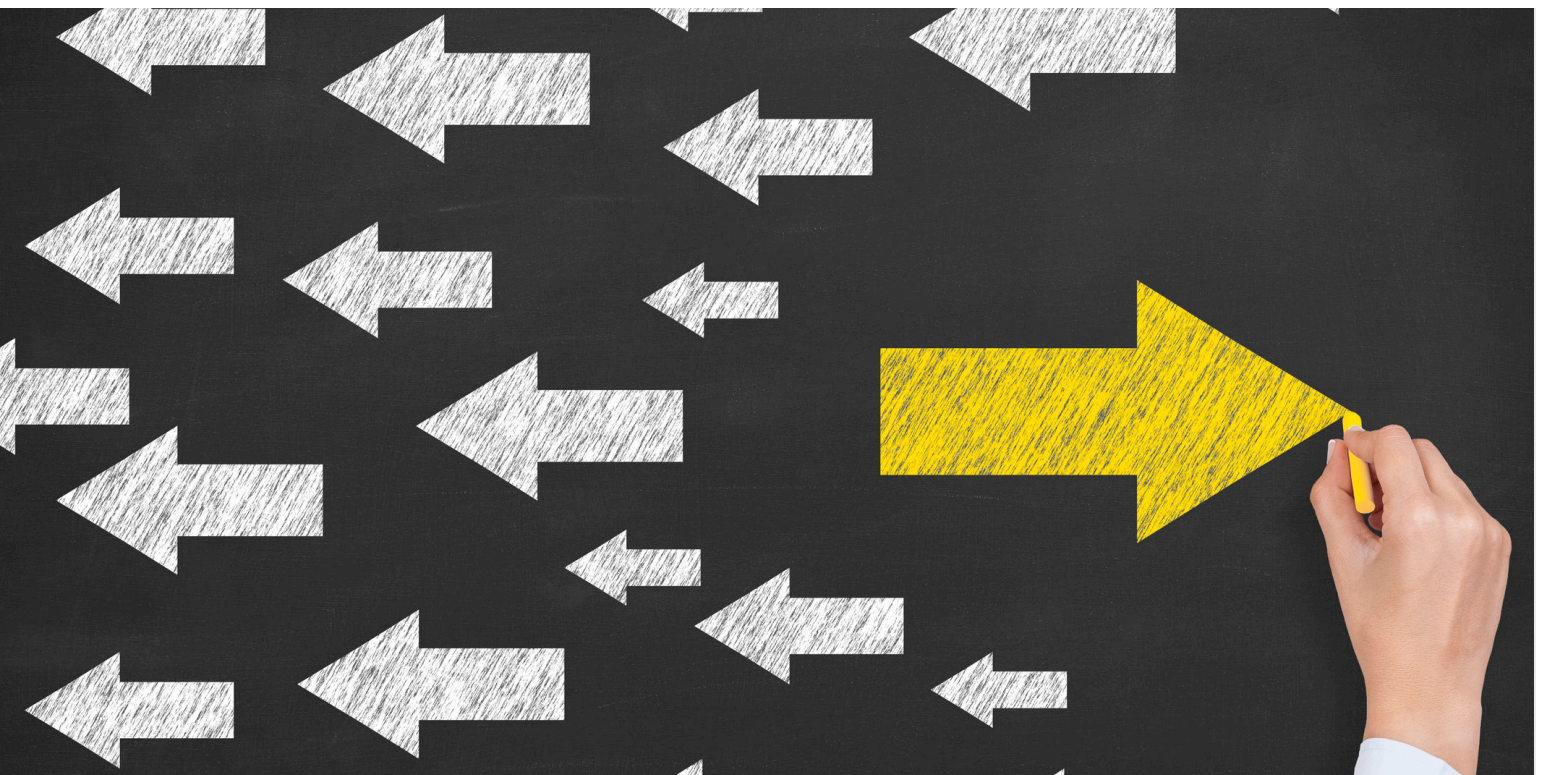




What Does Your Channel  
Marketing Automation  
Platform Need to Succeed?



## Complexities of Channel Management

Channel management is complex. We have explored this complexity from a variety of perspectives in previous articles. However, let's not forget that with the right channel management solutions you can tame the complexity and truly unleash the power of the channel. That's exciting. When you begin thinking about various types of channel marketing solutions, it's helpful to think in terms of two key categories: the channel marketing automation platform you will deploy and the channel marketing services you will require. Together, these two components should be designed to work together to provide an integrated lifecycle management approach to channel marketing.

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In this article we will explore the core components of channel marketing solutions that you should consider to be successful. So let's begin with channel marketing automation. How does it fit in with the overall channel marketing solution? Lifecycle management in channel marketing really needs to address several distinct components: partner recruitment, partner training, partner enablement and partner management, which focuses primarily on incentives management. If your organization is operating on a worldwide basis, the complexities involved in these four lifecycle stages—recruitment, training, enablement and management—require that you leverage an automation platform that can replicate your core processes across multiple countries without worrying about having to train various team members in multiple countries at various times on the same topics, issues and capabilities. A channel marketing automation platform basically automates core workflow in these four areas and will doubtless be an integral part of the overall channel marketing solution you need. An effective channel marketing automation platform can also reduce your operating costs substantially.

When you are trying to put together a set of channel marketing solutions that really address your core channel growth and productivity needs, keep in mind that before you select and deploy a state-of-the-art channel marketing automation platform you must have your core channel programs properly defined and structured, and you must have documentation available so you can automate each of the four lifecycle stages we have identified earlier. Make sure you have a clear view of the approach and the policies you want to apply to recruiting partners, training them, enabling them through integrated marketing tools and tactics, and managing them by providing incentives and aligning those incentives with partner performance.

Now let's talk about how the channel marketing services component fits in to your overall channel marketing solution set. The basic question here is: What are you going to insource and what are you going to outsource? When you consider insourcing a specific set of channel marketing services for your channel marketing solution kit, you need to determine what your overall goals are—for the year, or preferably for the next three years. Are you primarily trying to expand your reach? You'll require many more partners to accomplish that, and therefore you'll need to take steps to drive recruitment. Do you already have a rich partner base across multiple countries? You may need to do a better job of making them aware of the latest products and services you've rolled out so they will be better capable of selling them. Do you want to drive performance through incentives? You'll need specific programs to provide those incentives like market development funds, rewards, rebates and the like. Here's where you have to carefully consider what elements of your channel marketing solution make the most sense to address internally, and what elements you would be better off outsourcing to marketing agencies.

For example, when it comes to partner recruitment, if you are undertaking a specific country-level effort, you may be better off outsourcing the entire component to a reputable agency that

can drive the recruitment campaign on your behalf, and hand over those contacts to your existing sales infrastructure. Similarly, partner training can be a country-based effort, or it can be a multi-country effort tied to a new product launch or acquisition your company has made. When you're rolling out certain parts of your training you need to figure out which parts are core elements you will keep on running every year; these parts you will likely want to insource. But if there is some incremental training you want to develop and you need an agency to drive registration—whether through online events or offline roadshow-type events—it may make more sense to outsource that.

So, my point is that it's essential to think about these requirements in a structured way in order to figure out which channel marketing services make sense to create internally and which ones make more sense to outsource. Now let's step back for a moment: As you put together your overall channel marketing solution, you have to think through how your channel marketing automation platform actually works together with your channel marketing services. If you tend to outsource a lot of activities to an external agency, you may want your channel marketing automation platform to have a strong marketing concierge capability. Marketing concierge automation, as an integrated part of your channel marketing automation platform, is a great way to make sure that all your agencies around the world are following the same structured approach and process. The way you touch partners in Boston or Beijing or Bombay should follow essentially the same methodical approach in each geographical setting. This is where channel marketing concierge automation capabilities can be a big help.

Similarly, if you are offering incentives programs across multiple countries, while you may have a similar rewards and rebate structure—whether you give a 1% or 2% or 3% reward/rebate when a sales quota is reached—the currencies you use in Japan are going to be different from those in Europe or North America or Latin American. You likely need a platform that can address your global currency requirements. You also need a way to make sure the marketing agencies you're hiring in multiple countries are fully trained on such a platform. Again, planning all this out in a structured way increases the likelihood that your channel marketing solutions can ultimately prove successful.

Finally, as you consider global deployment of a channel marketing solution and determine how a channel marketing automation platform might work best with a set of channel marketing services, you will also need to make sure the vendors you select for both are adaptable and creative, and are willing to work together to constantly evolve as your channel marketing program evolves. As your needs change, as your business direction shifts, as your strategic requirements evolve, both the supporting agencies and the supporting platform will need to be able to evolve too.



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