



Two primary types of lead generation and management scenarios have been mentioned here...

Organizations selling through the channel always worry about one primary thing: driving more sales at a lower cost. The entire purpose of a channel organization is to extend reach to every part of a market where the product or service has value, ideally piggy-backing on other organizations that already have invested in generating demand and capturing it through their sales and delivery teams. A major focus for any partner relationship management (PRM) program is a unified **lead management** capability for generating leads and distributing them to partners—but also for allowing partners to generate leads and close deals on their own. In this article, we will explore how partner relationship management automation can help organizations generate more leads at a lower cost and then manage the lifecycle to attain a higher sales closure rate.

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The primary purpose of lead generation and management is to identify prospects who have a pain point that a specific product or service can fulfill. Entire armies of marketing personnel and libraries of marketing content are optimized to find and educate prospective buyers who may be interested in a company's solution. This has become a combination of art and science in direct marketing, but when it comes to generating leads through a partner network, it requires more tools and more attention. This is where **partner relationship**

management (PRM) software comes in. It helps vendor organizations manage the complexity of distributing content to their partner base, training them properly and managing them to close the leads that are provided to them. There are two primary ways this can be done:

- 1. Vendor-Led Lead Management** – This is when a vendor organization does all the heavy lifting of driving awareness and interest from a target audience, and then distributes the resulting leads to the partner base for closure. This is accomplished in a couple of ways:
 - **Open Accounts (Shark Tanks)** – In this lead distribution system, a lead is given to all qualified partners, and whoever reaches out to the prospect first ends up owning that opportunity. While this may appear relatively simple, the nature of this distribution method tends to vary—not only across organizations, but even within a single organization based on product type, certification requirements, the nature of the promotions and many other factors. However, a state-of-the-art partner relationship management (PRM) platform should be able to handle any of these scenarios in an artful way.
 - **Named Accounts** – In this scenario, a specific lead from an end-user company is given to a specific account. This could be based on contracts that the organization has with a specific partner, or it could be based on a special program, the nature of the product, partner qualifications or territory in an under-distributed environment. At times, end users may also request a specific partner for an opportunity and the organization may make that exception. Again, a state-of-the-art partner relationship management (PRM) platform should be able to automate these lead selection and assignment workflows based on partner criteria in a seamless way.

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2. Partner-Led Lead Management – When a partner is able to generate end-user demand and leverage a vendor’s product or service as part of their core offering to the end-customer, it generally makes sense for the partner to lead the process. Here, too, I should mention a couple of common scenarios:

- **Standalone Offer** – When a partner is primarily selling a service centered around a specific product—say, insurance, retail, hospitality or technology—where the product is the core offering and a partner’s services only augment

the core product, for the most part the partner can leverage marketing content and tools from the vendor to sell its product or service. In order to enable its partner base, the vendor would need to look for a partner relationship management platform that either connects to through-channel marketing automation (TCMA) tools or offer TCMA tools as add-ons.

- **Bundled Offer** – The classic example of bundling in the computer industry is Intel Inside. In this case a vendor like Dell or Lenovo or HP markets their end product (a computer) as a primary offer, but differentiates their solution from other solutions by stating very clearly that it is powered by Intel. This notion of “powered by” is quite common now, not only in the technology segment, but also in other segments like hospitality, for example, where a hotel chain specifically mentions certain partner offerings like branded towels or bed types or coffee. For this type of lead management activity, a partner relationship management platform needs to have tools for enabling and managing co-marketing activities like market development funds (MDF), co-op funds, etc.

In addition to addressing these two primary types of lead generation and management scenarios I have mentioned above, partner relationship management (PRM) software also needs to address channel conflict resolution across multiple partners pursuing the same opportunity. This is typically done with **deal registration** applications built into a partner relationship management platform. We have discussed deal registration in other articles, so I will not go into that here. However, I would like to make one additional point: Sales is a performance game. The best strategy in lead management strategy is to focus on high-performing partners and either give them leads (vendor-led) or co-generate leads with them (partner-led). This will yield much better results than randomly giving leads to partners who may not be well-qualified to sell and close opportunities for the vendor. We will explore this dimension in more detail in other articles about performance management.



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