Ziftsolutions

# A Comprehensive Guide to Channel Sales

From the Channel Experts at Zift Solutions

Explore the impact of indirect sales channels with our Channel Sales Guide. Take a deep dive into the dynamics of channel sales models and learn to build and activate a successful channel sales network for global growth.

# Executive Summary

Indirect sales channels are a force multiplier, amplifying and accelerating sales and revenue growth for technology vendors and service providers worldwide. Our Comprehensive Guide to Channel Sales covers what you need to know about channel sales models and how to build and activate your channel sales network.

# Key Takeaways

- Channel sales represent 75 percent of global commerce.
- Channel programs must understand their ideal customer profile before identifying their ideal channel partner profile.
- Channel sales programs are more scalable than direct sales programs.
- Recruiting partners hinges on showing value to both the partner and their customers.

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Part 1:

# What Are Channel Sales Models?

**73%** of the world's commerce is transacted indirectly

Channel sales, or indirect sales, is a strategy in which a company sells products and services through a third-party company, usually referred to as a partner. Indirect sales represent 75 percent of global commerce, according to Forrester.

Channel sales can include the following types of partner relationships and business models:

## 1. Wholesale Partners

Also called private-label or white-label resellers, wholesale partners sell vendor solutions to their customers under their own brand. They buy products and services at a discount and set their own pricing and margins. Often, they will package and market the wholesale solution along with other products or services, including professional or managed services.

## 2. Resellers

Also called dealers, resellers buy vendor solutions at a discount and resell them under the vendor brand. The reseller serves as an intermediary between the company that makes the solution and the end customer. In this model, the customer initiates the purchase through the reseller, who sells the solution for a profit margin. The reseller may inventory the solution or work with a supplier or distributor to fulfill the order.

## 3. Value Added Resellers (VARs)

VARs are similar to resellers, except they also add their own professional services along with the sale of the vendor solution.

## 4. Managed Services Providers (MSPs)

Like VARs, MSPs typically sell solutions and professional services but also take on the remote monitoring and management of those systems on an ongoing basis.

# 5. Affiliate & Referral Partners

Affiliate partners have cultivated access to an audience uniquely invested in a specific topic and follow them to understand and keep up to date with that subject. Affiliate partners typically earn commissions. Similarly, referral partners typically send prospective customers to vendors and receive a one-time commission for each closed deal.

# 6. Distributors

Distributors and technology services brokerages (TSBs) come between vendors and partners, aggregating partner relationships for vendors and vendor relationships for partners. In doing so, distributors take on the administrative burdens of managing thousands of partners for vendors. By leveraging the distributor's sizing and buying power, partners also benefit from higher commissions or discounts than they would qualify for on their own. They also may realize greater contractual protections.

# 7. Independent Retailers

An independent retailer is a retail company not supported by a major brand or franchise. For example, a store that sells mobile wireless services would be considered an independent retailer.

# 8. Agents

Agent partners receive recurring commissions for sales of vendor services. They typically perform all sales and marketing functions while the vendor deploys, delivers, supports and bills for services to the end customer.

# 9. Consultants

Consultants advise clients about their technology solutions. They often connect vendors and sometimes partners to ensure the successful deployment and delivery of solutions to their customers. Though consultants may not directly sell solutions, they play an integral part in enabling solutions sales. Depending on the consultant, they may receive a referral fee or commission, or they may not since the end customer pays them for their independent advice.

# 10. Non-Selling Partners

A complete partner ecosystem also will include partners who aren't present at the point of sale. Here are examples:

**Deployment & Implementation Partners –** Also referred to as service delivery partners, deployment and implementation partners enhance the value of a vendor solution by providing presales consulting, installation and management services.

**Training & Adoption Partners –** A training partner is responsible for training customers to ensure users know how to use the solutions correctly. Adoption partners step in with programs to get user buy-in on the benefits of the technology and reinforce training.

**Integration Partners –** An integration partner connects their solutions to yours via API to provide joint customers with a seamless experience. The integration is out of the box, adding instant value to both solutions.

Part 2:

# Why Should Your Business Invest in Channel Sales?

Channel sales done right creates a variable salesforce paid exclusively on performance, trusted by businesses of all sizes and verticals and adaptable to changing economic conditions. During hard times, channel partners advise companies on finding cost savings through technology solutions. When times are good, channel partners guide companies in developing tech stacks for competitive advantage. And in "normal" conditions, they do a little of both— helping companies find room in their budgets for the next-generation services they need to compete.

For these and many other reasons, building a channel sales network can deliver significant rewards. Developing a pool of partners can become a powerful engine for your business growth. But therein lies the rub. First, you have to find the right partners. And you have to recruit them amid serious competition from other companies that want to realize the benefits of partner sales. Should you win them over, you must keep them engaged and working for you in a marketplace awash in hyper-competition and evolution.

To determine whether to invest in a channel sales program, it helps to compare channel sales to direct sales, as shown on the next page.

## 1. Channel Sales vs. Direct Sales

### What's the difference between direct and channel sales?

Direct sales is the traditional method of selling products and services directly from the vendor to the end customer. In contrast, channel (or indirect) sales uses third parties to sell a vendor's products and services to the end customer.

**20%**

Increase in partner sales

**SEEN BY COMPANIES USING A PRM PLATFORM**

## Pros of Channel Sales

- **Performance-Based Compensation –** The variable cost for partners is attractive to vendor CFOs in economic downturns, as vendors only pay commissions on closed sales.
- **Third-party Endorsement –** Vendors automatically benefit from partners' endorsement of their products and services.
- **Speed to ROI for End Customers –** Partners that understand the customer tech environment can help them realize value from the vendors' solution more quickly, speeding ROI.
- **Scalability –** Vendor sales are not limited by the size of their internal salesforces. A pay-for-performance salesforce means vendors can add partners as needed without the typical overhead of an employee.

## Pros of Direct Sales

- **Training & Enablement –** It's much easier to train direct sellers because you can mandate training use of sales processes and playbooks.
- **Sales Performance Quotas –** Salaried sales reps are dedicated to selling their company products and services and must meet a sales quota. Partners, meanwhile, can choose whether or not to recommend your solution to an end customer and often must be incented monetarily to do so.
- **Precise Sales Forecasting –** Pipeline information is more likely to be updated accurately by direct sales teams that are accountable for weekly sales reports.

## Cons of Channel Sales

- **Partner Mindshare –** Barring an exclusivity agreement, no supplier can ensure their partners aren't being wooed away by another provider offering larger sales incentives or deeper support.
- **Unclear Sales Forecasting –** Forecasting in sales can be difficult as indirect sales partners won't update CRM or PRM dashboards and pipeline reports the way an internal direct sales team would.
- **Commission Payout Pressure –** Sales partners typically demand more aggressive compensation levels and timelines than direct sellers.
- **Dealing with the "Middleman" –** Sales partners introduce a third-party "middleman" into the supplier-customer relationship. Depending on the industry, sales partners can be gatekeepers to the end customers, creating a potentially frustrating obstacle for vendors who would rather own the client relationship.

## Cons of Direct Sales

- **Fixed Costs –** Salespeople in an internal sales team typically are paid salaries and benefits even if they don't perform well.
- **Timeline to ROI –** A salesperson's onboarding and training timeline can take months or even years to achieve satisfactory performance with a tangible ROI.
- **Employee Turnover –** Direct salespeople frequently churn, especially if they struggle with solutions selling. Once a rep leaves, a new salesperson must be hired, onboarded and become the new contact for customers they didn't bring aboard.

On average **75%** of a company's revenue generated by channel sales

Part 3:

# How Do You Recruit Channel Sales Partners?

There's not one right way — or even a prevailing method– to recruit channel partners. Companies that thrive in the channel get there through many paths — none of which are magic bullets for channel success. In fact, to a layperson, success may appear to be random; firms that struggle in the channel often appear to be modeling similar approaches to competitors that achieve success.

This is because channel success is complicated and requires a more profound commitment than pushing products and payouts. Those factors matter, to be sure, but capturing and retaining channel sales partners is a complex process that touches every aspect of a provider's business. Success and failure can occur at multiple touchpoints between your firm and your (potential and current) partners that encompass facets of your entire operation.

## 1. 10 Key Strategies to Recruit Productive Sales Partners

### Tip 1: Understand the Ideal Customer Profile Before You Understand Your Ideal Channel Partner Profile

The experts at Zift have consulted with dozens of channel programs over the years and most companies have not defined their ideal customer profile, even when they believe they have. Separate departments in the company may have differing ideas on their ideal target client. You need to know your ideal customer profile (ICP) before establishing your ideal partner profile (IPP) since the partner will typically be a gateway to the sale to the end customer.

**Here are questions to answer with your team when determining your ideal customer profile:**

- What would a customer buy from you?
- What problems do your products or services solve?
- What business advantages do your solutions provide?
- What is the age of your typical customer?
- What is the gender of your typical customer?
- Where do your typical customers live geographically?
- How do your customers make money?
- In what industries or verticals do your customers typically operate?
- What are your customer's pain points, and does your product or service address them?
- Why would they buy your services over those of a competitor?
- What are the most common or popular types of services you offer that your clients purchase?
- What factors are your customers likely to consider before the purchase?
- What do customers tell you they value about your services?

- How do your customers typically discover your product or service?
- How does the cost of your product or service influence your customers' decision to buy?
- What is your typical customers' preferred method of communication?

Based on the answers to these questions, you'll have a clear idea of your target customer and how best to reach them. From here, you need to determine what other companies serve these customers and if there's an opportunity to partner with them to deliver your services.

## Tip 2: Focus on the Channel Partner, Not Your Company

Solutions selling isn't new to technology providers. It's central to their internal direct marketing practices and how they coach their partners in their go-to-market strategies. But that same approach is often overlooked in channel partner recruitment — particularly by big brands that think partners should feel privileged to represent them. Providers that have built demonstrably better marketplace solutions can fall into the trap of pushing products over partnerships.

To be fair, both viewpoints have merit. Partners sometimes encounter brand-sensitive clients, and cutting-edge solutions can open doors or tilt deals in the right circumstances. When institutionalized, however, those limited perspectives miss the mark with partners in the same way that "product pushers" lose out to "problem solvers" when selling to end customers.

The provider-centric approach is why the mix of brands that thrive in the channel differs from the pool of market leaders that sell direct. There are some "channel-friendly" market leaders, but there also are many smaller companies that have established brand and revenue leadership within the channel through a relentless focus on the issues their channel partners face. Their channel commitment runs deeper than building strong pre-and post-sales support (though both are vital); they strive to understand the business challenges of their partners.

Some organizations will adopt a four-pronged "FIST" strategy for partner management:

- **Financial benefit to the partner.** What is the value of your products and services to the partner? How do they make money with them?
- **Integrity of your organization.** How do you position yourselves as trustworthy? It's more than reviews or being a public company.
- **Sincerity of your personnel.** Do your people genuinely care and like working with their partners? Authenticity creates a healthier engagement and should never be undervalued in recruiting and retaining partners.
- **Transparency in your communication.** You must over-communicate and never assume your partner knows the information you haven't explicitly communicated.

## Tip 3: Develop Your Ideal Channel Partner Profiles

All partners are not created equally. Some are high performers, some can be nurtured into becoming high performers, and some have limited potential. Knowing the difference and how to screen for the right partners can save you a lot of headaches and wasted investment.

An easy answer to the question of what makes an ideal partner is one whose organization is aligned with your sales, marketing, provisioning and support—these respective departments, when aligned, deliver an extension of each other for a true partnership. Vendors and partners who genuinely believe in each other's capabilities and competency in growing, serving and supporting customers jointly are necessary to ensure a successful engagement.

A supplier's ideal partner knows their ideal customer. They need to have a mature understanding of their own offer and ideal customer profile. Without that, it will be challenging to determine how your solution fits into their go-to-market strategy.

The effort to profile and screen for an ideal partner pays off—especially since it could take six to 12 months (depending on the length of your sales cycle) before you have a good read on a new partner's performance.

## Tip 4: Find New Partners Where They Gather — Online or In-Person

"The channel" is an industry unto itself — and a complicated one at that. Your potential partners attend conferences, read industry publications like CRN and Channel Futures, listen to podcasts, attend webinars, and participate in LinkedIn groups—you name it. They do everything other businesses do to grow their companies and refine their operations.

Just as channel partners with vertical industry expertise meet their customers where they gather, you need to build your brand, develop your leads and build your community where your partners meet.

Answer the following questions to help you narrow down your focus:

- Who are your customers?
- What in-person and virtual events are they attending?
- What magazines do they read?
- In what webinars/podcasts/groups are they participating?
- Who do they follow that influences them?

The answers to these questions may not be straightforward, particularly since technology convergence means your next best partner may look nothing like the ones you've worked with in the past. For example, SaaS or emerging tech partners may not frequent the usual IT partner haunts (and may not even know about them). You need to find out where they're spending their time.

## Tip 5: Use Technology Services Brokerages (TSBs) & Distributors to Reach Top-Performing Sales Partners

TSBs and other distributors can bring a lot of value to the table, including access to top-performing sales partners. They help to manage compensation, partner service inquiries and training on your company's solutions. The larger agencies even have their own partner conferences that deliver opportunities to interact with highly engaged partners.

TSB engagement can have a high value in specific provider's channel strategies. Develop a strong "sell-with" relationship with TSBs that give you access to their top-performing sales agents. Then allow those same agents to train, certify and earn aggressive residual commissions on opportunities sold.

While TSB agencies can be tremendous allies in connecting your company with top partners, they also can be gatekeepers, ensuring that only vendors offering the best channel agreements, service performance and customer experience get access to their best sales agents. Make sure that you've checked all the boxes.

## Tip 6: Follow Up with Leads Fast

A reliable channel partner can be a gift that keeps on giving. Of course, you know that already, which is why you're here. Your competitors also know it, and they collect the same emails at networking events. The prospective partners you talk with may enjoy being the belles of the ball, but their many suitors quickly become a blur. And when they get back from the event and receive follow-up emails, they're overwhelmed after the first few and begin deleting the rest or dragging them to their junk folders.

In other words, you want to be in their first wave of follow-ups. Of course, you need to attend these events, but that will not cut it. Good suppliers make an impression at events and then after they leave. You can't wait. Follow up in a week, or they'll forget you.

In our hyper-digital world, channel sales managers who are first out of the gate request to connect with partners on LinkedIn immediately after meeting them and while the event is still in progress. A personalized note in the moment can help get that critical second meeting on the books. In an ideal world, your follow-up meeting with the partner prospect is already set before you leave the event.

## Tip 7: Show Value to Partners — How You Help Them and Their Customers

Having solid presales support to help your partners close deals is imperative to building a strong reputation in the channel. So is reliable and pain-free provisioning and onboarding of your channel partners' customers. Post-sale support? Yeah, you've got to deliver. And your billing needs to be correct, and your commissions need to be accurate and on time.

Getting customer- and partner-side processes down pat is essential to building a solid channel reputation (and avoiding a poor one). But that's only the cost of entry. Offering something new and valuable to your partners will get you noticed and keep them engaged after they sign on.

By focusing on the unique value you offer partners, you can pique their interest and avoid the "me too" trap of trying to convince them to displace their current providers by engaging in SPIFF and commissions wars for "bread and butter" product sales. Besides, being the highest bidder isn't a winning long-term channel strategy; it only works until a better offer comes along and attracts partners more concerned about their bank accounts than their customer accounts.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What is our value proposition?
- What solution for an approach to customers or products are we giving them that they didn't have previously?
- How are we bringing them new customers they didn't have previously?

## Tip 8: Prioritize Responsiveness to Build Trust and Keep Partners Engaged

Price always matters. Let's not pretend it doesn't. In addition to price, the value propositions of most of today's technology sales are centered firmly on solving business challenges like overtaxed resources, operational headaches and problems that can cause customer dissatisfaction and revenue loss. Channel partners engage in this arena daily, mixing and matching the services they sell to help their customers tackle various issues.

But as soon as they leave a client site or close a ticket, channel partners face many of those issues themselves. They've got all the overhead and responsibilities of any other business — HR, payroll, accounting, sales and marketing, etc. — but are at the mercy of the providers they work with to keep their customers up and running (and satisfied).

This is where responsiveness can set you apart from your competitors. The faster your sales support operations can quote services or your channel account managers can resolve issues for your partners and their clients, the more trust you build in the relationship. That's because you make your partners look good to their customers and reduce their workload while you do it.

The PRM market currently represents around

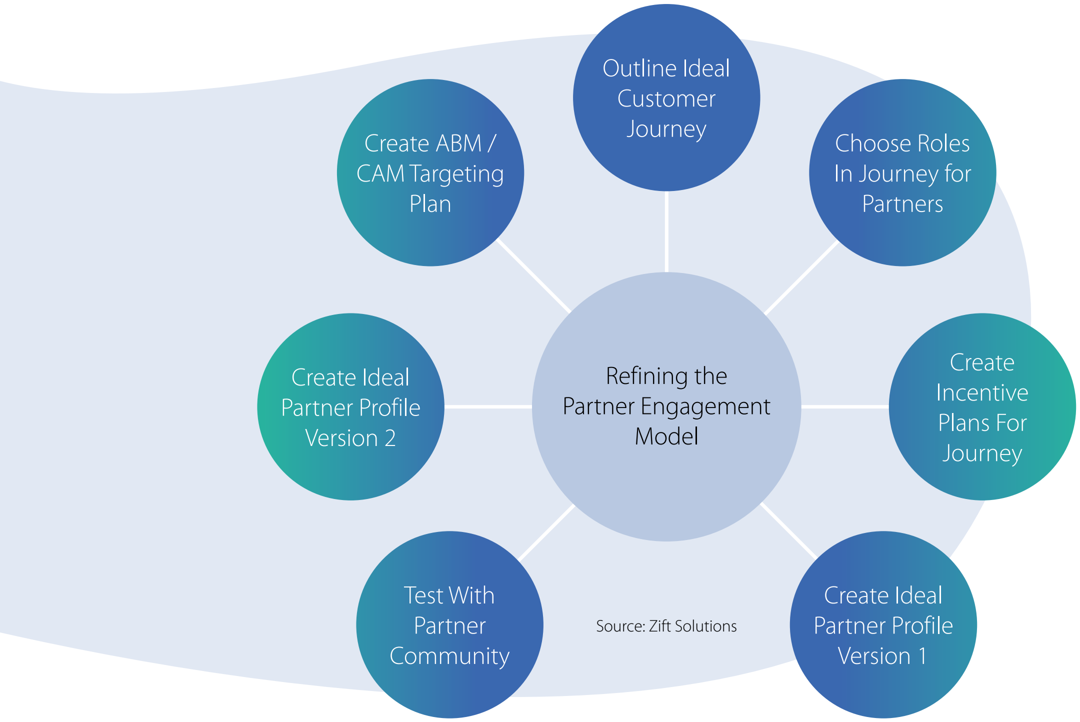
**8.5%**

of sales of the total business process management market.

Go the extra mile in providing what your customers, prospects, and partners are asking for, and ensure that you are responsive to them. Everybody has choices these days, and you'll deal with someone faster if they are responsive. It all comes back to the customer experience and meeting the partner's needs.

## Tip 9: Assess and Refine Partner Engagement Model

Assessment is vital to building and maintaining strong channel partner recruitment and engagement. Develop and test partner incentives and participation directly before launching campaigns.



Source: Zift Solutions

In terms of measuring partner performance, detailed quarterly business reviews can help you test your partner profiles to ensure they're performing as expected. You'll see which products are performing best for your base on the one hand, and on the other, you see which partners are performing the best with your products.

Periodic reviews also can help you identify partners that are not engaging or that may have been poached by your competitors, as well as any changes in the competitive environment that require attention.

## Tip 10: Know When to Say No to a New Partner or Invest Further in an Existing One

Depending on the length of your sales cycle, you're taking a six- to 12-month bet that the financial, human and opportunity cost of recruiting a partner will pay off. That means you want to do all you can to tip the odds in your favor.

Use best-fit partners to model an ideal partner profile and stick to it. Don't be afraid to tell a prospective partner "No."

Similarly, if a partner is not engaged, not performing and slow to respond to your outreach or uninterested in opportunities you provide to up their game, focus your resources elsewhere. Spend your time and energy on partners who share your goals and values and who want success as much as you do.

Stop banging your head against the wall. Sometimes, it's simply a matter of misalignment between your objectives and your partner's objectives. The most talented channel leaders in the world know when to say no or manage differently. Don't waste time or set yourself up for disappointment by forcing your partners to fit into your definition of success.

While there's no copy-and-paste method for finding the right partners, keeping these tips in mind while developing your channel partner recruitment strategy can set you on the right path. Capturing (and retaining) the best partners for your organization will set the foundation for your channel's success.

Part 4:

# Why Should Your Partner Program Use a PRM Platform?

Due to the complexity of channel partnerships, a whole category of software tools has emerged to manage partner relationships, including recruitment and enablement of channel sales.

PRM is a horizontal solution serving indirect channels in all 27 industries.


## 1. What is a Partner Relationship Management (PRM) Software Platform?

Partner Relationship Management (PRM) software manages partnerships between organizations and their indirect sales channel partners (e.g., affiliates, agents, brokers, dealers, distributors, value-added resellers, managed services providers, etc.)

PRM software streamlines and strengthens partner program business processes to deliver mutual sales growth for providers and their indirect selling partners by:

- Organizing and orchestrating data
- Storing and sharing assets
- Tracking indirect sales transactions
- Qualifying indirect sales partners for program incentives and promotions
- Facilitating ordering and provisioning of provider solutions to partner-sourced end customers

The most common capabilities of PRM software platforms include the following:

- Storing shared resources in a content management system (CMS)
- Integrating with customer relationship management (CRM) software and popular third-party applications
- Distributing provider-sourced and partner-sourced leads
- Tracking allocation and use of marketing development funds (MDF)
- Tracking and attributing promotions for select partners, partner types and product lines
- Analyzing financial performance, such as detailed pricing and sales data

- Enabling (TCMA)
- Housing a library of partner sales and marketing materials
- Centralizing KPIs, partner data and administrative functions on a dashboard
- Enabling deal registration for partners to claim leads
- Training and certification on how to sell, order, provision and procure provider services akin to a Learning Management System (LMS)
- Processing and fulfilling orders

Partner programs should consider using a PRM software platform to enable their partner program and channel sales for these key reasons:

## 2. A PRM Platform is a Single Source of Truth

A high-quality PRM is a foundation on which vendors can build their programs. Providers can use the PRM as the one-stop shop for partners to engage and do business, including:

- Deal registration
- Account management
- Training
- Collateral
- Demand-gen campaigns
- MDF
- More

The best PRM software offers utility and convenience vital to partner engagement. Suppliers strive to be easy to do business with, so it's imperative that they aggregate as many systems, tools and platforms into a single location as possible so partners don't need to remember multiple URLs and logins.

The impact of the PRM extends beyond the partner program and represents your entire company to partners. A sound PRM system will create your partner program culture and your company culture will be communicated through it. The PRM effectively provides a baseline understanding to partners of how your program, your products, and your company work. Just as your website is the face of your business to end customers, your PRM is the face of your program to partners.

Not having a PRM is a disadvantage in today's marketplace. If you've not invested in a PRM, you risk looking "small", especially if market-leading competitors have had them for several years. Appearing "small" and under-resourced brings up many uncomfortable questions from partners. These include your capacity to serve customers, the size of your staff, your geographical reach, the reality of your 24/7/365 support commitment and how you're reliably tracking partner deals if no partner management system is in place.

## 3. A PRM Platform is the Path to Partner Program Scalability

Scaling a partner program in a post-Covid economic environment requires digitally-focused methods for partners to engage with your program; PRM software makes scalability a reality.

With the rise of remote work and flexible work schedules, partners will require tools, like a self-service PRM, that fit their plans and priorities. As partners get busier and sign with more suppliers, they need the freedom to self-serve requests instantly. Partners want to access training, create marketing campaigns or co-branded collateral, and even see and manage their pipeline and booking reports at their own pace and schedule.

Competing in a digital-first selling environment is a crucial driver of PRM software use for partners. Marketing and demand-gen tools are in high demand, and partners are turning to suppliers' PRMs to execute campaigns.

Scalability is critical for partner programs, especially for partners selling volume-based services. Most partner programs aim to scale and recruit many partners to keep the pipeline full. There are some exceptions depending on vendor business models and target accounts, but generally, it's a numbers game, especially since not all partners will be productive. You can't scale reasonably to service hundreds or potentially thousands of partners without a PRM software platform to automate program processes for you.

## 4. PRM Software Protects Your Partner Program from Staff Turnover

The channel is rife with constant personnel turnover, especially with channel account managers switching companies every 18 months. While you want to replace these front-line positions as quickly as possible, short-term vacancies won't make or break your program if you have a high-quality PRM platform. PRMs enable partners to get core sales process components, like quoting, without needing to engage a supplier employee.

## 5. PRM Software is Customizable to Fit Your Partner Program Model

Partner programs have various business models for all types of partners, some of which include:

- **Technology Alliance Partners –** Technology alliance partners offer complementary technology to the provider's solution. This partnership combines two (or more) products or services as a solution for the end customer.
- **Fulfillment Partners –** Fulfillment partners help providers manage administrative and contractual needs of selling products at scale. These partners primarily manage order fulfillment of a high volume of transactions at a low rate.
- **Cloud Service Providers –** Cloud service providers offer an element of cloud computing (IaaS, SaaS, or PaaS) through hosting a vendor solution in the cloud to improve speed, security, flexibility and other forms of optimization.
- **Managed Service Providers (MSPs) –** Managed service providers will proactively and remotely manage end customer IT infrastructure, typically under a monthly or annual subscription model. MSPs frequently function as a form of outsourced IT and would layer a vendor solution into the tech stack they offer the end customer.
- **Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) –** In the hardware industry, the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) usually refers to a company that builds a product designed for end-users, like a PC, laptop, or printer. Apple, HP, Dell, Canon and Brother are all examples of original equipment manufacturers.
- **Global Systems Integrators (GSIs) –** GSIs build computing systems by combining vendors' hardware, software, networking, storage products and solutions.
- **Strategic Partners –** Strategic partners will fit the role of multiple partner types listed above, but these will typically be partners that deliver the most revenue and provide the most direction and input to vendor strategies.

Quality PRMs can conform to several different partner program models. Some models, like wholesale programs, can't function without a PRM system. In this example, a white-label partner needs to be able to order services at will and then immediately communicate timelines for deployment to an end customer as if it's their service. Programs only achieve fast turnarounds at scale like that through the automation technology that PRM platforms provide.

ZIFT CUSTOMERS SEE AN AVERAGE

# 21%

Increase in channel sales productivity

## 6. Your CRM Software Can't Take the Place of a PRM Platform

Suppliers may wonder why their company's partner program can't simply use their CRM to track deals and email to recruit and manage partners. The problem is that a CRM isn't purpose-built for partners and is not on par with a PRM platform's capabilities.

Proper PRM solutions will provide new partner recruitment, onboarding, enablement, communication, sales and marketing support, business management, incentives, demand generation, deal registration, content library and more. Additionally, PRMs include the data necessary to showcase which partners are leveraging its tools so you can adjust to ensure partners take the right actions at the correct times.

Your CRM allows your salespeople to manage their funnel, commissions and deals. PRM is for partners to manage their funnel and access marketing materials. They're two completely different audiences with different aims.

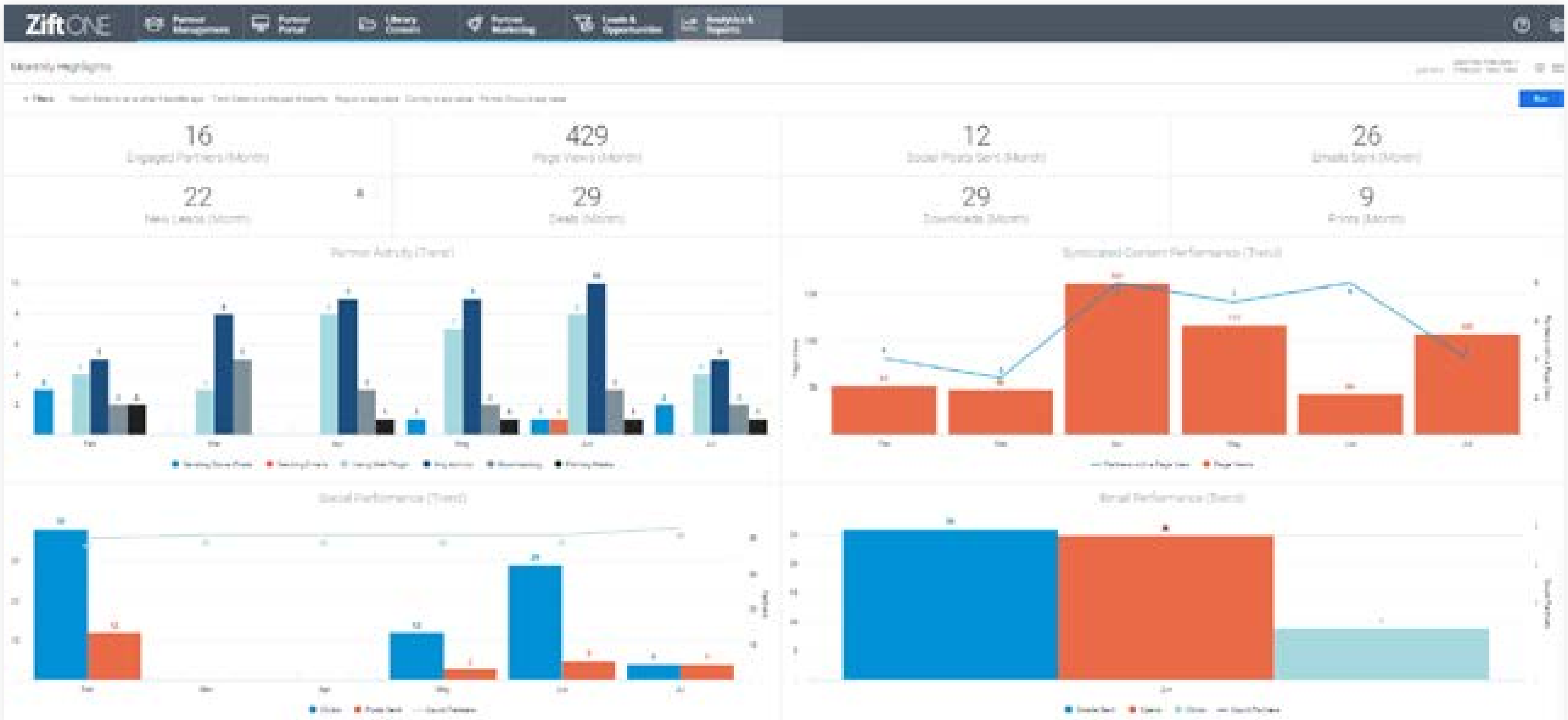
## 7. A PRM Platform Provides Indirect Sales Pipeline Visibility and More

How do you determine whether your partner program is successful? There are many factors, but sales and pipeline are at the top of the list. However, partner programs face a high hurdle of tracking deals, proposals, prospects, leads and each stage of a sales funnel from hundreds or thousands of partners. Tasking channel managers to manually monitor and track these metrics isn't efficient.

PRM software platforms are the key to providing your program with the information you need for proper sales and pipeline forecasting. PRMs are equipped with analytics dashboards and report generation functionality that makes it easy to gauge the success of your partner program. The PRM software delivers sales pipeline visibility across your partner base.

Plus, the PRM tracks more than just the sales pipeline. Entire program initiatives and resources, including marketing materials and campaigns, can be tracked inside the PRM. These sales enablement resources can take months and tens of thousands of dollars to develop. The PRM can give you the visibility you need to see how your partners use them and determine whether there's ROI on your efforts.

Below is an example of a dashboard showing analytics from ZiftONE:



# 8. What Are the Benefits of Using a PRM?

**Rapid Growth for Partners in Revenue Channels**

**Increased Marketing Productivity**

**Channel Activity Oversight with Tracking of All Metrics**

**Real-Time Channel Partner Feedback**

**Automation of Partner Recruitment, Onboarding, Training and Enablement**

**Automated Lead Routing**

Part 5:

# What Should You Look for in a PRM Software Platform?

Selecting the right PRM software platform is an important decision since it will be the hub of your channel program. Here are key questions you should ask your PRM vendor:

## 1. Can the PRM Facilitate Partner Onboarding?

PRM platforms need to be part of the partner experience from step one of the onboarding process to drive adoption. Best-in-class platforms enable e-signatures on partnership agreements to kick off onboarding. Plus, they house your education, training, certifications, lead registration and quoting.

The PRM platform can segment and categorize partners throughout their onboarding process to further customize how your program is training partners with content only relevant to their given stage in the onboarding process.

Plus, onboarding with the PRM platform can open up more program revenue pathways. The best PRM platforms will include learning management system (LMS) capabilities. An LMS allows your program to onboard partners that fit multiple program types through various courses and training tracks, so it can simultaneously support white-label partners, direct agents, TSBs and their subagents, VARs and MSPs.

Need for PRM Software in Large Enterprises to Increase by

**3.1X**

**BETWEEN 2023 AND 2033**

**ZIFT CUSTOMERS SEE AN AVERAGE**

**25%**

Decrease in administrative and account management costs

## 2. Can the PRM Integrate with Your CRM?

A PRM should integrate with your CRM. You can gain deeper insights into your partners' activities by syncing the data from your PRM with your CRM. CRM and PRM must correctly map each other to reflect sales commissions and deal attribution. If all sales go through your CRM, mapping them into PRM is essential so the entire sales process is automated.

## 3. Will the PRM Enable Marketing Automation for Partners?

The PRM needs to be able to provide marketing automation for partners. This functionality isn't just for large, well-established partner programs. When a program is small and still trying to gain market share, that's when it most needs marketing automation functionality. Automation makes it easier for partners to market your services, so they're more likely to do so.

## 4. Is the PRM Easy to Use and Navigate?

Your PRM should be a cohesive resource for all functions and actions you want your partner to take. The partner shouldn't have to log in to multiple systems to do business with you. When registering marketing leads in the PRM, for example, the partner should be able to log them as a deal simultaneously.

*Beware of PRM platforms that claim they do this when they're really several platforms linked by a single-sign-on (SSO).*

Part 6:

# Why Choose Zift Solutions as Your PRM Software Platform Provider?

Channel partner programs of all sizes and types turn to Zift Solutions as their PRM software platform provider.

## 1. Why Choose Zift Solutions?

### Vendor Experience

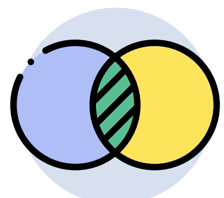
Gain Pipeline Visibility

Establish Marketing Attribution & ROI

Manage Deal Lifecycles

Unify Channel Data

Generate Insightful Reports



### Partner Experience

Reach & Retain New Customers

Access One Program Location

Leverage Co-Branded Content

Deploy Powerful Partner Playbooks

Stay Ahead with Training & Continuous Learning

### Buyer Experience

Work with True Industry Experts

Get Personalized Content and Solution Recommendations

Enjoy a Seamless Buying Relationship

# 2. ZiftONE™ — One Platform for One Pipeline

Nothing screams "amateur!" for buyers louder than a disjointed, cumbersome experience. ZiftONE helps channel leaders manage data, marketing and reputations through a "one pipeline, one platform" mantra. So, operations, enablement, marketing and sales are working from a single integrated source — the one that helps them maximize partner efficiency and minimize buyer frustration.

## ZiftONE Partner Management

### Happier Partners Close More Deals

Through customized, access-anywhere, highly intuitive admin dashboards, ZiftONE makes it easy — enjoyable, even — for your partners to stay engaged with your brands.

## ZiftONE Channel Sales

### Better Pipeline Visibility to Fuel Stronger Sales

Give your PAMs/CAMs the data they need to focus partners on high-value activities, keep them armed with the right information, and hold them accountable for their performance.

## ZiftONE Partner Enablement

### A Little Know-How Can Go a Long Way

With ZiftONE, grow your partners and improve partner relationships with training, searchable collateral, a better lead and deal registration experience, onboarding, and success plans.

## ZiftONE Technical Security Information

### ZiftONE is Secure to The Core

ZiftONE was designed to ensure uptime and continuous performance for global programs, abiding by the privacy needs of European Union companies and programs to meet the highest security standards.

## ZiftONE Channel Marketing

### The Power to Generate Demand — 24/7/365

ZiftONE puts you in simple command of multi-touch digital marketing campaigns designed to generate leads — and support pipeline growth — all day, every day.

## ZiftONE Channel Services

### A Service Experience Built to Be Better

From guiding you through the intricacies of recruiting and onboarding to creating winning campaigns and integrating systems, ZiftONE channel services help you shine.

About

# Zift Solutions

Founded in 2006, Zift Solutions is the only Partner Relationship Management (PRM) and Through-Channel Marketing Automation (TCMA) tool built as one to work as one. The company's ZiftONE platform manages the flow from onboarding to enablement, lead generation to marketing, all the way through sales. Backed by the most experienced team in the industry, Zift was named the only leader in both Channel Marketing Automation and Partner Relationship Management by Forrester Research and a market leader in Partner Management Software and Through-Channel Marketing Software by G2. For more information, visit www.ziftsolutions.com.

## Ready to Invest in Channel Sales?

**Contact a Zift Solutions Specialist Today!**

marketing@ziftsolutions.com
ziftsolutions.com/get-a-demo

"Personally, I like the dashboards and partner locator the most. Many PRM's host content and the like but having a Partner Locator that can be customized as well as Looker based BI tool for Data and Analytics on Partner Activity/Engagement is key to engaging Partners for Success."

– Mindy H.

"I like the fact that you have Looker built-in, so you can create all the reports that you want."

– Rita C.

Ziftsolutions