

# The Best-Kept Secret

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*My partnering success is the best-kept secret in the company!*

You've been working hard for over a year on strategic alliances. Your program is out there; you've got solid partnerships going; you've even seen partner influenced wins. And you hear, "what value has the alliance organization delivered?" The sales VP never mentions partners on the pipeline call. A big win is announced, but with nary a mention that a partner brought the lead. The CEO looks at the influenced sales you report and asks if these are just cases where we resell someone else's hardware. Of course, you do hear how a partner screwed up another deal we thought we had won. This scenario may be common, but it's not inevitable and it's not healthy for your company's partnerships.

## Create Awareness

You know you're making good progress with alliances. What would be the impact if everyone else in the company knew? Wouldn't understanding and awareness help make your program even more successful? Sales people are quick to steal techniques from their more successful colleagues; they'll insist on working with partners if they see a growing list of successful joint sales. Product managers become enthusiastic, no longer skeptics, when they see other company products growing their market share through partnerships. Even the naysayer has trouble dismissing successful partnering when the momentum of awareness builds.

It pays to advertise. And it's not just self-promotion. Making partnering a normal part of the way your company does business is crucial to long-term partnering success. Creating internal awareness of your partnering progress is as important as doing teaming agreements. But you've got to do it right. Creating internal awareness won't happen with a few internal press releases. You're looking to drive behavior, specific behavior, from specific people. That takes a results-oriented plan, for a coordinated set of communications, over an extended period, with professionally-written content.



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## Drive Behaviors

The basis of 3-Dimensional Partnering is that partnering success requires specific behaviors from specific people. An effective partnering communications plan does more than make everyone aware of successes; it reinforces the motivation for these people to take the necessary actions and makes clear what steps they should take. It makes people aware of the success they can achieve if they take the right actions. It makes them aware that they will achieve much less if they don't take the right actions. Effective partnering communications targets specific audiences. It considers the behaviors required from each audience. It assesses what each audience values and what is likely to influence them, and it selects those communications vehicles (internal newsletters, town hall meetings, e-mails, etc.) that are more effective for each audience.

Effective partnering communications also requires coordination of messages. People need to hear about partnering successes from multiple sources; they will tend to dismiss messages coming from a single source, especially if messages from other sources are contradictory. A partner program newsletter has to be reinforced by the company's internal announcements of wins. The CEO's internal (and external)

speeches must reinforce the role partners play in the company's success. What is said by the VP of sales and by the VP of each business unit is as important as anything their people read. All these messages must be coordinated and consistent. The words have to be similar, the messages aligned.

Effective communications takes planned, coordinated, consistency over time. We all know the flavor of the week phenomenon – the CEO read another turn-your-company-around-in-30-days book and has lots of new ideas to take this company to the next level. People are programmed to listen for consistency over an extended period of time. This is how each of us distinguishes the fads from the real changes in company policy and culture. Partnering communications plans fail when they are too infrequent, too sporadic, and too short-lived. Plan for the next year; think in terms of communications processes (not projects), schedule the time to stay on top of your communications activities each week. If you're not prepared to attend to your communications needs for the whole year, don't bother starting. Losing interest in your partnering communications plan is the best way to communicate that partnering itself is just a flavor of the week.

### **Get help!**

We all are great writers, right? Wrong! Effective writing is more complex than we give credit. Words have emotional impact that varies by reader. Words that inspire sales people will leave engineers laughing. Ideas that captivate product managers can come across as trivial and unimportant to senior leaders. Effective writing requires an understanding of psychology. Even if you're a gifted writer and communicator, do you have the time to invest in an effective, long-term partner communications program? Enlist help. If you have a large program with substantial resources, consider hiring a

communications specialist. If your requirements aren't sufficient to keep someone busy full time – and let's be honest, most of us don't need that much communications – investigate internal resources. Does your PR or Marketing organization have anyone who could be assigned to you part-time? You can also obtain help from outside the company. It is often most cost-effective to subscribe to a partnering communications service that provides regular material for your use for a modest monthly charge.

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Demand expertise, though. Whether you hire, borrow, or rent someone, make sure they know partnering. It's not good writing you need, it's effective communications. Effective communications requires expert understanding of partnering and the various roles that people have to play in a successful partnership. Effectiveness comes from experience with the mental obstacles people have to working with partners. Experienced partnering writers have seen the same challenges and can efficiently develop the material that will hit the spot.

As PPS works with clients, communications is almost always one of their biggest challenges. However, taking a people-oriented, targeted audience approach, you can effectively build internal awareness of your partnering success and reinforce key desired behaviors. Identify the key groups of people in your organization who not only need to know that you're making partnering succeed, but who need to help you make it happen. Flesh out the details about what they need to do, what's in their heads today and how to move them to the thinking that will cause them to support your program. Write the plan, provide content, and begin executing an on-going awareness program. If launching a Partnering Success Awareness Program seems a little overwhelming and you need help to get started, call us. You and your team deserve it!