

What makes a good partner programme? 5 Steps to Success

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Leveraging partnerships is good for business but the channel landscape is changing. Tomorrow's winners will truly engage with their partners says Rob Wiles at Puzzel. Here, he shares 5 top tips for building a supportive channel ecosystem.

Early in 2019 a principal analyst at leading research and advisory firm Forrester said he had seen "more disruption in the channel in the past 18 months than in the past 37 years combined."(i)

Interestingly, he then went on to say that "ecosystems are set to replace traditional channel programs"(ii), a trend that echoes Puzzel's own conversations with partners. Many of our partners simply want to 'dip in and out' of a vendor's portfolio but combine it with offerings from other vendors or even with their own in-house skillsets and intellectual property. With this in mind we are looking for new ways to engage with the channel and here are my thoughts on what makes a good partner programme.

5 steps to an effective partner ecosystem

The best channel strategies create impact in the marketplace while giving customers something new and relevant to their business. At Puzzel our strategy is simple, rewarding, on trend, disruptive and above all supportive:

1. Less is definitely more – while many vendors go for high volume, we believe partners should be chosen carefully. The aim is not to recruit 100s of partners but provide organisations with an opportunity to be part of a supportive ecosystem. Look for partners who bring different skills, perspective and value to the mix. They should complement each other's products and services. They should also be able to determine their own level of engagement to best suit their individual business models. This gives partners the freedom to generate new revenue streams while effectively protecting margins and ensuring their offerings stand apart from the competition.

Be sure to include industry analysts, consultants and latest social influencers on LinkedIn and Instagram. Their power to influence buying decisions is real and viral so it is important to involve and nurture them!

2. Brilliant engagement – winning vendors are those that truly engage with their partners to achieve coverage and scale in today's competitive marketplace. Sharing collective knowledge and expertise with partners to create joint value propositions will have real impact on the market and drive customer success. Extend engagement beyond the immediate partner management team to include high-touch sales people, solutions architects, pre-sales and marketing. Why not add the VIP touch by appointing executive sponsors for partners who want to focus 100% on your business?

3. Positive commercials – most organisations will agree that different types of partners are motivated by a different set of discounts, rebates and MDF rates when they are really only thinking about what motivates the channel or sales department. Successful vendors should seek to introduce incentives that excite all areas of the business from the owner to the financial director as well as the salespeople and

beyond.

4. Trusted technology – we promote the benefits of cloud contact centre solutions that combine omnichannel technology with Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support complete customer interactions in a digital age. Highlight scalability to accommodate all customer types so that partners can rely on one platform to meet their customers' end-to-end needs. Be creative and build a marketplace where partners can monetise their offering and where everyone from IT administrators in small companies to seasoned enterprise architects, in large multinational organisations, have easy access to the best vendor and third-party solutions, all in one place. Use trusted technology to spread the word and build business cases.

5. Create a supportive channel community – it's all about enablement, enabling partners to win and delight customers in their own way. Start with the basics, which can be overlooked. Communicate news about upcoming product releases before they become public. In advance, give partners the marketing tools they need to deliver the right message and generate hot leads. Remember to train the whole team – pre-sales, sales, operations, support, marketing and professional services. At Puzzel we aim to enabling partners to become effective customer experience (CX) consultancies and value added partners to their own customers.

The secret to building an effective channel is to brave and dare to be different! Turn traditional thinking on its head and learn the new rules of partner engagement.

Rob Wiles is Partner Channel Director at Puzzel

(i) Forrester blogs (<https://go.forrester.com/blogs/what-i-see-coming-for-the-channel-in-2019/>)

(ii) Forrester blogs (<https://go.forrester.com/blogs/what-i-see-coming-for-the-channel-in-2019/>)

About Puzzel

Puzzel is a leading cloud-based contact centre software provider and one of the first pioneers to develop a cloud-based contact centre offering. Today, Puzzel combines its omni-channel technology with artificial intelligence capabilities to provide comprehensive, end-to-end customer interaction solutions in an age of digitisation. Puzzel was named a Challenger in the 2018 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Contact Centre as a Service, Western Europe, Report 2018 for the fourth consecutive year for its strong growth, functional capabilities, strengths in standards and compliance, customer service and support. The company is headquartered in Oslo, Norway, with offices in six European markets including the U.K. For more information, please visit Puzzel (<http://www.puzzel.com>).

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