Winning in the Modern Channel

Partner Edition

The channel ecosystem is shifting, and partners that fail to adapt will lose ground. This guide shows how to respond to changing buyer behaviour and vendor expectations to both protect your position and grow revenue.

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Introduction

This paper explains the commitments IT and security partners must make to grow their markets, secure vendor funding, and support modern buyer journeys, and why traditional approaches no longer deliver the pipeline or differentiation they once did.

It outlines the structural challenges partners now face, why vendor-provided assets and training often fail to translate into measurable results, and the capabilities partners need to develop to compete effectively, scale growth, and attract greater vendor investment.

Contents:

Executive Summary

Buyers have changed. They are harder to reach, more sceptical of outreach, and less aligned to vendor or partner sales cycles.

To access vendor funding and support, Partners are increasingly expected to deliver modern, multi-touch, data-driven marketing, yet lack the tools, skills, and resources to sustain the consistent activity buyers expect.

This is not a failure of effort, but a mismatch between expectations and capability.

Partners often face limited marketing headcount, gaps in automation and analytics, heavy operational workloads, and ongoing pressure to generate a pipeline for multiple vendors with minimal support.

This paper explains why these challenges exist and how partners can remain relevant as the market evolves

Marketing for Pipelines

Most partners, especially under £5m turnover, simply do not have the marketing infrastructure or capacity to run continual modern campaigns end-to-end and keep pace with buyer decision making to influence the whole sales cycle.

Partner Type	Sub-£5m Turnover	£5m+ Turnover
Systems Integrator (SI)	20-30% equipped	50-60% equipped
MSSP	15-25% equipped	45-60% equipped
MSP	10-20% equipped	35-50% equipped
VAR	5-15% equipped	25-40% equipped
Reseller	5-10% equipped	20-30% equipped

This isn't a criticism, but a reflection of how partner businesses are built: around service delivery, engineering, and customer support and not marketing operations.

How Vendors fall short

Capability Beyond Collateral

Vendors usually provide product sheets, email templates, landing pages, and campaign-in-a-box kits. These are useful, but they don't solve the real challenge: executing modern marketing requires systems and skills that many partners don't yet have.

70% of partner-delivered campaigns underperform.

Source: Forrester

Forrester reports that 70% of partner-delivered campaigns underperform because partners lack the operational capability to activate them effectively. It's not the content that's missing, it's the infrastructure behind it.

Training Doesn't Fix Structural Gaps

Most partners have attended countless vendor training sessions. But training alone doesn't create a pipeline.

60% of SMEs lack the digital marketing skills needed

Source: UK Skills Gap

The UK Digital Skills Gap Report shows that over 60% of SMEs lack the digital marketing skills needed to run data-driven campaigns, even when training is available.

Training helps, but without:

- A marketing automation platform
- A CRM that supports segmentation and nurture
- Analytics to measure performance
- Time to execute

. . . it becomes knowledge without application.

Modern Marketing Demands More

Beyond the free versions, costs can quickly exceed what is affordable for a small business.

As a result, the majority of partners can't, or don't, invest in all the tools needed to align with their buyers' decision-making journeys.

- CRM + MAP integration
- Lead scoring and nurture workflows
- Analytics dashboards
- Content engines
- Multi-touch campaign orchestration

Without these tools, even well-designed vendor campaigns cannot be executed or measured effectively, limiting vendors' visibility into how their investments progress through the sales cycle.

Where performance data is unclear, vendors are less able to fund digital programmes and often default to supporting physical activities, such as events, where participation is easier to track but long-term impact is harder to measure.

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Underestimating Resource Constraints

The majority of vendors invest heavily in campaign assets that live in their portals that aren't optimised because they don't consider resource constraints when making campaigns available.

Over 80% of small tech firms have no dedicated marketing headcount, or they are junior executives running tactical initiatives.

Source: UK Federation of Small Businesses

Most partners with sub-£5 m turnover have:

- No full-time marketing staff
- One person juggling marketing, sales support, events, and admin
- No budget for paid media
- Limited time for campaign execution

This means partners are expected to deliver enterprise-grade marketing with micro-business resources.

The Skills Gap; Structural, Not Personal

This isn't because partners don't care about marketing. It's because the industry has historically prioritised:

- Technical capability
- Service delivery
- Certifications
- Sales outreach
- Customer support

Marketing has always been secondary, but ambitious businesses, properly aligned with vendor targets, are finding new ways to access funding that was previously unavailable to them.

Over half of partners lack essential digital communication and marketing skills.

Source: Cyber Security Skills in the UK Labour Market report

Pipelines Need Operational Maturity

The gap is not driven by effort or intent, but by capability.

Partners that combine automation, analytics, and consistent multi-touch engagement are able to build sustained market visibility and measurable demand, while those dependent on periodic vendor activity often see short bursts of engagement followed by long periods of inactivity, resulting in weaker pipeline development over time. The difference isn't effort. It's capability.

Mature marketing operations generate up to 5x more pipeline

Source: Gartner

Pipeline comes from:

- Consistent execution
- Data-driven decision-making
- Integrated systems
- Repeatable processes
- Alignment between marketing and sales

These are operational disciplines , not collateral.

What this means for partners

You’re Competing in a Non-Level Playing Field

Even though your products and services may be better than competitors of any size, technology and continual execution are the difference between a strong and weak pipeline.

Buyers today expect:

- Personalised content
- Continual, multi-touch engagement
- Fast follow-up
- Clear differentiation
- Proof of expertise and peer validation

This requires more than occasional campaigns; it requires a marketing engine.

Laying the Groundwork

Vendors are shifting investment toward partners who demonstrate:

- Marketing capability
- Consistent execution
- Data-driven reporting
- Ability to scale campaigns

Building capability increases your attractiveness to vendors and unlocks more MDF, co-funding, and strategic opportunities.

You don’t need to build everything at once

Partners can start small:

- One foundational tool (CRM or MAP)
- Dedicated marketing resource (even part-time)
- One repeatable campaign process
- One analytics dashboard
- One content pillar

Or, just as you sell subscription-based services, consider a performance-backed solution where everything is included for a fixed fee.

This has the knock-on effect that once capability can be proven, funding from vendors follows.

Where to start

- Invest in all the **foundational tools**, including CRM, marketing automation, and analytics.
- Build or outsource **marketing operations** when pipelines aren't supporting growth
- Develop digital **marketing skills** SEO, content, automation, and analytics.
- Ask vendors for support with **co-execution**, not just assets.
- Create **repeatable processes** for lead nurture, follow up and reporting.
- Attract more **vendor funding** by demonstrating you can measure what matters: pipeline contribution, conversion rates and activity ROI.
- **Win more business** from net new or existing customers by stripping out the waste that's guaranteed to exist in your current GTM

Conclusion

Modern marketing is complex, technical, and resource-intensive, and most partners - no matter what category or size - haven't been set up to succeed in this environment. This is not a failure; it's a structural reality of the channel.

But partners who begin building capability, even gradually, will:

- Generate more predictable pipeline
- Differentiate more clearly
- Attract more vendor investment
- Strengthen customer relationships
- Grow faster and more sustainably

The future belongs to partners who **build performance engines**, not just run campaigns.

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Is this all too much?

Take a subscription service instead

It's a critical dimension that the entire channel ecosystem has been lacking for years.

Having seen the failures and experienced what happens to sales outcomes when poor marketing investment choices are made, we built a comprehensive service to deliver more. Better still, vendors back our activities with funding, because we guarantee performance.

Market Activation ™ bridges the long-standing gap between vendor expectations and partner capability through the combination of a **buyer network + execution engine + intelligence platform.**

It aligns both vendors and partners in the shared goal - predictable, repeatable pipeline generation - by providing the audience, infrastructure, support, and execution engine that neither vendors nor partners can build alone.

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We will do it all for you, including helping to obtain the vendor funding in the first place, so you do what you do best - run your business.

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