

CHANNEL PARTNERSHIPS

THE FUTURE OF CHANNEL PARTNERSHIPS IN 2026






From Programme Management to Revenue
Architecture

By Stewart Townsend
Channel Sales Strategist & AI Operations Consultant
Former Channel Director at Sun Microsystems , Oracle, and Zendesk.

www.channelasservice.com



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

-  **AI-driven predictive co-sell** becomes the top capability investment for partnership leaders
-  **Programmes → Platforms:** building operating systems, not loyalty tiers
-  **Full-funnel integration:** sourced + co-sell + transactional motions connected rather than optimised in isolation
-  **Automation** eliminating ~60% of manual reporting and coordination overhead
-  **Hyperscaler ecosystems** emerging as the primary growth engine for B2B solutions

WHY 2026 IS THE INFLECTION POINT

AI Maturity

Moving beyond simple analytics to execution intelligence. AI now delivers actionable insights that drive specific partnership decisions rather than just reporting on past performance.

Marketplace Adoption

Reaching critical mass with buyers demanding frictionless procurement. By 2026, approximately 80% of B2B buyers will prefer purchasing through cloud marketplaces over traditional sales channels.

Economic Pressure

Companies face increasing pressure to grow revenue without corresponding headcount growth. Partnership-led growth becomes essential as organizations seek to expand reach without expanding teams.

Buyer Behaviour Shift

Cold outbound effectiveness continues to decline while warm introductions through trusted partners gain prominence. Buyers increasingly reject unsolicited outreach and require trusted third-party validation.

THE PARTNER OPERATOR MODEL

Intelligence

Surface signals and insights from data and AI to find where revenue is hiding. Focus on next best partner action for key accounts, not just dashboard metrics.

Enablement

Build playbooks and workflows partners can't fail with. Create systems for repeatable success, not just training sessions and product overviews.

Execution

Connect GTM motions, co-marketing activities, and deal collaboration into one unified system. Implementation matters more than strategy.

The Operator's Rule of Two

Lean In

- When motion is undefined or new
- When building new partner relationships
- When testing unproven playbooks
- Direct involvement, guidance, hands-on
- Speed matters more than scale

Orchestrate

- When motion is repeatable and proven
- When partners know the playbook
- When workflows are established
- Systems over heroics, scale over speed
- Codify success, then get out of the way

AI-DRIVEN PREDICTIVE CO- SELL

Leaders are prioritising AI-driven co-sell capabilities that predict the next best action, identify partner connections, and automate workflows to eliminate guesswork and manual coordination.

49%

of leaders prioritise predictive co-sell over other AI use cases

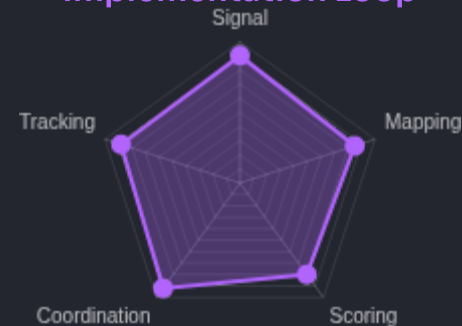
40%

faster partner
response times

60%

higher co-sell
conversion rates

Implementation Loop



- 1 Signal Detection
- 2 Relationship Mapping
- 3 Opportunity Scoring
- 4 Automated Coordination
- 5 Performance Tracking

FROM PROGRAMMES TO PLATFORMS

Traditional Programmes

- 🏆 Tiers, points, certifications
- ✅ Focused on compliance
- 🏅 Status over outcomes



Partner Platforms

- 🔗 Operating systems for success
- 📈 Outcomes over activities
- 👥 Compounding ecosystem value

📣 Escape the Echo Chamber

Most programmes follow identical playbooks: Bronze/Silver/Gold tiers, certification requirements, and quarterly reviews. This standardised approach optimises for programme compliance rather than revenue generation.

⚙️ Platform Mindset: Assets Compound

Partner success creates assets—case studies, integrations, go-to-market playbooks—that benefit every other partner in the ecosystem. Each success increases total platform value.

📊 Measure Impact, Not Activity

Replace quarterly business reviews with real-time dashboards showing mutual opportunities. Move from annual kickoffs to continuous learning systems. Transform partner tiers into capability activation based on customer needs.

💡 Key Question

Ask: "How do we make it impossible for partners to fail?" instead of "How do we get partners to complete our certification?"

FULL-FUNNEL PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

The winning strategy isn't choosing between partnership motions it's connecting them.

Companies integrating all three stages report exponentially better results than those optimising in isolation.

🕒 **25%** faster deal closure with active partner involvement

📈 **40%** higher average contract values

↑ **3×** higher partner-influenced revenue growth

TOP: PARTNER-SOURCED

Discovery engine with warm, contextual opportunities

MIDDLE: CO-SELL

Acceleration through mutual plans and shared success

BOTTOM: TRANSACTIONAL

Frictionless conversion via marketplaces and channels

HYPERSCALER ECOSYSTEMS

📈 Marketplace Revolution

By 2026, Gartner predicts that **80%** of B2B buyers will purchase through cloud marketplaces, representing a fundamental shift in enterprise purchasing behaviour.

⚡ Performance Impact

Deals with active cloud provider involvement close **50% faster** and have **35% higher** average contract values compared to traditional sales motions.



AWS

ISV Accelerate offers co-sell support with warm introductions based on customer cloud usage patterns. Strategic focus on cost optimisation and operational efficiency.



Microsoft Azure

Co-Sell Ready programme provides access to global field organisation. Strategic focus on productivity improvement and collaboration enhancement.



Google Cloud Platform

Partner Advantage focuses on data and analytics solutions. Strategic focus on data intelligence and innovation acceleration.

AUTOMATION & WORKFLOW

Moving from manual reporting theatre to real-time execution intelligence. Teams implementing automation workflows are eliminating **60%** of administrative overhead.

- Kill reporting theatre: reports nobody reads, metrics nobody acts on
- Response times drop from days to hours with automated coordination
- Partnership managers focus on strategy rather than administration
- Clean pipeline hygiene with real-time updates and accountability



CRM



Automation



Slack PODs



#partner-wins

Celebrates closed deals in real-time



#pipeline-sync

Weekly sourced and influenced opportunities



#lessons-learned

Closed-loss analysis with next steps

THE 2026 ACTION PLAN

1

Evolve Your Role

Stop being a programme manager. Start being a revenue architect. Build systems that orchestrate intelligence, enablement, and execution.

2

Invest in AI Strategically

Focus on predictive co-sell capabilities that tell you who to work with, when, and why. Avoid shiny objects that just create better reporting.

3

Build Platforms, Not Programmes

Design partnership experiences that become more valuable as more partners succeed. Escape the echo chamber of industry best practices.

4

Connect Your Funnel

Integrate sourced, co-sell, and transactional motions. Stop optimising individual partnership stages in isolation for 3x revenue growth.

5

Automate Everything Possible

Eliminate manual reporting overhead. Build real-time workflow systems that create capacity for strategic relationship building.

6

Embrace Hyperscaler Ecosystems

Establish strong presence in AWS, Azure, and GCP marketplaces. Learn to co-sell within cloud provider ecosystems for 50% faster deals.