

# Incentive Insights

## Incentive Insights: Six Building Blocks of the Partner Experience

*According to Perks WW research, partners see Ease of Doing Business (EODB) as a critical decision point when choosing a vendor. The partner companies surveyed ranked EODB as the highest among five possible attributes. However, vendors did not include EODB as an area of investment.*

The power has shifted, you know it and more importantly your partners know it. With more suppliers to choose from, channel partners are increasingly selective about their investments. Even more consequential, it's relatively easy for dissatisfied partners to disengage with a supplier and sign up with a competitor.

In this new paradigm, suppliers must rethink and redesign their engagement model and decrease the effort needed for partners to engage. The partner experience has become vital for partner engagement and loyalty.

What exactly is the partner experience? It's not an easy question to answer because there isn't a clear definition for this experience and the associated guidelines. All too often, vendors design their partner incentive programs based on internal ideas of what a partner expects, rather than what the partner actually wants. At Perks WW we define the partner experience as a holistic view of a partner's relationship with a supplier. All the individual interactions add up to an overall experience that reflects how the partner feels about a company and its offerings.

To be competitive, suppliers must offer an experience that's customized, targeted, and engaging from the partner's, not the supplier's, perspective. We've learned from our experience working with channel organizations that there are six fundamental elements required to create a channel engagement program designed with the partner experience in mind.

1. *Partner Scorecarding*

Fully understand your partner's different business models because the one-size-fits-all program no longer serves the needs of your partner community. Know your audience and deliver the right value exchange, in other words, the right incentive at the right time.

2. *Buyer and Partner Journey Models*

The evolution of the buyer's journey has led to enormous transformations in the channel, driving a whole range of behavioral changes between vendors, partners, and end-customers. Understand your buyer's journey and teach partners how to engage buyers throughout the sales cycle.

3. *Channel Data Management*

Engage partners based on channel data you can trust. When the underlying data is dependable and computation is done right, the result is nothing but happy, engaged partners and an improved partner experience.

4. *Personalization*

Personalization is interwoven throughout the partner-centric partner experience. It's all about assisting partner personas through their journey with content that addresses their needs and helps them achieve their goals.

5. *Gamification*

Top performing suppliers have started to add gamification as an engagement strategy. Best practices are to use gamification to drive and reward desired activity and/or behavior completion.

6. *Program Design*

Engage partners and their teams as individuals! Business model transformation has shifted the partner–supplier relationship, making it clear that suppliers need to engage partners and their teams as individuals to deliver the best partner experience.

## Recommendations

Savvy suppliers recognize that a superior customer experience can't be achieved without a definitive partner experience strategy and an effective means of influencing partners to provide a better customer experience. After all, when revenues are sourced with and through indirect channels, a significant part of the customer experience is controlled by those channels.

The first step toward building a roadmap to partner experience excellence by assessing your company's adoption of the six fundamentals of this experience:

- Partner scorecarding
- Buyer and partner journey models
- Channel data management
- Personalization
- Gamification
- Program design

This assessment can be a group activity that includes the heads of channels and their direct reports, or partner-facing individuals can query appropriate

participants and compare findings. The latter approach is especially valuable in companies where elements of the partner experience are distributed across the broader organization.

When the assessment is complete, discuss priorities and opportunities for improvement. We suggest first addressing any topics that are obviously lacking in your organization and focusing on deploying them.

Next, select topics of particular importance or interest based on company initiatives and priorities. Conduct this assessment twice a year to measure progress against priorities and improvements.