

CHANNEXT

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CREATING
THE BEST PARTNER EXPERIENCE

Steering the Channel

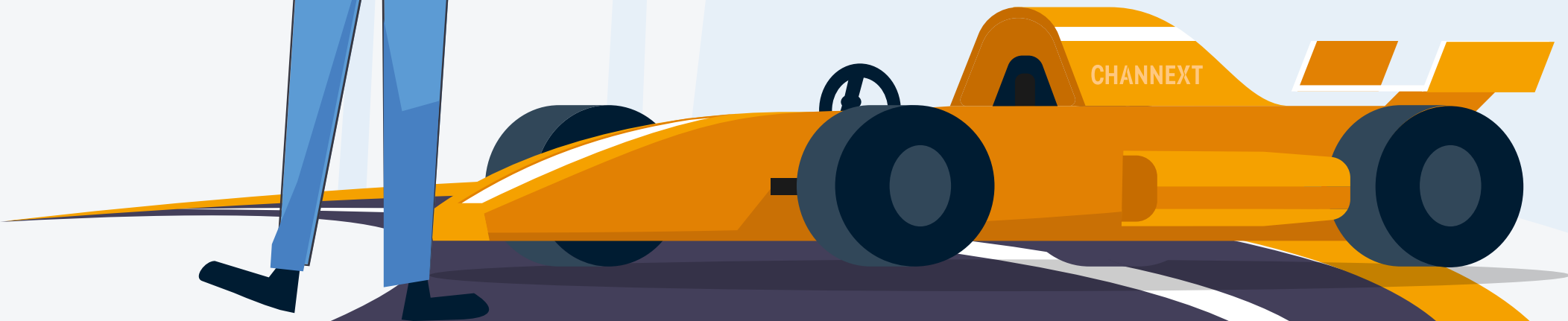


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Introduction

Steering the channel

When looking for ways to describe the ultimate partner experience and steer your channel towards success, it was easy to make the comparison between Formula 1 vs. the channel.

We see many top vendors plastered across F1 cars, drivers' helmets, and boiler suits. The fast-paced, ever-changing world isn't that far from our own. Constantly striving to give partners the best experience possible. To train together. Practice together. Win together.

Over the next 6 chapters, we'll take you on a journey past the 5 steps you need to implement in order to create a scalable, predictable channel team. One that win races and ultimately: the constructors championship.

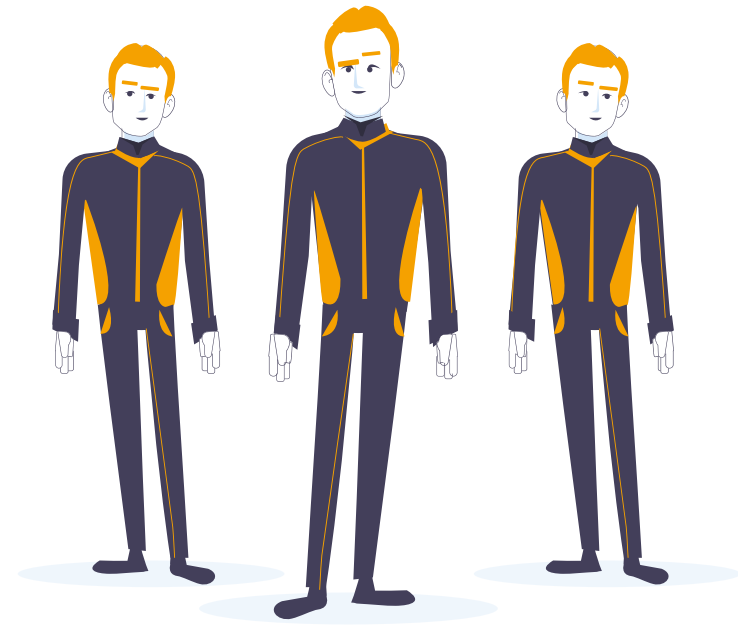


Building the ultimate partner team

The team

Since the 1950s, Formula 1 racing has evolved in ways we never thought possible. We went from cars made of aluminum to carbon fiber, speeds of 180 to 220mph, and from scrappy teams to multi-million dollar businesses.

Today, each team wants to be as predictable as possible. From knowing the moment rain will fall on the circuit to chiseling milliseconds off a pitstop. In similar fashion, channel teams are trying to orchestrate the channel so that they can predict their revenue streams, nurture happy partnerships, and ultimately get happy customers – that turn into the type of fans even Max Verstappen would be jealous of (as a Dutch company, we're a bit biased here).

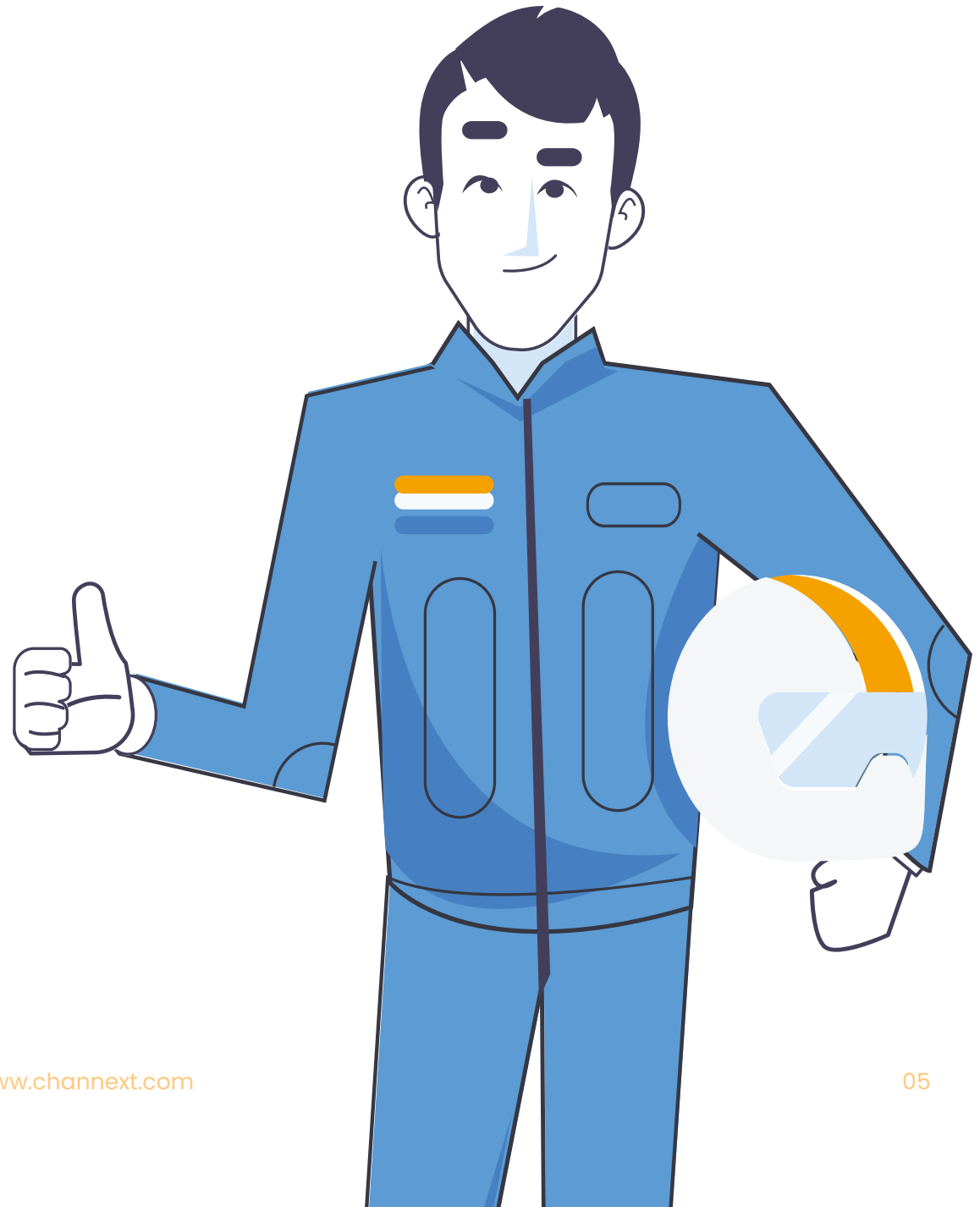


So how do you make things predictable? That's what we'll be exploring in the coming chapters. We'll be dissecting Formula 1 and comparing it to the channel and its partner ecosystem, its teamwork, carefully engineered machines and tech, how it performs in different regions, building the ultimate predictability machine, and how it gets drivers winning championships.

The Happy Driver – Put the partner experience first

F1 drivers are a lot like channel partners. They're in it to win it. The great ones have a lot of vendors to pick from. So you'll need to supply your partner with the best and latest infrastructure so that they can do their job. Much the same as a driver needs the best car.

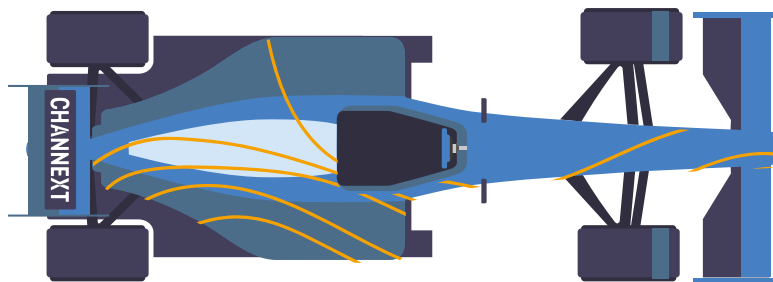
The ultimate goal is to turn end-users into your and your driver's biggest fans. Giving partners a great experience means they are set up to give end-users – comparable to the F1 fan base – the best time of their life.



Orchestrating the channel

In order to take your partners to pole position and create the most value for your end-users, you'll need to create a killer team. One that works together closely to create an amazing partner experience. Having great partners is key to winning races, but there is another very important aspect. And that is the car.

In Formula 1, only the racers with the best cars can compete for the championship. Take 90's and early 2000s driver Michael Schumacher (arguably the best F1 driver ever). Even though he had the most talent, grit, and perseverance, when he made the switch to Ferrari, he couldn't win for four years straight. It was all down to his car. It wasn't enabling him to win races.



It took four years of hard work and determination for him to win. Schumacher and his team of engineers created a car that got him the championship. It's time we level the playing field, and give all channel teams the Ferrari they deserve! The combination of a great driver and a great car makes for an attention-grabbing race. This brings the most value to the fans and makes for an experience that they'll want to have again and again. Teamwork makes the dream work.

Meet the team

If you want to be the best, you need to surround yourself with the right team. It takes a superb team to create the ultimate racing car for your driver. To orchestrate the channel with the ultimate technology solution for the partner, and the desired business outcomes.

So what does the ultimate channel team look like?

The driver = Partner

Whether you're a Verstappen, Hamilton, or Schumacher fan – no judgment here – all focus is on the partner. At least, it should be. They are, after all, the ones driving your car and winning races. A good driver can get the most out of the car, just like a good partner can bring your product offering to the next-level. It's crucial to focus your efforts on creating the ultimate partner experience if you want to win.

Team boss = Head of channel

There's no team without a team boss. From the ultra-focused Christian Horner to the always-optimistic Guenther Steiner. They come in all shapes and sizes. They need to rally their engineers, keep the drivers focused, the engine running, and the sponsors happy.

We couldn't think of a more apt description for the head of channel. They are the ultimate orchestrators. They create the ultimate channel team, steer partner programs, rally for channel budget from management, and ultimately prove the ROI of the channel.

They're also the ones researching smart alliance partnerships, much in the same way F1 does. So what kind of motor do you need and what kind of tires, compared to how other vendors can elevate your product to create and complete your product portfolio.

Head engineer = Partner Account Manager

Chances are you've never heard of Gianpiero Lambiase. He's Verstappen's head engineer and they have one of the strongest bonds in Formula 1. They know each other inside out; Verstappen needs to trust Lambiase with his life. Although that may be a stretch too far for you and your partners, you get the gist.

It's an ongoing relationship, in which you need to continuously iterate to create the best partner experience.

Suppliers = Alliance partners

No racing car is complete without a set of Pirelli tires. Red Bull couldn't race without their Honda motors. And each car has its preferred oil company. Much like in the channel, teaming up with other brands will make the teams stronger.

What does this look like in the channel? Well, you need an engine, much like software needs hardware to run on. You need wheels, much like an AV-solution needs displays. And don't forget your data! More on that in the next chapters.

Team = Vendors

Red Bull Racing, Mercedes, Ferrari; they are the ones facilitating the show. They recruit the best team bosses and engineers, and try to attract the best drivers. Everything is geared towards keeping the team members happy and ultimately win the Constructors' World Championship. So every interaction needs to be a positive one.

The largest teams in F1 have up to 1300 employees, how many would you recognize? Think of everyone behind the scenes: the engineers, marketers, product leads. It works the same way at vendors.

These brands have tremendous power, they can elevate partners and partner brands. Every driver wants to drive for Red Bull or Mercedes, much like every partner wants to work for Dell and Cisco. It's like a badge of honor.



How to get your partners in winning shape

The driver

In sport, it's not about winning one match, one game, or one race. It's about winning championships. And that's no different in the channel. As team boss (head of channel) you want to get your driver (partner) in winning form. You want to take them from Formula 4 all the way to Formula 1. As a team (vendor) you need to help your partners to help their end-users. But do you know when your drivers are happy?

Human relationships

When Daniel Ricciardo left Red Bull for Renault in 2018, the entire F1 world was shocked. When Fernando Alonso left Renault in 2018, only to come back to what is now Alpine in 2021, minds were blown. It's crucial to keep your drivers happy if you want them to stay.

On the other side, there's Max Verstappen, who has been with Red Bull Racing since his first race in 2016 and signed a contract until 2028. Talk about loyalty.

So what makes some drivers stay and others go – and how does this relate to the channel?

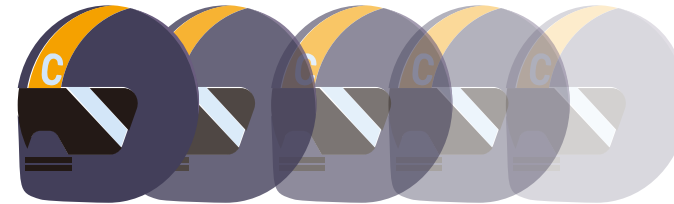
While the performance of the car is undoubtedly one of the most important factors (every driver wants to drive a winning car), when choosing to stick with a team, there's more to it.



Relationships with the team

Just like Formula 1 drivers, your partners are becoming more and more demanding in an increasingly competitive landscape. A simple phone call once in a while ain't gonna cut it. You need to create an outstanding partner experience, providing added value to your partners at every step of the partner journey.

Offering enough 1:1 time with your partner account manager for instance. Kick-off the new season (fiscal year) together by creating a joint success plan. Building trust and sincere attention helps build a strong and long-lasting relationship. Look at the trust between Mercedes engineer Pete Bonnington and Lewis Hamilton. Hamilton needs to be able to trust Bonnington at every turn. And in the same way, you need to make your partners feel they can always rely on you.



Relationships with teammates

It was clear for everyone to see that Daniel Ricciardo was never going to be allowed to beat his teammate Max Verstappen. Who knows, this may be the fate of every Red Bull racing number 2.

This is true in the channel as well. If you consistently focus on 1 partnership over all others, there will be walkouts. A great relationship between drivers creates a good atmosphere in the entire team. Try to facilitate cooperation between your partners as well, and enable them to co-create, work together on deals, and launch joint marketing campaigns.

Pull your partners up to the highest level

Just like Formula 1 drivers, your partners want to get to the highest level possible. Because the more popular your driver, the more fans/end-users they'll have. In addition to creating the best partner experience for them, this means you will grow together. How do they grow their business? By creating the most value for end-users. It's up to you to take them there.

End-users as advocates

Advocates are the holy grail of any vendor. You want your end-users coming back time and time again. Not only through renewal but being aware of you constantly. New product launches. Add-ons and upgrades to help them do their work better and faster. Continuous hardware and software support. You name it. You want end-users talking about you to their peers. Talking about you online. The ultimate way to do this is by enabling your channel partners, creating a scalable go-to-market approach. Make sure you are delivering the ultimate experience to them so that they can deliver the highest value to their customers.

Visibility at scale

Make sure you are visible to your end-users. You want to stay top of mind. We often see that partners' most popular vendors are the ones that keep coming up with campaigns, keep in touch, stay visible. Proactively! That means you shouldn't ever expect your partners to come to you. Meet them where they are. On their terms. Sponsorship is a powerful tool, but it's hard to measure success. We realize having your logo on an F1 car might be a step too far. So consider how you can be visible at scale together with your partners. For instance by providing shareable social posts, launching joint campaigns via LinkedIn and Facebook advertising, or creating content to push directly to your partners' websites.



Not all partners are created equal

Partner programs often work based on partner rankings. Registered, silver, gold, and platinum.

It's been around for decades and is becoming a little outdated, but we don't see it going anywhere for now.

First things first, you need to be realistic. Not every driver will make it to Verstappen or Hamilton status.

Just like not every partner will go platinum, even though they share that ambition.

Registered: To start with, there are your registered partners, comparable to the drivers for Haas, Alfa Romeo, and Williams. These can be partners that are new to the game, or partners that are looking to grow. Just like drivers, these registered partners need to prove themselves to their vendors. Often they are not equipped with the best cars or biggest budgets, but through training, they can amass experience to get to the next level.

Silver: Here are your silver partners, comparable to team drivers for Aston Martin, Alpha Tauri, and Alpine. These partners – much like their driver counterparts – can really go two ways. A team like Alpha Tauri is all about the incubation, fresh young drivers looking to get some mileage before moving on to the big boys. Then there are the drivers who have been around the block. They're comfortable where they are, but always looking to iterate and improve to get to the next level.

Gold: You'll find the gold-standard drivers at teams like Mercedes, Red Bull, McLaren, and Ferrari. They have established names with established drivers and their eyes on the prize. They have proven track records, win races, and could easily go all the way. In partnerships, these are the partners with multiple trained employees, access to MDF budget, their own account manager on the vendor side, discounts. Lots of perks but not quite at the level of...

Platinum: Your platinum partners are like world champions: Verstappen and Hamilton. It's a status reserved for very few. These partners bring in the largest part of your revenue. And if you want to keep them, you'll need to pamper them. Often these drivers have been with their teams for years and years. Because their teams have trained them.

Recap

Your channel team starts and wins through human relationships. The ones you have with your partners, and the ones partners have among themselves. You want the experience to feel like they're part of a winning team.

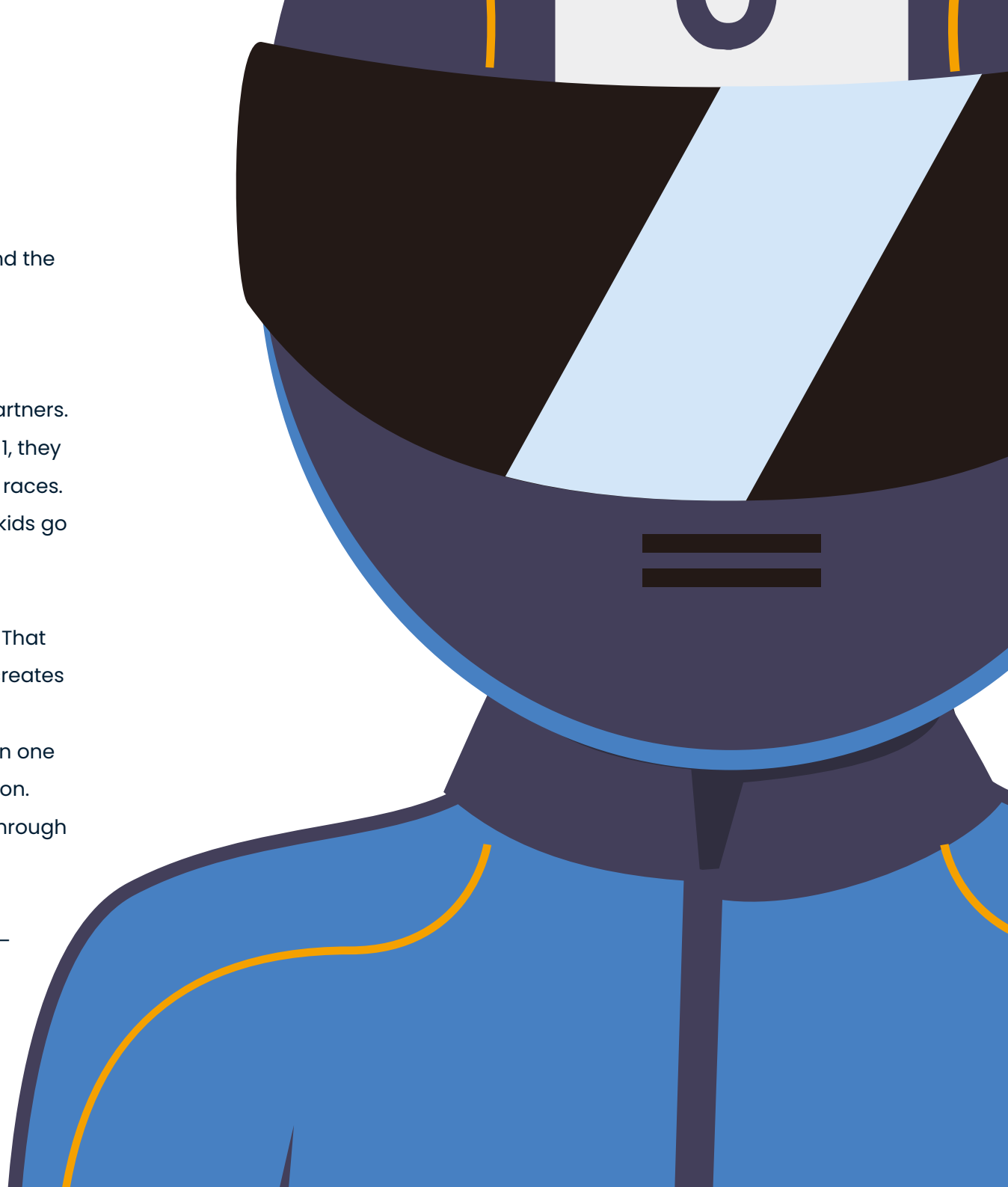
See your partner program as a training program for partners. Champion F1 drivers don't start their career in Formula 1, they start when they're kids. Driving go-karts, winning small races. That's when the teams start paying attention. Helping kids go through the ranks of F3 and F2, all the way up to F1.

And once they make it, they will need the ultimate car. That ultimate car is like the ultimate partner program and creates the ultimate partner experience.

But don't forget, every team is different. And even within one team, each driver has their own unique car configuration. Your program should be designed to lift your partner through the ranks, through dedication and personalization.

More about building that ultimate experience – or car – in the next chapter.

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Building the ultimate partner experience

The car

There are many ways to keep Formula 1 drivers happy, but the most important one has to be the car. F1 fans are going crazy over the 2022 car lineup. It's more aerodynamic, more sustainable, and should ensure a smoother driving experience for the driver. If we compare the F1 car to the partner experience, how do you ensure the best ride for your partners?

In the previous chapter we looked at how to get your partners in winning shape through human interaction, pulling them up to the top, and recognizing not all partners are created equal.

In this chapter, we will go deeper into treating your partner program as a training program, how to get your message to the market, and how to supercharge that message through co-creation.

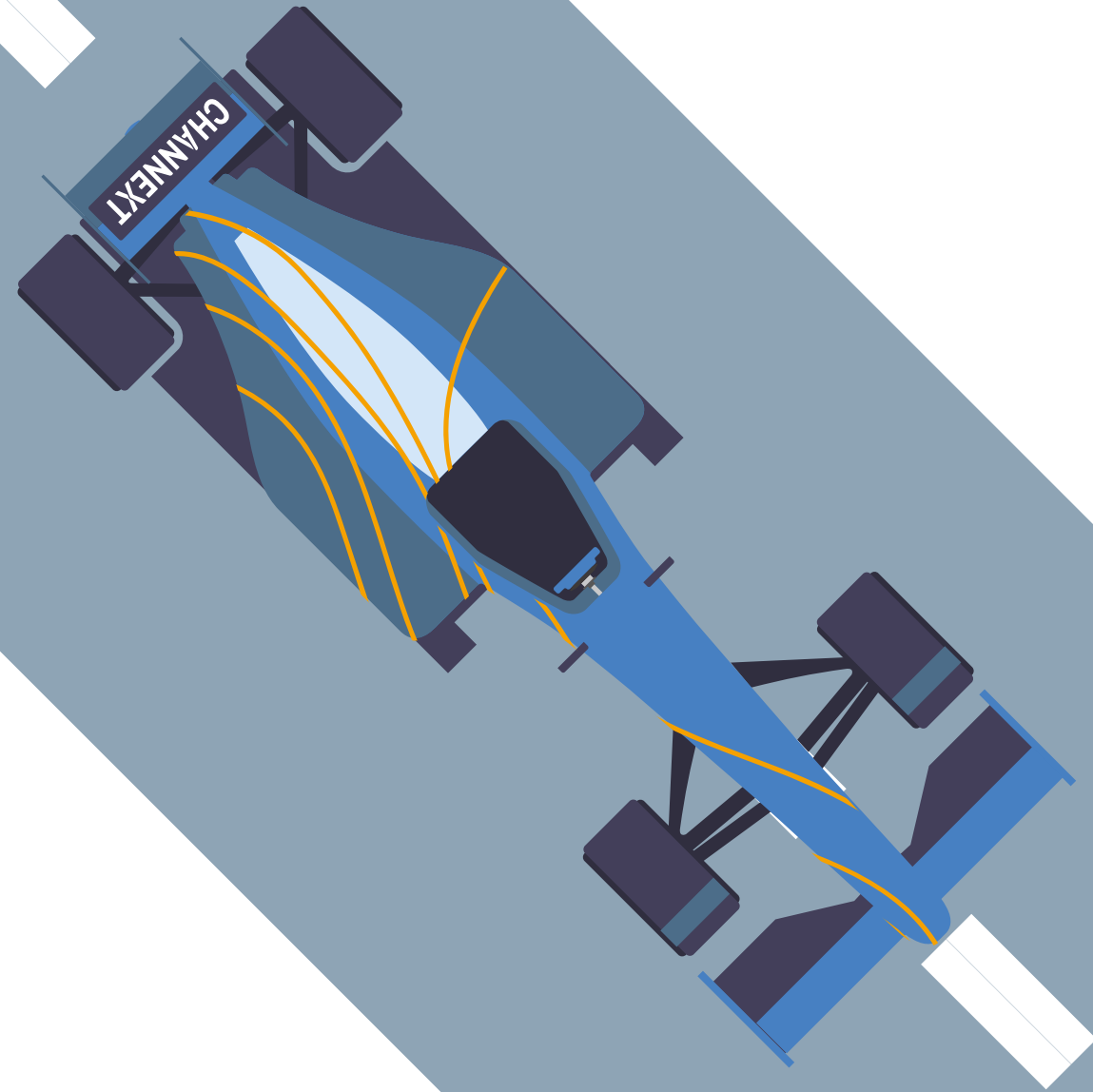


Training & enablement

Racing drivers don't wake up one day and decide to drive an F1 car. In fact, there are many hilarious moments of non-professional drivers trying – and failing. It takes continuous training to get this good. When drivers aren't in a car, they're in a simulator. Before racing, there are the track walks and test days – even for those who know the circuit by heart. It's how the team discovers how their car will react to the driver, the track, the weather. It's all part of their training.

Building confidence

In the channel, it's no different. Before letting your partners out into the wild to promote, sell, and support your products and services, they need the confidence to do so. You want your partners to be able to talk to end-users while fully understanding your portfolio. If they lack confidence, they won't talk about you. And that would be a missed opportunity.



Train skills, not just knowledge

Do you think Charles Leclerc knows how to put his Ferrari together? Ever heard him talk about the inner workings of its motor? What he does know, is how to make it purr – and that's what matters.

The same goes for your partners.

When's the last time you read a manual cover to cover? Chances are, never. Yet so many vendors expect their partners to do so. Take a good look at your product/service, is it interesting in itself? Or is it what you can do with it that makes it interesting? It's about how it can add value to your end-user, and ultimately help grow their business.

Train your partners on how to talk about your products by teaching them:

- > what problems your products/services can solve for end-users
- > how to identify why end-users need these products now
- > how to identify the end-user DMUs and who to initiate contact with
- > what positive effects your products/services will have on their business
- > how they can add their own value through consulting and added services



Naturally, these sales skills require some knowledge of your product, but they don't rely on your product as heavily as in traditional sales. Instead, your partners will focus on talking to the right people about benefits and added value and will yield maximum results.

Gamification

When F1 drivers aren't in a car, they're either training their body and reaction speed or they're in a simulator. It's work – hard work – but it's fun.

Gamification is a great way to make training more fun for your partners. Test their knowledge through quizzes, create virtual assistants, build your onboarding like a quest that they can complete, and most importantly, reward them for completing tasks.

And don't forget: training is not a one-time thing. If you want to keep your partners eager to work with and talk about your product, they will need continuous training. Make sure it's broken down into smaller chunks to make it easy to digest. And keep it fun!

Get the message to the market

Now that we've explored what you need to do before getting your message to the market, now let's see how to help your partners get that message across. Because at the end of the day, you want to turn end-users into fans of your brand and your partner's brand.

Vendor push to end-user pull

Gone are the days when partners simply functioned as resellers selling your stock. Today's partners are focused on solving the problems of their end-users. If they can offer that solution through your products/solutions or a combination of those products/solutions with other brands they carry, all the better.

It also means that you are no longer pushing your solutions on partners, but instead, your end-users are pulling them through your partners.

Partners lack time and resources to do marketing, so you need to help them. We see it time and again: the more you help, the higher the engagement.

Content is the fuel for your machine

F1 regulations state that fuel needs to be more sustainable for 2022, and we couldn't agree more! An optimum partner experience needs to be fueled by content. It needs to be sustainable in order to fully support your program and technology. The quality of your fuel is what will make your program work.

High-quality content comes in many forms. Our vendors are supported in the use of different forms of content, such as:

- > Co-branded landing pages: images and information from vendors, styled to fit partner websites. Mostly culminating in a lead gen form with dual-brand opt-in.
- > Facebook and LinkedIn social posts: image and text posts that link back to the co-branded landing page. With an option to edit.
- > Facebook and LinkedIn ads: image and text ads that link back to the co-branded landing page. Often used for managed – gold & platinum – partners.

Supercharge your message through co-creation

In Formula 1, no two cars are the same. And cars are never the same for two years in a row. It's no different in the channel. To keep your channel partnerships successful, you should be constantly iterating both your partner program and your channel marketing program. This way you'll be able to keep up with the demands of your partners and their end-users.

“Partners can add so much more than just a price tag.”

Co-creation

Where traditionally, channel partners were simply resellers, now they can add so much more than a price tag. Here are three ways to encourage your partners to get more out of a sale.



Value-added services: Most products and services require more than simply boxing and shipping. Once a sale has taken place, there is an entire customer journey ahead. From installation to training and consulting, partners are creating their own services on top of their vendor's products/services.

Joint-value proposition: When it comes to sales and marketing, your partners should never feel like they're doing it alone. Creating joint-marketing plans will benefit both parties. Set up a success plan together. Have great use cases ready for multiple personas. Create playbooks that explain how to implement and how to know they will get value.

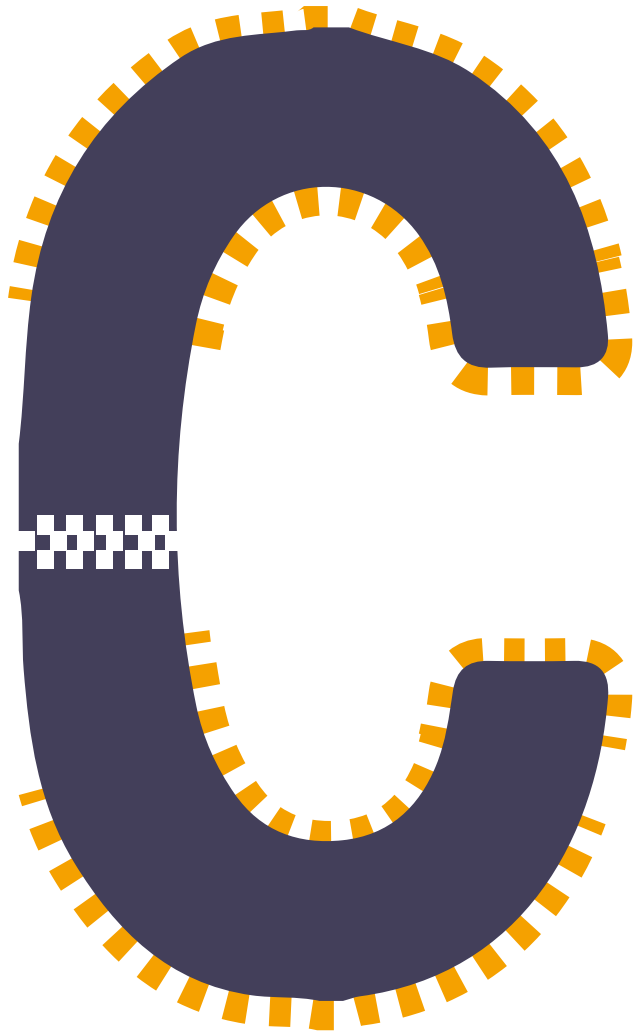
Co-selling: Once your partners have been properly trained and feel confident to sell and integrate your products, they will be more engaged with your brand. Once you show them that there is a demand, engagement goes up again. This is the perfect time to start co-selling. How do you approach your first few customers? Our customer, Fujitsu, understands that the first few deals for new partners are the most important. So they approach end-users together. Searching their customer base to identify end-users that will be a good fit for partners. They go through the first sale together, then hand over the end-user to their partner. It's then up to the partners to grow that account. Show, don't tell. Showing how to grow your business together is the ultimate form of partner engagement. Generating revenue together is the best way to get your partnership going.



Next up

Now you have the key pillars of your partner program. Once you have made a partner experience that inspires confidence, is fueled by great content, and tailored to your partner's needs, it's time for the test drive. Are you on the right track? In the next chapter, we'll be exploring how to broaden your partner program and adjust per vertical and per region. Because every partner needs a tailored approach.





Expanding into new regions,
verticals, product categories

The track

In the previous three chapters, we discussed the best structure for the team, how to keep your partners happy, and how to create the best partner experience. This essentially gives you the key pillars of your partner program. Once you give these pillars context and structure, you'll be on the right track.

Then it's time to look beyond your own borders. Because once you have a solid partner program in place, you can start finding partners to help you adjust per vertical and per region. And don't forget: every partner needs a tailored approach. So, how do you tailor your partner marketing program per region, vertical, and product category? Keep reading to find out.

Exploring new regions

When it comes to race track locations, the difference couldn't be bigger. From rainy Spa to sweltering Bahrain. The exclusivity of Monaco, compared to how down-to-earth Australia's Albert Park is. And from the traditions of Silverstone to the ultra-modern track that is the Miami International Autodrome. And what to say of local prices, where you can pop in for three days of F1 fun for just \$70 in China, that same ticket will set you back \$270 in Abu Dhabi.

It's something to keep in mind when considering expansion into new territory because you'll have to compete with local languages, customs, traditions, pricing structures, and more. Here are some to keep in mind.

Geographical

Expanding into new territories means adapting to different geographical constraints. In the Netherlands, driving for an hour seems like an eternity, while in London any trip will take you at least that long. In the USA, everything is farther apart and remote working has become the norm for many companies, especially in IT.

The language barrier

While many people around the world will understand some form of English, it doesn't mean they want to be addressed solely in English. In the previous post, we highlighted the importance of fuelling your partner marketing program with high-quality content. Providing content in local languages is a must!

No need to overthink this part. Make sure you create strong, original copy that can easily be translated into multiple languages – keep it short and simple and stay away from colloquialisms. This way local teams won't have to create their own versions, but simply translate and check.



Local rules and regulations

Each country has its own set of rules and regulations to navigate, and you'll need to be compliant with all your partners. For instance, Europe has the GDPR which calls for Cookie warnings. The US has the CCPA. Local partners, or better yet, local agencies and distributors, can help you make sense of local rules and regulations.

Cultural differences

Traditionally, Grand Prix winners spray their counterparts with champagne to celebrate. But when LeClerc took first place at the Bahrain Grand Prix, something seemed to taste a little different. Being a 'dry' country the champagne had been swapped for 7-Up.

Different regions come with their own cultural differences. Make sure to do your homework before accidentally saying "du" to a German counterpart, or forgetting to bow to your Japanese one – even during a Zoom call.



Tweak it to their timezone

Night racing, it's exhilarating, feels even faster than usual, and guarantees some spectacular images for fans. In countries like Singapore and Dubai, you couldn't imagine drivers and their teams having to work outside during the day, so the night races make total sense. It's the preference of both driver and organizer.

When planning your go-to-market strategy make sure to ask your partners when they feel it is the best time to post. Keep different time zones in mind and make sure to hit 'post' when it suits them. Yes, that may mean that your launch could go live in Australia hours before it does in Amsterdam, and that makes sense.

Broadening your horizon

With 22 (!) GPs in the Formula 1 season there are some big differences between tracks. Circuit races are where you can beat opponents on the straights, like Mercedes in Bahrain – usually. When it comes to city races such as the windy streets of Monaco with hardly any room for error, you want a car that's easy to maneuver such as Red Bull. So you see, each track is different and will have a favorite driver and car.

“Don't change your entire program; make small adjustments for each partner.”

The same applies when it comes to expanding and exploring new verticals, you will need to reevaluate your partner strategy. For instance, what kind of partners are you looking for? Resellers, Influencers, Service partners? What goals do you have with these partners, and how will you enable them to get the most out of your program?

Verticals: You want to get into a new vertical to broaden your reach, and tap into uncharted opportunities. You'll need to find partners that are already active in that market. Ones that know the lingo and can make the right introductions.

Take the way different verticals describe their end-user for instance: in healthcare it's patients, in SaaS it's users, in IT it's customers. If you want to give your partners the best chance to resonate with their end-users, you will need to offer personalized content.

But that's not where it stops when it comes to enabling your partners.

Product categories: Take a vendor such as Cisco. It started in routers, expanded into networking, and now have one of the most popular video conferencing software in Webex. Yes, these three sectors live within the greater IT landscape, but there is a huge difference between these different product categories, especially when it comes to target audience. Again, you don't need to change your entire program, just like an F1 team doesn't need to design an entirely different car for each driver. It's about the small adjustments you make for each driver or in this case, partner.

Keep iterating

Remember, each race track is different. And so you need to adjust your car slightly. Both to the track and to the individual drivers. It's the same with partner programs. So keep iterating. What do my partners need? You're not changing your entire program but tweaking it to your partners' specific needs. How do you do this? You'll need to get data and feedback from your partners. We'll discuss that in the next one.

How to increase predictability in the channel

The data

Data, it's one of the many reasons we love Formula 1. The use of data makes the car more predictable. When to come in for a pit stop. When to change from wet to dry weather tires. When to break in each corner. These micro-adjustments can make the difference between winning and losing. So how can we apply the way F1 uses data to make the channel more predictable?

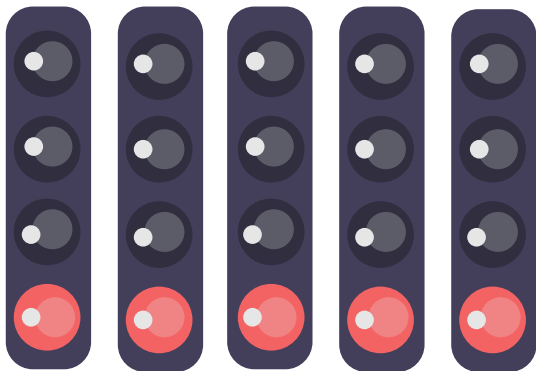
In the channel, we're in dire need of more data about our partners. What do we know? Revenue, whether a partner is certified and what status they have, location, size at a push. It's not much to go on. What if we looked outside our own field, towards a specialism that knows everything about its partnerships: Customer Success.



Healthy partners = happy partners

F1 drivers are constantly monitored while in the car. Their heartbeat and breathing are good indicators of their stress levels and fatigue. Customer success teams use similar metrics or health scores to determine the status of their customers. Healthy, or at risk.

Depending on the score, the teams can see whether a customer is likely to grow, renew, remain, or churn. The same can be done by partner success teams. Below, for example, are some indicators your partners are at risk of churning and what you can do to keep them locked and loaded.



Churn indicator

One big indicator that a partner is about to churn is when they are rejecting your campaigns or content. So what do you do? The most important thing is to start the conversation. Ask them, is it the content itself? The quality of the campaign? The language? The offer? Is the product misaligned with their vertical? Or is something else up? Make sure to check whether they are rejecting all vendor campaigns, or just yours. Maybe they are looking for expansion opportunities. Perhaps they want to increase their ranking or their status. Dialogue is crucial because the more engaged your partners are, the healthier their score, and the more you can help each other in the long run.

Healthy partners = active partners

At Channext we measure how healthy your partners are through various metrics. One of those is the activity score, complete with leaderboard rankings. The activity score measures the interactions a partner has with their vendor, such as how many campaigns are published or rejected, and how often a partner gives feedback about campaigns or adds their own personal touch to outgoing social posts. We call these impact metrics. On the left, you'll see typical input (or vanity) metrics. Those commonly used by vendors to measure the success of a partner program.

On the right are metrics that will actually give you feedback and form a great base to start the conversation with your partners.

Forget vanity metrics

Remember when Nikita Mazepin demanded Haas get him a new chassis midway through the season? And did it work out for him? Although he reported being slightly faster after the switch, the driver ultimately ended 2 places behind his teammate Mick Schumacher in the 2021 season. Some say it was a vanity move. It's like basing your data on portal logins; it says so little about how a partner sees you. And it's definitely no foundation to change your partner program.

Input metrics

- > Portal Logins
- > Content Downloads
- > Created co-branded collateral
- > Preferred verticals of partner
- > MDF requests / spent
- > Email opens (to-partner comms)
- > Certified Partner employees

Impact metrics

- > Connection score
- > Partner campaign participation
- > # of end-users reached + end-user engagement
- > Partner network demographics
- > Real-time campaign results
- > Partner interactions
- > Partner NPS

Predictability

This is where a predictable partner overview comes in. Who is going to give the most value to their end-users in the long run and drive predictable revenue growth for you? How do you identify strong partnerships?

Like Jay McBain of Forrester describes in his blogpost the gold, silver, bronze partnership story is outdated. We will see many companies move away from this model, replaced by a new partnership scoring model.

Recognizing strong partners

How do you recognize strong partnerships? The first point is, naturally, sales. Higher volumes mean better-performing partners. But there is more to consider. Can you count on your partners to be influencers? Do they talk about you to peers and end-users? Are they investing their time in your brand, i.e., how many trained employees do they have? While a lot of this is happening in the dark funnel, there are ways to measure strong partnerships.

Scoring strong partnerships

You need scores to measure. In addition to measuring how active your partners are. You want to measure how connected they are to your brand.

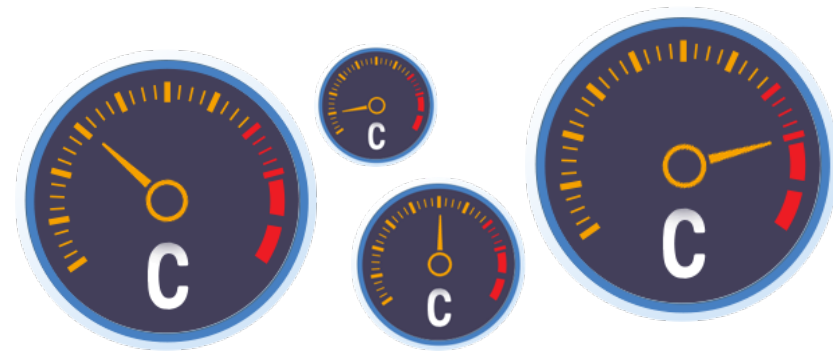
- > Have they connected their social media accounts
 - both business-owned and private?
- > Do they have a landing page dedicated to your brand and product portfolio?
- > Are they showing your logo or partnership status on their homepage?
- > Do they have multiple brand ambassadors within their company?

Each of these elements deserves a specific score. And based on these scores it's easy to rank partnerships, showing which ones are healthy, and which ones need some extra effort from both sides. It's a great starting point for the conversations you want your partner account managers to be having with your partners.

Feedback between partner and the team

Without constant communication between the team principal, lead engineer, and driver, races would look nothing like they do today. The team is constantly in communication with each other. The driver provides feedback about how the track and car feel, the lead engineer is constantly monitoring the car's performance, and the principal sees what other drivers are doing and makes decisions based on rank – even if they are sometimes ignored by the drivers.

You need to do the same between your head of channel, partner account managers, and partners. Constant feedback means constant iteration of your partner program and marketing campaigns. And strengthening of your entire team.



NPS feedback

NPS feedback is a great way to measure how partners feel about you and your campaigns. This monthly survey is easy to enter and easy to read. It's a great basis from which to find holes in your campaigns and partner program.

Luck and gut feeling vs data

We've seen in this article that you need as much data as possible to win. Revenue attribution is necessary to help you make choices. But you can't predict everything. Drivers spend years and years on the tracks, getting to know every twist and turn, knowing when it's about to rain, or sensing when one of their rivals is about to crash.

Would Verstappen have won the 2021 world title without the Latifi crash? We'll never know. What we do know is that having as much data as possible and being agile will help you win. Thanks to the data they had, Red Bull immediately went for a pitstop upon Latifi's crash, giving Verstappen room to shoot in front of Hamilton and nab the title.

“Data combined with feedback builds stronger partnerships.”



Combining data and feedback

The same goes for the channel. Data will help you predict whether your partners are healthy or at risk, and whether they are looking to grow or could possibly churn. Even stronger, data combined with feedback will help you start the conversation with your partners, and build even stronger partnerships.

In short, you need data to react quickly. But there's no such thing as 100% predictability.



Steering the channel

5 steps to implement right now:



Winning in the channel

In Formula 1 there are two championships. One for the best driver. One for the best team. Of course, the idea is to win both. But which one do you think is more important? The constructors championship is the one to focus on. Why? Bottom line, because it offers the biggest prize. But also because it's about the entire team, the team boss, lead engineers, all the technicians, the pit crew, and of course both drivers.

How do you do it? By following these 5 steps for a start!

Step 1

Create a winning team to support your partners

When drivers move from team to team and subsequently down the leaderboard it can be heartbreaking – Daniel Ricciardo we're looking at you. The same goes for partners. If they keep switching teams, they will continuously need to start from the bottom. So you'll need to create a winning team that your partners will love and support.

- > **Put the Partner Experience first:** supply your partners with the best and latest infrastructure to do their job. Offer support across all teams.
- > **Orchestrate the channel:** combine the best partners with the best partner experience to offer your end-users the best service
- > **Design the ultimate channel team:** The rest of the team should focus on facilitating partner success. From the head of channel to the partner account manager, the vendor and even the alliance partners.



Step 2

Get your team in winning shape

Having a great team and a great driver isn't a guarantee for success, just ask Lewis Hamilton. Looks like he could learn a thing or two from his new teammate, just like partners can learn from each other. See your partner program as a training program for your partners. A way to lift them through the ranks, creating end-user ambassadors along the way.

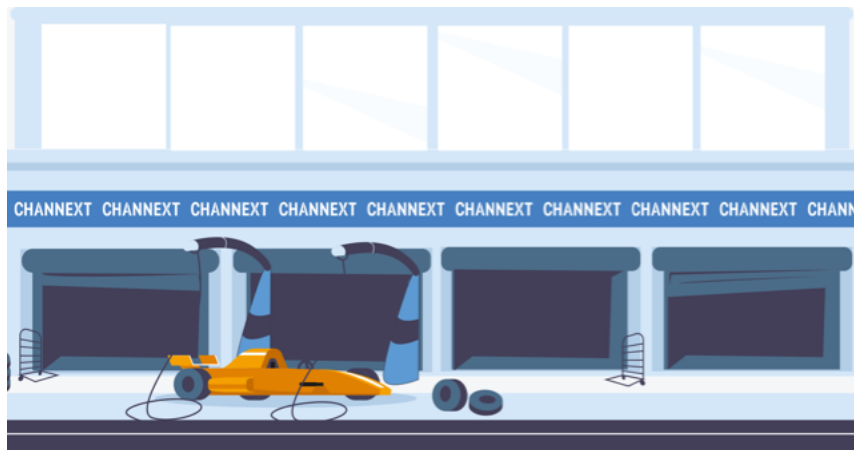
- > **Human relationships:** make sure you're offering enough 1:1 time with partner account managers, and facilitate collaborations between partners
- > **Pull your partners up:** enable your partners to offer end-users the best experience, make sure you're visible at scale
- > **Know your partners' limits:** while every partner wants platinum status, make sure you give them what they need at each level from registered upwards



Step 3

Building the ultimate Partner Experience

Winners tend to drive the fastest cars. But it takes experience to handle that much horsepower. Partners deserve the best partner experience but they need the know-how in order to be confident. Fuelling partners with the right content for their end-users and work together on joint-value propositions and co-selling, facilitating successful, long-lasting partnerships through mutual collaboration.



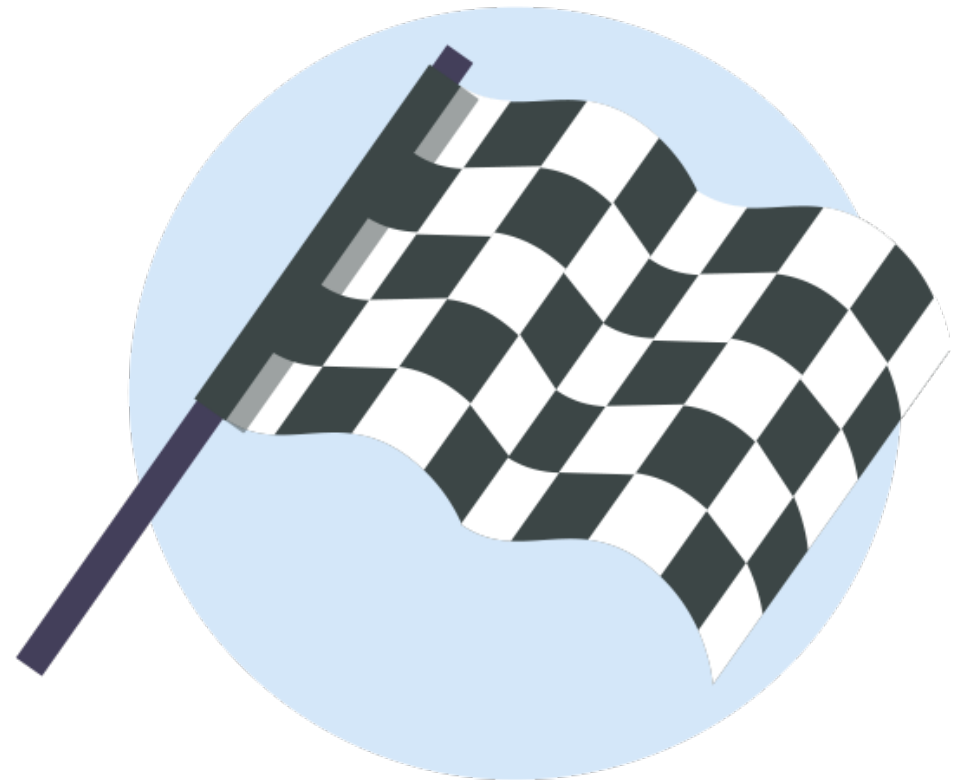
- > **Training and enablement:** in order to sell, partners need to know what they're selling, it requires training on a skill level. Oh, and make it fun!
- > **Get the message to market:** higher engagement of end-users can only happen through visibility, that means putting out consistent, high-quality content
- > **Co-creation:** your partners own services and products can add value to your own proposition so work together towards success plans
- > **Co-selling:** new partners? Approach your first few end-users together to show how it works, generate revenue together to build strong partnerships

Step 4

Translate the Best Partner Experience into new territories

From the mean streets of Monaco to the balmy night races of Bahrain, each Formula 1 track has its quirks. The same goes for vendors looking to expand into new territories, verticals and product categories. Make sure to know the lay of the land before you enter. Just like an F1 team tweaks its approach to each track, it's important for channel teams to keep iterating.

- > **Exploring new regions:** when moving into new territories, keep in mind the local language(s), rules & regulations, cultural differences, and timezone(s)
- > **Getting into new verticals:** different verticals have different end-user bases that will require different communication
- > **Keep iterating:** tweak your program to your partners needs, especially when considering expansion into new territories or verticals

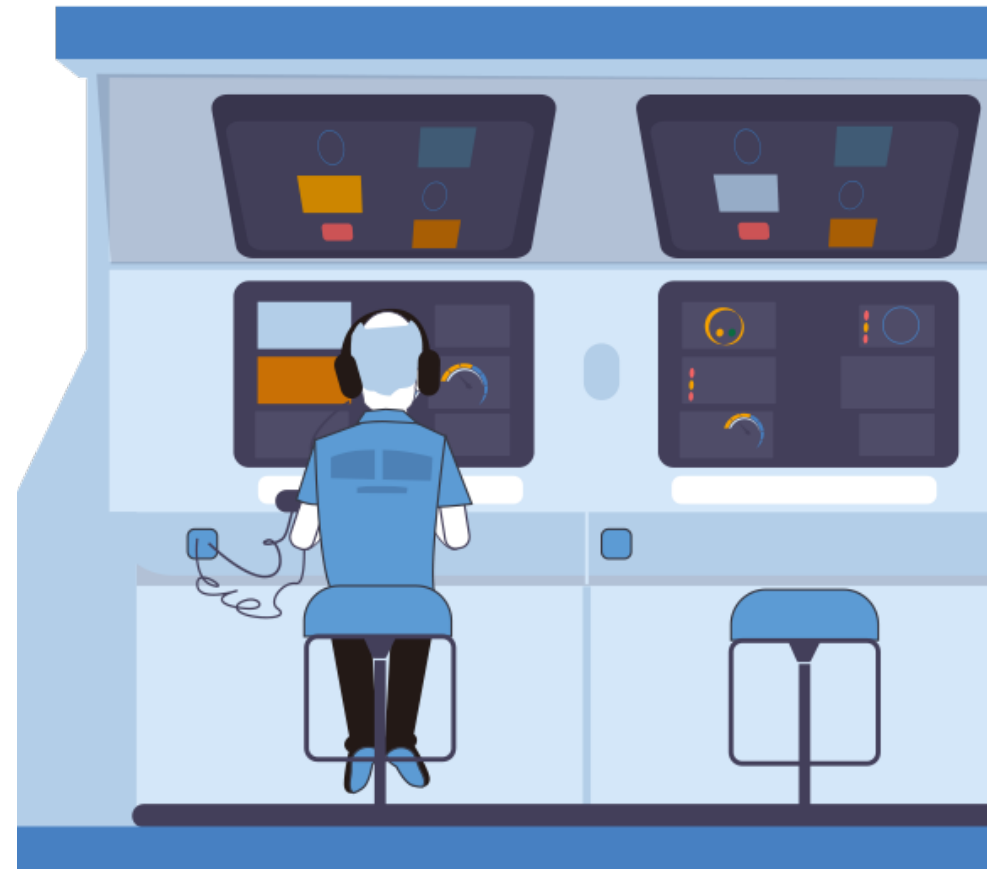


Step 5

Use data to make your channel more predictable

Here at Channext we love our data, especially when it comes to Formula 1. From predicting the second it's going to rain to how long tires will last. But even in F1, you can't rely on data 100%. You need to have the experience, the feeling, and a little bit of luck to win the race. So how do you predict how your partners will act using data vs. gut feeling?

- > **Healthy partners = happy partners:** do you know how to recognise your partners are about to churn, time to consult the impact metrics
- > **Predictability:** strong partners will help to grow your business, make sure you're scoring them accordingly and build a constant feedback loop
- > **Gut feeling vs. data:** in business, people can be unpredictable, so you'll need to combine your valuable data with real human connections



It's time to steer your channel towards victory!

Over the past chapters, we've looked at different ways to create the ultimate, predictable partner experience. From creating a winning team, to expanding into new regions, to implementing data. Now you're ready to bring your team and your channel to the next level. Implement these steps and you will be winning world championships!

Ready to get started?

Want to see how Channext can help you regain control over your unmanaged partners, engage them in your marketing activities and help predict your ROI? Check out [our demo video here!](#)

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