

MARKETING TO YOUR CHANNEL

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Value added resellers (VARs) and system integrators are faced with increased industry and economic challenges, such as declining margins, increasing end-user expectations, and operational inefficiencies, making it more difficult to sustain a successful business. Implementing the three marketing tactics listed below will help you effectively communicate and market to the channel, thereby increasing opportunities for growth in marketshare and sales.

Primary Marketing Tactics

Email

Email marketing is a key component of any channel marketing strategy – it's easy, affordable, direct, actionable and highly effective. Use a monthly e-newsletter to systematically inform your VARs of new products and services and accomplish the following:

- **Provide one-to-one email marketing:** Segment your email list and customize your marketing message to provide timely and relevant emails.
- **Drive traffic to your portal:** Write article summaries with links to full articles and other resources on the portal.
- **Reinforce your brand:** Customized HTML emails are an opportunity to reinforce your brand and messaging.

Portals

A portal is essentially a website (an intranet or extranet) that serves as a gateway to company information. In this case, a portal provides the channel sales and marketing information necessary to conduct business – from technical support to updates on products/promotions to sales and marketing documents. A portal platform benefits organizations by providing increased efficiency, increased productivity, and direct cost savings, all leading to increased sales and end-user satisfaction.

A survey by Harris Interactive ResearchSM of 500 employees across multiple industries found that employees identified extensive benefits from using their corporate portal¹:

- **Time savings:** 36% of employees reported greatly improved productivity. By using their portal, employees reported saving 2.8 hours per week or 7% of their time.
- **Productivity:** Employees who are extremely satisfied with their intranet or corporate portal use it more often and report a significantly higher level of benefits. Employees who use the portal more than 8 hours a week experience nine times the productivity gains of those who use the portal 2 hours or less per week.
- **Relevance:** Employees estimate their productivity would double (an additional 3 hours of their time) if their portal were improved with more relevant content, enhanced features and better design so they could easily access information and tools necessary to perform their jobs.

Webinars

Webinars are a one-to-many on-demand collaboration tool that combines the scale and flexibility of online marketing with the personal touch and lead-generation capabilities of roadshows. Webinars feature dynamic multimedia content that organizations use to train and educate the channel on new products or pricing and promotion opportunities. Here are the primary benefits of using webinars:

- **Educate the channel:** Webinars are an interactive way to provide high-value content to VARs. Webinars can also be recorded and archived for future retrieval.

- **Reduce marketing costs:** Webinars virtually eliminate travel and event costs, thereby reducing overall marketing costs. In addition, presenters and attendees only need to step away from their busy schedule for an hour or two to attend a webinar rather than step away for a few days to attend an in-person meeting.

Related Companies and Software

Email

ExactTarget – www.exacttarget.com

ExactTarget's email solution focuses on personalization, customization, and deliverability. Their software integrates seamlessly with various CRM packages.

Constant Contact – www.constantcontact.com

A do-it-yourself email marketing management tool that allows businesses to create email campaigns that will increase their customer base.

Portals/CRM Solutions

Salesforce.com – www.salesforce.com

Salesforce.com provides on-demand customer relationship management solutions. It offers services to manage and share information regarding sales, customer service and support, and marketing operations worldwide.

CNET ChannelOnline – www.channelonline.com

ChannelOnline™ helps VARs by delivering a turn-key solution that automates the complete sales cycle: improving customer service, sales productivity, and sourcing profitability. ChannelOnline is a comprehensive work environment that provides all of the tools and information sales professionals and buyers need at each step of the sales process.

Plumtree – www.plumtree.com

The software provides an open, scalable platform that allows organizations to deploy a web portal for information and applications. The portal platform organizes links to different types of corporate documents in a web directory and assembles applications and internet services from different systems in its portal platform.

Webinars

Netbriefings – www.netbriefings.com

Netbriefings is the leading provider of large, broadcast-style webcast services specifically suited for secure company meetings, outbound marketing events and online training.

WebEx – www.webex.com

WebEx creates solutions for organizations worldwide to meet their goals for marketing, sales, training, and support.

Bulldog Solutions – www.bulldogsolutions.com

Bulldog Solutions specializes in generating leads and building customer relationships. They provide the strategy, tools and implementation for successful webinars allowing companies to meet their sales and marketing objectives.

¹ Factor, A. (2002). Developing a sales & marketing portal. <http://www.marketingpower.com/content15989.php>