

All About Partner Marketing

Strong Brands Provide The Wind Behind Your Partners' Sales

(This is a guest post by [Denise Lee Yohn](#), a brand-building expert, writer, and speaker, who spoke at our recent Success Summit.)

Many VARs and channel partners are small businesses which face significant brand-building challenges. Their primary objectives are to get on people's radar screens and establish trust with new customers who have probably never heard of them before. Vendors, who often enjoy all the benefit of a strong, established brand, have the opportunity to help these small businesses build their brands.



One way is to **integrate your brands**. Don't dominate and subjugate the VAR's brand by insisting your brand be the lead brand. Think horizontal, not hierarchical in terms of visual branding elements like the treatment of logos or verbal branding messages. By the very fact that yours is an established, bigger brand, your branding will register more saliently, so don't worry so much about the size of your logo.

And integrate your value propositions. With the developments in cloud computing and mobile applications, the way customers think about and want to buy services and software is changing. The line between the two is becoming blurred – so rather than seeking to clearly delineate what each party contributes, look for ways to seamlessly integrate what you do and communicate an integrated value proposition. Doing so may actually increase value perceptions for both companies.

Also **engage your VARs as customers**. Of course, they're your partners in selling to and supporting end users, but vendors who have the most successful relationships with their VARs think about them also as customers and serve them as customers. If you practice the disciplines of VAR customer intimacy, you will be able to better meet your VARs' brand-building needs.

For example, rigorously collect, integrate, and analyze customer insights. Seek to understand them, what makes them tick, what keeps them up at night, how they decide among vendors, what they need to serve their customers better. Also consider fostering community among your VARs. Instead of one-way, vertical communication from you to them, develop horizontal dialogue among your VARs. Provide forums through which they can share with and learn from each other. You'll benefit from being seen as the instigator and facilitator of all the benefits they derive from such

interactions.

Finally, **teach your VARs** how to market and sell your products. Don't assume they know how. They might not have the knowledge, experience, bandwidth, or finances to do marketing right. Proactively provide marketing education and sales training, and give them thought-leadership that they can repurpose as their own. Marketing certifications, sales playbooks, and customer content will help them develop stronger brands – and of course, your sales will increase as they develop greater competence in these areas.

You can use your power as a large established brand to require your VARs to do business with you on your terms, or you can use your power to produce a rising tide that lifts all boats.

([Denise Lee Yohn](#) has been inspiring and teaching companies how to operationalize their brands to grow their businesses for 25 years. World-class brands including Sony, Frito-Lay, Burger King, and Nautica have called on Denise. Read more by Denise on her [blog](#) which was named among the Top 25 Blogs Marketing Executives Actually Read.)