



Collaborative Marketing is
the New Black

story by **BARBARA PFEIFFER** | illustration by **DAVE SWANG**

With today's buyer taking control of the buying process, marketers find themselves going deeper into the sales funnel, creating more content, and using more engagement tactics as they take their prospect from awareness through evaluation and trial. At the same time, while the demands on their time are increasing, 90 percent of VARs and ISVs have less than four people on their marketing team (and that number has stayed pretty consistent).*

WITH ALL THIS PRESSURE, WHAT'S A MARKETER TO DO?

The answer might be in collaborative marketing.

In an often-referenced Forbes blog post, David K. Williams defined collaborative marketing as "...the process of sharing resources to increase leads, brand, and influence." That's a beacon for today's overwhelmed, under-resourced marketer, so it's no surprise that we're seeing more collaborative marketing (CM) every day.

We wouldn't call collaborative marketing the "new black" if it was just a great way to stretch your resources (although in our opinion, that does take it to a pretty cool level). What really makes CM the next "new thing" is that beyond potential resources, it can also bring you:

- » **New prospects.** In certain collaborations, CM can open up a whole new set of interested prospects for your services.
- » **More credibility.** When you bring expertise from multiple organizations together, you can create stronger, more educational, and more valuable content.
- » **Budget savings!** Outsourcing content development and design? Share the costs with three complementary companies, and that one e-book you budgeted for becomes three. Doing the work in-house? Spend some time with fellow Partner(s) comparing your marketing expertise so each Partner contributes what they do best.

WITH WHOM DO YOU COLLABORATE?

The most natural collaborations are, of course, between ISVs and their VAR channel. That's where you should start. To be a true collaborative marketer, though, you'll want to look at all sources for possible collaborations, including:

- » **Infrastructure Partners.** Check out many of the Microsoft Ready-to-Go and other packaged Partner campaigns, and you'll find most are integrated campaigns across multiple products. This is particularly true for Microsoft Dynamics CRM. The best campaigns are those that offer the prospect an integrated, one-stop solution, and you'll be seeing continued emphasis on this in future Microsoft materials and programs. Take advantage of this trend: Bring an infrastructure Partner into your marketing to double the impact of those campaigns.
- » **Professional service providers.** Who do you work with that might add value to your marketing or have a complementary customer base? Accounting firms? Law firms? Financial services firms? Look at all your service providers and consider whether there is an opportunity to introduce each other's services or share expertise for content development.
- » **Customers.** Yes, customers! They are a big piece of collaborative marketing – although in a slightly different way. Customers are collaborators when they advocate for your company and when you put them at the center of your campaigns (telling their story and SHOWING your expertise instead of just talking about it).
- » **Industry leaders, associations, and groups.** No – it's not a cheat. Yes – you are paying for your membership, but that doesn't make it any less collaborative. In this partnership, you're bringing the dollars, and they're bringing the reach and credibility.

Once you have your co-marketing plan outlined, you need to consider where you want to share marketing efforts. Common "sharing" scenarios we see in the Microsoft marketing channel include:

- » Creating joint email campaigns, e-books, and infographics
- » Sharing space at events and tradeshow
- » Participating in group blogs

All of these are great, but collaborations can really take you so much further. With a little creativity, you can deliver marketing campaigns, content, and programs that you could never do on your own.

SIX CLEVER COLLABORATIONS

- » **Create an expert e-book.** "Five Tips to Increasing Profitability for Distributors" would be a lot easier to write if five organizations each took one tip to write about. Take it an additional step: Have each participant create a short video of his/her tip, and then share those tips on your YouTube and other social channels.

Don't have the talent in-house? Pool your dollars to outsource the e-book or videos.

- » **Invite experts in your target industries to answer one common question.** Then compile the responses into an e-book, infographic, or white paper. To get them engaged, make sure you have a strong promotion plan that you can share with them upfront to show the reach your piece will have. It's free marketing for them in return for minimal effort. An added benefit: Content from third-party experts is more trusted than content you create yourself, so these industry thought leaders will add to your credibility.
- » **Create a virtual event.** A webinar is, well, a webinar. It's a good tactic, but it's kind of boring. Work with fellow Partners to take your webinars and package them into a virtual event. Use your shared budget to hire a great keynote speaker and build a virtual event site with a schedule of all your webinars, including a single registration, additional resources, and even a virtual expo for your event attendees. Consider working with an industry association for promotion of this event in exchange for "speaking time" on the agenda or a place in your expo.
- » **Create a customer-centric campaign.** Tell the story of a customer and the results you helped them achieve. "Tease" out the story over a series of touches including emails, articles, blogs, and social posts with the finale being a live, interactive webinar. For extra credit, weave the customer's business into the campaign. This doesn't work with every industry, but in cases where your customer offers a product, you can weave product

images into the campaign in creative ways and even provide actual samples via lumpy mailers to your top prospects. Have shared customers? Even better as you can work with the other Partners on the heavy lifting.

- » **Create a survey.** Surveys are a great way to establish credibility in an industry. They are also a great way to feed your content engine. From one survey you can publish the results in an e-book, create some powerful infographics, write blog posts, and share snippets via your social networks. It is essential to note that surveys need a good base of people to survey. Joining with other Partners to survey a specific industry or market segment will give your results more weight.
- » **Go over the top.** Want to do a really integrated, creative campaign with all the bells and whistles? Super-creative campaigns across a wide range of tactics – from direct mail to advertising – can cost money but are worth it in the end as they often produce higher responses than email or other stand-alone tactics. Collaborating with a group of Partners can give you access to the budget you would not have on your own and allow you to build that one-of-a-kind campaign.

But wait! All that stuff takes work. Didn't I say you were going to get more resources? Yes, in time. You'll also get better content, stronger campaigns, and a wider reach that will make that initial investment worth the effort. Need proof? Check out how one of your peers found success by participating in a collaborative marketing campaign at www.thepartnermarketinggroup.com/marketing-resources. 🌐

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Making the Right Connections...and Keeping Them

- » **Be on the look out.** Find companies with similar cultures and work styles.
- » **Start small.** It takes time to build a working relationship. Start with a smaller project or campaign to see how well your styles mesh.
- » **Set expectations and define roles.** Be super clear on who owns what, establish realistic due dates, and document milestones to avoid surprises down the road.
- » **Plan together.** Collaborations work best when they start in the planning stage with the added benefit of a lot more ideas being brought to the table. Take advantage of events such as Convergence, WPC, User Group Summit, and reIMAGINE to meet with others and brainstorm brilliant campaigns.
- » **Tracking.** In order to understand the success of any campaign, you need to have a tracking mechanism in place. With collaboration, how you track will likely be based on how you are executing the campaign. For example, will each of the companies send their own email touches, and then the results will be compiled? Or will you use a single platform? Will you create a single landing page?
- » **Do a post-mortem.** What worked, what didn't, and what can work better next time? Make sure you don't look just at the campaign but at the collaboration itself. Do you need different tools or a better process?

Need help creating a campaign for a collaborative marketing venture? Barbara Pfeiffer and the team at The Partner Marketing Group can help you get styled with the new black. Check out the products and services designed for technology Partners at www.thepartnermarketinggroup.com. Barbara can be reached at Barbara@thepartnermarketinggroup.com.

*Statistic courtesy of The Partner Marketing Group's 2014 Technology Marketing Survey.

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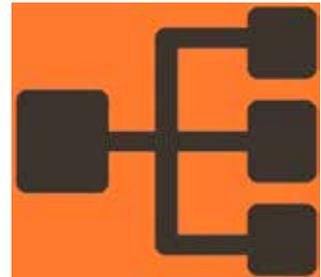
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