



Becoming “The Total Package” for Your Customers

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*T*he Total Package. When I heard this was the theme for the summer issue of The Partner Channel Magazine, I was thrilled. Working with Microsoft Partner and ISV organizations for many years – from inside and outside the organization – this very topic has been a common goal and a constant challenge.

How do you convince prospects and customers that you are The Total Package?

It's a real struggle, and there are three things you can focus on right now to start seeing positive results.

- » Messaging: How do you define and articulate what makes you the total package for your customers?
- » Marketing: How, where, and when should you share this messaging?
- » Measuring: How do you know if the messaging is resonating?

MESSAGING

What makes you special? This is, by far, one of the toughest questions for our clients. Even though it's a simple question, it is typically met with silence. If you don't have a clear value statement to offer, then it simply hasn't been defined yet. This is the core of what we do every day as marketing Partners, and by the end of this article, you'll be on track to answer this question – without missing a beat.

If you really want to challenge yourself here, don't think about products at all. Make it all about your customers. Realistically, they can find similar solutions elsewhere. Think about everything else you offer as a Partner. How do you help your clients' businesses grow, thrive, profit?

Messaging is Not Just About Words

When you think of messaging, you probably think of words, but messaging is really directly related to your overall branding. It's not just about refreshing your sales collateral or coming up with a better company slogan. It's about presenting a unified and clear message (or brand, if you will) across every touchpoint of your company – from your website to Twitter, your marketing collateral to your trade show booth, and every communication both verbal and electronic.

Some people respond better to words and facts, some respond better to visual stimulation like images or graphs, and some honestly just have to “feel” the right connection. That's why you have to cover all your bases.

This can be an excellent exercise to go through as an organization. Just like you probably recommend to your clients when developing a list of software requirements, involve the team here, not just a few managers or marketing people. Get input from those who work directly with customers on the front lines – sales reps, consultants, technicians, support staff – because they hear the praise and the problems every single day.

Start with a list of questions to address. Maybe it's a survey you ask each employee to fill out; maybe it's a company roundtable with an open forum for discussion. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions, even if it means learning you are doing some things poorly. You can't fix it if everyone is afraid to talk about it.

Some ideas for questions to start with might be:

- » What are our strengths as a company? As individuals?
- » Who are our customers? What are their expectations?
- » Where are we failing our customers?
- » How many customers have we lost in the last year? Why?
- » What do we want people to think when they hear our company name?

The basic idea is to discover the gaps preventing you from being The Total Package and create a plan to bridge those gaps. Define what you need to do better, who will take ownership of the solution, and when you expect to see results.



Develop creative content (think eBooks, infographics, case studies, blogs) to help you convey your new messaging in entertaining and engaging ways. If you're having a hard time coming up with ideas or don't have the in-house resources to design, write, or execute it, outsource it!

MARKETING

Coming up with the right branding and messaging to convey you are The Total Package is one thing, but how should you share that messaging? This will be different for every Partner and ISV because there are so many marketing tools out there. The key is to focus on integrating as many channels as you can to reach as many people as possible. Start with the ones you are probably already using, such as:

Your Website

More often than not, products aren't the beginning of a conversation with a prospect or customer, and your website is no different. Many Partners get caught up in revolving their site around products and features because that's the norm or what is most comfortable to talk about. But, it's not always what your visitor is looking for – at least right away.

- » Make sure prospects quickly understand you are in the business of helping them solve problems. Use your new messaging, great visuals, and easy-to-read headlines. It's understood you can sell them a bunch of products. That's not a solution.
- » Use landing pages for more targeted messaging for campaigns. Here, you can really get that industry-specific, or challenge-specific, message across. Visitors have uncluttered, relatable messaging and a quick way to convert. Plus, it makes it easier to track performance for a specific market or segment of your customer base.
- » Amazing messaging is great, but ultimately you must make it easy for visitors to convert and take action. Make sure your calls to action are easy to access and use. And don't hide everything you have behind a form. Save that for your high-value pieces.

Your Email Campaigns

Email is a marketing tool that is so widely used, it can lose its effectiveness very quickly without a strategy behind it. When you send too many generic emails that people just aren't relating to, it can hurt your reputation and cause people to unsubscribe. Before you send another email blast to your entire list, consider these tips to improve your results:

- » Segment your lists. Whether you segment by industry, new versus longtime customers, products – or ideally all of the above – you can (and should) then invest the time and resources to develop more targeted and relevant emails. Include valuable insight, share industry-specific resources, make them personal.
- » Test, test, test. Almost every email platform includes the ability to do split testing or A/B testing so you can test different subject lines, different intro paragraphs, different send times. Use it! You can't predict what people will respond to and when. It's worth the extra time and effort.
- » Mix it up. If you only send HTML newsletters, consider mixing in some more personal, plain emails that at least appear to come from a real person. Put a face to your business so people feel like they are connecting with a person, not a brand.

Your Social Presence

Many Partners and ISVs fall into one of three social media camps:

- » You have profiles on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, community groups, industry forums, etc. and are consistently posting and engaging with prospects and customers.
- » You have a few profiles set up and started out posting regularly, but now you're lucky to post once a month. You know it's important but just don't have time.
- » You have no social presence at all and don't see the value, or perhaps you see some value but haven't invested the time to do anything with it.

Social does take some time, and you'll want a strategy behind it, but there are tools out there to make it much easier through automation. It definitely deserves a place in your plan to become The Total Package.

Here are a few baby steps you can take to be more social and reap huge rewards such as brand recognition and improved SEO, as well as being seen as a thought leader, experts in your field, and a company who cares about their customers.

- » **Refresh.** Take some time to either set up or revisit and refresh your profiles on all of your existing social sites. Do you have a great banner? If you currently are focused solely on the products you offer, change it up to include your commitment to customers – how you help them succeed.
- » **Automate.** Find a tool that allows you to schedule posts in advance and commit at least an hour a week on social media to start. You can even take turns amongst the team. List good content resources or use a tool like ContentMX to help you quickly curate relevant content from around the web, blogs, news sources, etc.
- » **Interact.** Congratulate a customer on an achievement, retweet a customer sentiment on products, answer a question on a LinkedIn forum, start getting involved.

MEASURING

All of your marketing should be measured to understand how, when, and why your prospects and customers are engaging with you and your message. More often than not, this is the step that gets overlooked. You don't know how, you don't have time, you don't know what to do with the analytics. It doesn't have to be overly complicated, but it is critical...or else you are throwing dollars out the door.

- » Set up and learn Google Analytics if nothing else. Track visits to your site, where people come in, where they leave, how long they stay, who engages with what. Use this insight to consistently adjust your site for flow, layout, calls to action, etc.
- » In addition to using your email platform to test as noted earlier, apply your analytics to do better. Document over a period of time your best-performing subject lines, send times, clicks, etc. so you can improve your results moving forward and not repeat tactics that didn't perform well.
- » If you're using Microsoft Dynamics CRM, integrate tools available to you like Social Engagement, making it easier for your team to monitor sentiment, interact with posts, and spot opportunities. Track engagement over time to ensure you are making progress.

IN SUMMARY

Those of us that work on marketing with Partners and ISVs every day can understand and relate to your challenges. You want to stand out, not blend in, but that's easier said than done. Take a step back and think like your customer. What is he/she trying to solve? Where does he/she look for answers? Why is he/she looking for a solution? Then respond with messaging focused on solving that person's challenges, not so much on selling your products. 🌐

And, of course, don't hesitate to call in the experts when you need help! Visit us online at www.ThePartnerMarketingGroup.com to learn how we can help you become The Total Package with unique messaging, targeted marketing, and industry expertise. Our marketing programs and solutions are designed specifically for software publishers, resellers, and ISVs. To start the conversation, please contact Michelle Glennie at Michelle@thepartnermarketinggroup.com.