



The Power of the Partner

By KS&R's Technology Team

Strengthening your connection with customers through channel partner insights

Companies frequently conduct research that captures the voice of the customer to gain insights into how to enhance customer experience in today's competitive marketplace. But companies are often missing another important perspective—that of their downstream channel partners.

Voice of the partner (VoP) research is perhaps less well known than voice of the customer (VoC) research, but it is becoming critical for the many companies that rely on channel partner networks to sell, market, and distribute their products and services to end customers. [Forrester estimates that about 75% of world trade flows through indirect channels—that is, partners.](#) For some companies, more than 90% of their total sales is through partner channels.

Channel partners are not simply passive conduits that move products from providers to end customers. They are instrumental in creating demand. They can also serve as the face of the provider's brand. They influence and support end customers and collaborate to meet end customer needs. Their unique perspective can fill in gaps and complement voice of the customer research for a more complete view, while also helping providers and partners work more effectively to increase sales and profits.

The value of VoP

With their close proximity to markets, partners can provide a wealth of information about end customers.

- They have a direct line of sight into end customer preferences, purchasing decisions, and behaviors.
- Their insights can help companies understand demand, improve marketing strategies, guide the design and development of products and services, and gauge potential price points for those offerings.
- Partner perspectives can also alert to changes in markets, end customer preferences, and the competition—and even uncover untapped market opportunities.

An effective VoP program can also provide insights into partners themselves and identify what is working for them and what isn't.

- The partner not only sells the provider's products and services, it also tests, critiques, and promotes (or doesn't promote) those offerings.
- A better understanding of their needs allows the provider to target its efforts to better support and enable partners.

VoP initiatives can also help strengthen relationships with partners.

- Investing in the effort to listen to them tells partners that the provider has a shared interest in the success of their business.
- Partners often handle products and services from a variety of vendors, and a stronger relationship can motivate them to focus on certain ones.
- Understanding and meeting partner needs can create a kind of virtuous circle, in which partner satisfaction promotes increased satisfaction among end customers.

Uncovering the insights

Researchers today have a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and tools that can help companies capture the voice of the partner. These tools can be useful to identify strengths and pain points in the relationship, understand what end customers are buying and what offerings partners are promoting, and gather information on the competition.

VoP research has been used to provide a range of insights, such as:

- Determining which rewards and incentives are most effective to better benefit and motivate the partner.
- Understanding the conditions that cause a partner to choose one vendor over another.
- Seeing where partner profit margins are lower or higher than the provider expects so that it can align pricing to both ensure partner profitability and increase sales.
- Developing targeted messaging for new products.
- Understanding partner sales and marketing strategies across the end customer segments they serve.
- Understanding partner pain points in their daily interactions with customers.
- Identifying the end customer pain points that frontline partner employees see in their daily interactions with end customers.

Naturally, interviews and surveys must be carefully designed to ensure that the information they gather uncovers the answers and insights the provider needs. However, the “how” of the process can be as important as the “what” of the content. In general, partners are happy to provide input.

Today, businesses increasingly rely on an ecosystem of partners to succeed, and downstream channel partners are, for many, a critical part of that ecosystem. Companies that recognize this and take the time to fully gauge the voice of the partner will be in a better position to collaborate with partners to meet the needs of end customers and, ultimately, compete.

[Return To Thought Leadership >](#)