

## **How NOT to do channel marketing - a guide for vendors and distributors**

Some time ago I was asked to write a piece of advertising copy for a distributor that was looking to promote its products and services to the reseller community. To assist me in understanding exactly what resellers would like from both vendors and distributors, I contacted a few of my clients and asked them that question. The results were very interesting. All of these situations are 'live' examples which actually happened!

### **Top Ten Things that DO NOT work for resellers**

1. Being given a sizeable chunk of cash by a very large network provider but being made to spend it within a set number of months, even though it could have funded a whole years-worth of structured and relevant activity.

**Result - an expensive but rushed and ineffective campaign.**

2. Being made to use specified suppliers for data supply and telemarketing who were overpriced, ineffective, inaccurate and inexperienced.

**Result - a overpriced campaign with poor results leading to funding not being given the following year.**

3. Being made to include a vendor logo on printed items even though the normal approach for that reseller would be a 'consultative selling' one.

**Result - making specific vendor alliances immediately obvious and so having a negative effect on the audience as they no longer believe the reseller is 'independent'.**

4. Being given boxfuls of pre-printed mailers which were not relevant for an individual resellers' audience, and when the reseller needed work doing to their database first.

**Result - expensive mailers either sit under desks gathering dust or are mailed to inaccurate or irrelevant audiences, taking up employee time, incurring postage costs and generating no positive result.**

5. Being given funding without additional marketing support and advice when there is no real marketing expertise in-house.

**Result - poorly devised and managed campaigns, or funds being spent on engineers t-shirts or sales jollies instead, giving no additional revenue generation.**

6. Being made to use heavily vendor-branded materials or an 'e-lateral' type system where pre-designed mailers are available on-line for customisation, both of which do not allow for any reseller differentiation.

**Result - e-lateral type systems are fine for communicating with existing customers but no good for new business activity as a prospect could receive the same mailer five times from different companies each with a different logo on. Also, with any branded materials there is little or no opportunity to promote the individual reseller's skills and complementary services, giving no ability to tell a prospect why they should buy a product from one reseller rather than another reseller who is offering the same thing.**

7. Being made to use existing advertisements even if they have been designed for a foreign audience. Vendors have been known to offer to pay for advertising space if resellers use a pre-created advert, but if that advert has been written as a general communication piece for a US audience, it is unlikely to have a positive effect.

**Result - funds wasted which could have been spent on a bespoke advert that would have been far more likely to generate additional revenue.**

8. Being tied into a cumbersome and complex funding system where it is virtually impossible to find out how much co-op funding you have accrued and even harder to gain approval to spend it.

**Result - funds left unused and being lost, plus hours of reseller marketing personnel time taken fighting their way through the system to request allocation or claim the funds.**

9. Being made to abide by ridiculous rules to claim funding. Example: to claim co-op funding for a customer seminar, instead of asking for an invite list, an attendee list and a follow-up report showing meetings generated, one large vendor asked for a 'photo of the event' and a copy of the invitation!

**Result - no trackable ROI for the vendor and no 'education' for the reseller.**

10. Being made to log in to multiple impersonal 'reseller areas' on various vendors' websites just to get something as simple as a logo. Often if a reseller is working with numerous vendors they will have many different log-ins, passwords etc. and many different systems to find their way around. When contracting for a reseller I once spent an entire day fighting my way through six different 'partner areas' just to get six logos!

**Result - time wasting and frustration.**

### **How to get it right – a message for vendors and distributors**

1. Take time to find out about each reseller's marketing plans for the year and make sure that large chunks of cash, when available, are allocated in a manner which enables the reseller to make best use of them.

2. Trust your resellers to use their own suppliers, vetting them where necessary, or make sure that suppliers whom you recommend or insist on are capable of doing the job properly.

3. Try to understand that plastering your logo all over a piece of sales literature may very well have a negative effect on the audience, not a positive one. If you are a sufficient percentage of that reseller's overall business, then a consultative selling approach should be encouraged, with close monitoring.

4. Ensure that your resellers have the basics in place first. Better to fund someone to help your reseller clean up their database first and then get it segmented properly, rather than supply lots of expensive mailers which are not used at all or which go to inappropriate audiences.

5. Educate your resellers in basic marketing skills and encourage them to recruit in-house marketing managers or employ experienced external consultants and contractors, possibly funding these also. Once there are good solid marketing skills in house there will be noticeable improvements in quantity and quality of marketing activity.

6. Promote the use of 'e-lateral' type systems for communicating with existing customer bases only. Then assist resellers in developing bespoke materials which promote their individual skills and abilities to new audiences, but which can also promote your products in a softer way where appropriate. The message should always be: 'your product - but your reseller's company/skills/complementary offerings'.

7. Do not cut corners by trying to make resellers use existing materials which are not relevant for UK audiences. You must allow the piece to be customised, or re-created in a way which will suit that reseller's target audience and geographic location.

8. Understand that reseller personnel do not have time to wade through reams of rules and regulations just to find out how to claim a few quid. Make your co-op funding systems simple to work with, so resellers can easily see how much they have, when it must be spent by and what supporting documentation is required to ensure the funds can be claimed. Sometimes it seems that you are making it complex on purpose so that funds are not spent.

9. Vendors and distributors must devise sensible rules and regulations for reseller co-op funding which ensure ROI tracking and educate the reseller in the process, and these should never be set in stone, as what might be appropriate for one reseller will not be acceptable for another. For example, funding towards cleaning up a reseller's database might be appropriate if they sell your products alone, but if they sell four different competitor product ranges then obviously the campaign will need to be more specific to ensure benefit for you.

10. Vendors and distributors seem to have opted for partner interaction systems which require minimal human intervention, thus saving on personnel costs but at the same time becoming impersonal and alienating the reseller. As it is often said 'people buy from people' in this industry and putting a 'partner

area' between you and your reseller and not having someone on the other end of a phone who can help is not good customer service. These do have their uses of course but you must remember that the reseller IS your customer.

If I call your marketing department to ask for a logo file to be emailed to me the answer I want is "No problem, what format would you like?" not "No problem, if you log on to [www.impersonalvendor.co.uk/partnerarea/marketingdownloads/](http://www.impersonalvendor.co.uk/partnerarea/marketingdownloads/) and key in your username and password (What username and password? Do I have one? Could you email it to me again please I seem to have lost it . . .?!), then go to logo files, then click on the format you want, then click on download jpeg file . . . ." zzzzzzzz, sorry, I'm asleep already . . .

### **Conclusion**

All of the above comes down to one thing. Vendors need to go back to giving resellers the personal touch. Trying to automate everything and have just one set of rules which do not take into account the fact that each reseller is an individual business with individual needs does not work. Resellers need help, support and education when it comes to marketing, and most of all they need flexibility. However large a vendor you are and however many resellers you have to manage, make sure you build a 'customer service' mentality, investing in people first and technology second.

**Gill Taylor**

**[www.freelancecopywriting.biz](http://www.freelancecopywriting.biz)**