9 sticky affiliate marketing situations and how to fix them

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How to keep the buzz going and get rid of the sticky

Partnerships are the next frontier for businesses looking to grow.

As a partnership professional, you're probably facing the complexities of building a robust, successful partner program Both novices and seasoned experts may find it daunting to handle the business scenarios that come up.

You want to ensure success for your business — and advance your career. In the following nine sections, you'll learn how to position your partnership program on a fast track to build awareness and significantly grow conversions.

By leveraging your existing audience, brand equity, and communication channels with partners (including affiliates, influencers, and other types of partners), you can significantly strengthen brand reach far beyond the boundaries of your native communication channels.

A thriving partnership program has the potential to deliver added revenue well beyond conventional sales and paid media strategies.

If you find yourself asking, "How do I gain more partners?" or "How can I minimize costs?", this practical guide can steer you along the superhighway to partnership success.

Core steps

Getting partnership programs off the ground is hard work and once they're up and running you have to make sure that every partner actively delivers as much value as possible. To ensure your partnerships achieve a deep level of engagement, focus on the following steps:

- Activate
- Nurture
- Re-engage

These core partnership pillars always remain the same. However, different types of partnerships bring distinct challenges that require unique actions and engagement methods specific to the partnership category. Partnerships that are notably different include affiliate and content partnerships, influencers, and mobile partnerships.

CHAPTER 1

How do we ramp up recruitment?

If you're an account manager, you likely spent a lot of time on new partner discovery and recruitment. You may feel that there aren't enough hours in the day to recruit and manage more partners. What's the best way to keep costs down, remove silos, and fix a broken patchwork of manual recruitment processes so you can scale?

Set up a partner strategy

Begin the discovery process by establishing a basic partner strategy that follows this critical path:

Identify top competitors

Which other businesses or products fall within your same market? Which partners do competitors already leverage, and are their partner campaigns successful? If so, what makes them successful and what can you learn from their success? Can you attract any of the competition's established partnerships?

Analyze competitor traffic

Assess which websites drive the most traffic to your competitors' online content. Third-party analytics tools like Mediarails, SEMrush, Alexa, or Google Analytics benchmarking can help you gain that understanding. If you're not familiar with at least one of these tools, it's time to roll up your sleeves. You can sign up for a free trial and learn on the go. A terrific way to gain comfort is to use the new tool to solve a specific task. Analyzing competitor traffic is your chance, and it will be time well spent.

Leverage search rankings for relevant products, categories, and topics

Search rankings can help you identify partners that may fulfill your reach requirements.

- Leverage search engine optimization (SEO) or paid search insights to see which partners rank well for relevant keywords.
- Try granular keywords such as a particular product or product category, or move higher up the funnel and try industry categories or broader topic areas.
- Do a number of searches to see which websites score highest for those keywords, and consider relying on your SEO or paid search teams for help.

The websites that show up on page one of your most valuable keywords are all excellent candidates for your partnership program.

- Expand your recruitment pool by working your way down the list to less valuable keywords, or to second or third search engine results pages (SERPs).

Third-party metrics from platforms like SEMrush or Google Analytics will help you ensure that potential partner assessments are credible and comprehensive. Tools such as Impact's Mediarails and the Bing integration can also help you discover and recruit at scale.

Evaluate shared audience potential

Begin this phase by confirming the profile and quality of your primary target audience. The more defined your target audience is, the better. It ideally includes both demographics and psychographics — assuming that valuable information is well documented in your marketing strategy. You may also consider pursuing another target audience your brand aspires to reach in order to grow.

Next, ask your potential partner whether its audience shares any of the same characteristics. For example, "Is your audience composed of women between the ages of 30 and 60? Does it include women who like to travel?"

If you find significant overlap, incentivize the potential partner to establish an agreement.

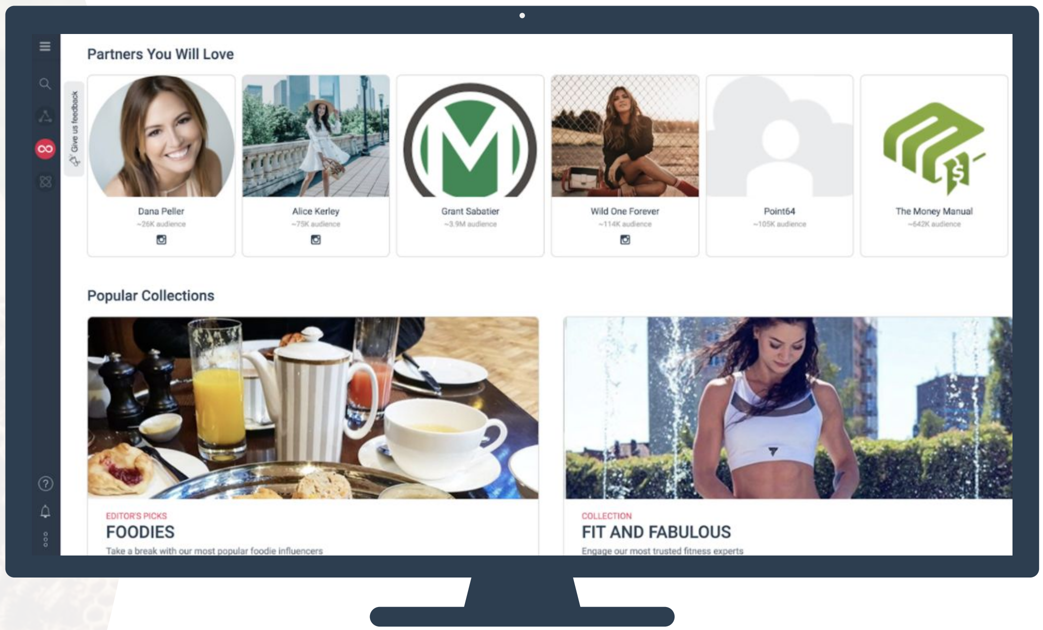
Nurture partnerships through email

Many partnership programs never go beyond passive recruitment tactics. They send out one or two emails and then move on. But did you know that many sales reps send five to seven emails before getting a response? Although it may feel uncomfortable at first, successful recruitment requires a shift in mindset to thinking like a sales rep.

Use segmented drip email campaigns to cultivate partnership opportunities in an automated fashion. This is a great way to complement ongoing recruitment tactics and develop new leads.

Use a lookalike model

One final option in your "ramping up recruitment" toolbox is leveraging lookalike models to locate partners that resemble those you've traditionally had success with.



Impact's partner recommendation capabilities can help you achieve this.

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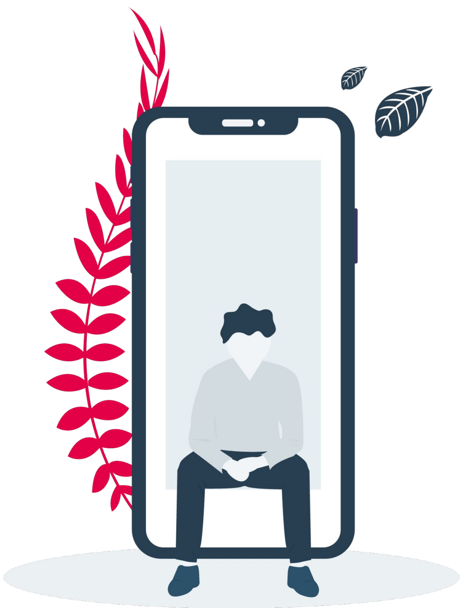
Recruit your chosen partners

Once you've discovered which partners you'd like to work with, it's time to recruit them to your program.



Establish milestones

The first step in a smooth recruitment process is establishing a schedule tied to milestones that help you reach your goals. For example, how many partners would you like to recruit and onboard over the weeks or months ahead?

Track outreach efforts

Next, keep your finger on the pulse of your pipeline. Measure response rates to your various recruitment tactics. Create benchmarks to periodically analyze how successful your invitation efforts are, and adjust as needed.

An A/B test is a common best practice. Use it to test details like your email subject line, email content, or key visuals. Testing, learning, and strengthening your execution can make a significant difference in results.

Once a prospective partner agrees to join your program, let the onboarding process begin!

CHAPTER 2

How do we reduce our costs?

Is each partner's commission properly aligned with the relative value of revenue it brings in return? A fundamental step for any partnership program is to prioritize all partnerships according to return on investment (ROI). Naturally, that includes both new and existing partners.

Evaluate your partnerships

Evaluate your partnerships by keeping in mind the following criteria — and the data associated with each.

LTV partners

A good starting point for assessment is to identify each partner's lifetime value (LTV). While this may be challenging early on in a partnership, use established partners with high LTVs as a guide. Analyze their characteristics, then recruit partners with similar characteristics.

High LTV partners often correlate with high ROI partners (unless their commission rates are unusually high). If you're looking to cut costs, high LTV partners are likely the last you'd cut from your program.

Assess partner commissions

It's important to look at the cost per acquisition (CPA), associated with each affiliate, influencer, or partner. Is it a good value? Does the partner drive unique audiences to convert on your website? Is the partner often the only touchpoint in numerous customer journeys? (This is one of the clearest signs of a partner's incremental value.)

Based on analyses like these, if the value you derive from a partner is less than other partners with comparable or lower CPAs, it may be time to head back to the contract negotiation table and lower commissions.

Test commissions for certain items

Beyond looking at the value a partner provides, another great way to reduce costs is to test commission structures for specific items. For example, can you reduce or remove commissions for high-demand or low margin items without seeing a significant drop in traffic? Adjusting commissions based on commission structure tests can reduce costs in the long term.

Get more budget by proving ROAS

Budgets are usually shared between numerous channels. You may be able to make a case for getting a bigger piece of the overall marketing budget, based on your channel's performance and efficiency. According to Nielsen projections, the average return on ad spend (ROAS) across all media types is about 3:1.[1] However, the Performance Marketing Association (PMA) sees a much higher ROAS for the partnership channel: a return of 18:1 in the travel industry, 15:1 in entertainment, and 12:1 in retail.[2] The affiliate channel also guarantees great ROAS because you pay on sales rather than for clicks or impressions.

1. "Benchmarking return on ad spend: Media type and brand size matter," Nielsen, June 24, 2016.
2. "2018 performance marketing study," PMA, August 7, 2019.

Reversals

Some retail programs find up to 40 percent* of sales returned by customers. Many programs also see some level of suspicious or fraudulent activity each month. It's important to send in reversals at regular intervals to combat these scenarios. This can significantly reduce costs while ensuring you only pay for actions that bring business value.

Monitor partner payment streams, uncover duplication or losses

Another important and helpful process is to go through a "deduplication hierarchy." This process helps ensure that double payments are not being made between different digital channels and any of your partners. Double payments are not always readily apparent, so this is an excellent way to uncover leakage.

Finally, confirm that you have an accurate view of revenue and margins for conversions driven by coupon use. You'll gain a clear view of the value or profitability of those transactions.

Once you've carefully evaluated the factors noted above, you can properly prioritize your partnerships and continue to review your commission structure accordingly.

* Based on client experience

CHAPTER 3

How do we handle concerns about incrementality?

Incrementality is a common concern and as such, should be closely monitored on both a channel and partner level, throughout the calendar year.

These practices ensure that at peak promotional times, such as Black Friday or Mother's Day, additional investment and test campaigns can be rooted in robust logic.

Use incrementality to grow

Restore credibility

Account managers can take steps to transform any incrementality concern into a positive.

Think of it as an opportunity for growth.

Verify partner value

Begin by using cross-channel reporting to more accurately assess partner value. Perhaps you have a particular partner on a pedestal and see it as providing more value than it actually does, Conversely, a partner may be perceived as less important than it really is.

Verify partner value *(con't)*

It may be time to do a deep-dive analysis:

1. **Look at the full customer journey.** Review the customer's entire path to purchase. Incentivize partners that drive value to prospects at any point, not simply at last click. It's important to reward those that drive traffic at the top or the middle of the conversion funnel. Impact's contribution report addresses the importance of incentivizing partners for any amount of progress.

2. **Periodically reevaluate the customer journey.** An analysis is a snapshot in time. The nature of a partner's contribution along the customer journey may shift, so it's important to regularly check in and look for changes.

3. **Consider solo touchpoint journeys.** Identify partners that are the sole touchpoint in the conversion path. Those that participate in a high percentage of solo journeys are among your most valuable partners. It's safe to assume that conversions would not have happened if not for those partners, and you can highlight this to prove specific instances of incrementality.

4. **Pay attention to customer status.** Is a partner good at driving a high volume of new customers, or does it generally only refer existing customers? If a partner excels at new customer acquisition, this may be an indication of strong incremental value.

Consider direct URL or promo code tracking

This is a precise and efficient method to assure your partners that their referred business is properly credited.

For example, improve profitability and revenue by tracking conversions more accurately through:

- **Unique promo codes.** The promo tracking mechanism associates a promo code used at time of conversion with a designated partner. This ensures that the correct partner gets credit — without the need for a tracking link or click.
- **Direct URL tracking.** This method allows you to assign credit based on a partner's unique referring URL. The partner does not need to append tracking parameters to its links. A major benefit of direct links is their ability to boost SEO.

Knock down silos

Another way to ensure an accurate view of performance is to avoid measuring any channel in isolation (i.e., creating a "silo"). It's easy to become accustomed to obstacles or walls that build up, and these silos can easily occur between various channels, business teams, and departments. Unfortunately, this is a recipe for driving duplicate attribution credit (multiple channels claiming credit for the same conversion) and driving up costs.

Travel up in your "helicopter" to get a broader view of your data. Solicit input from team members to fully understand the bigger picture and what they see across digital channels. Once you remove communication barriers between channels, transparency is ensured. With cross-team collaboration and unified data streams, you'll have all the pieces of the puzzle to de-duplicate conversions and ensure attribution accuracy. You'll secure a clear-eyed, holistic assessment of who drives a conversion, and avoid paying for it more than once.

Shed light on blacklisting

It's prudent to double check that coupons intended only for specific partners are not leveraged by other channels or partners in your program. Include promo code exception lists in contracts to ensure proper attribution. For example, if you distribute a coupon code to a specific partner, you can use a promo code exception list to confirm that you only reward the partner when it was the last touchpoint for conversions. This helps prevent partners that weren't involved from getting credit.

CHAPTER 4

How can we discover new influencers?

There are multiple ways to reap the benefits of sentiment. As you look beyond affiliates for other partner relationships, chances are you've found influencer recruitment to be a laborious, time-consuming process — particularly when you set out to recruit dozens, or even hundreds or thousands, of nano-, micro-, and macro-influencers.

Use the following strategic approach to rapidly scale. Kickstart your quest for influencers with the help of Impact's Discovery.

Discovery's automated workflows will help you find the best partners for reaching your audience faster than ever.

Identify relevant trends and hashtags

To get underway, put more hooks in the water and accelerate prospect discovery by making the most of key trends in your industry. Comb social media platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Pinterest. This free market research will help you understand the social fabric and garner valuable insights.

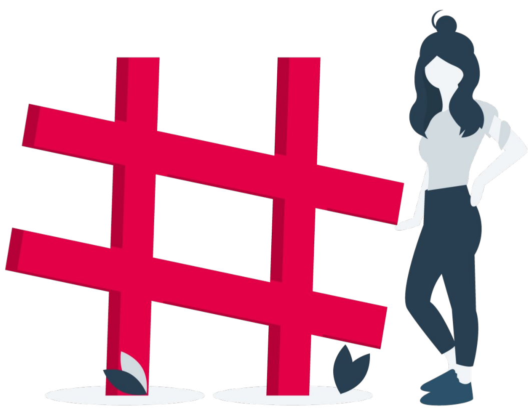
Today you can easily uncover:

- Which influencers deliver traffic to your competitors
- Who on social media is talking about topics related to your business
- Who's especially productive at generating content that benefits your business

Consider taking advantage of targeted searches and through selected hashtags and mentions. Keep your digital finger on the most compelling prospective influencer partners, and evaluate their platforms by asking the following questions:

- What kinds of content do they produce?
- Which content brings them the most success?
- What is their brand voice and does it align with our company?

Go even one step further and create brief prospect profiles for you or your team to prioritize at any point.



CHAPTER 5

How can we effectively engage with influencers?

Announce product launches and new campaigns

It's a good idea to plan ahead and earmark the time to announce the launch of new products and services. But don't limit distribution of your news to your current database. Think creatively and broadly about the range of influencers that could have a vested interest in hearing your news.

Cast your net wider than ever. This will improve your opportunity to excite relevant and influential celebrity, micro-, and nano-influencers. Public relations, email, and other channels and tactics will go a long way toward cultivating brand evangelists. Make it easy for them to contact you.

The same opportunity for awareness applies to all compelling upcoming campaigns. You and your team can make it easier for influencers to hop on board and promote your products or your campaign.

Put together an influencer package of logos, visual assets, and messaging that makes it easy for influencers to refer to your product on their platform. You'll find further recommendations on creating a toolkit below. In either case, campaign announcements need to carry more weight than just a sale or a small promotion.

Speak their language

Many partnership practitioners lapse into an affiliate mindset when communicating with their influencer network. However, that mindset is detrimental when reaching out to potential influencers, as you risk missing the opportunity to truly connect with what motivates them.

Slip into the digital shoes of a social influencer for a moment. Seriously consider using "influencer language," and learn what excites them. Depending on your brand and your target audiences, try to understand and cater to the subculture and values of particular influencers and their constituencies. Develop customized message pathways that play to the strengths of different groups of social influencers. Track and assess the results.

In advance of a new product launch, create a drip email campaign that drives social influencer engagement via their audiences.

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CHAPTER 6

How do we address the 80/20 rule with partners?

It's a familiar refrain because it's a common pitfall — so ask yourself the following vital question on a regular basis: **Does 80 percent of our partner activity come from just 20 percent of our partners?** This pitfall of a ratio is also known as the Pareto principle.

Monitoring and strengthening activity is an integral part of any partnership optimization strategy for short-term gain and long-term success. No enterprise wants to unwittingly become too dependent on just a few partners. This is the fundamental reason why personal and corporate financial advisors recommend a diversified portfolio of investments.

Every manager gets pulled in different directions, and it's easy to take your eye off the partner performance ball. When noise or data masks the reality of a situation, business revenue and profitability can become vulnerable. The good news is there's a strategic path for anticipating and addressing the challenges of the 80/20 trap.

Overcome the 80/20 rule

Analyze partner KPI contribution

Depending on how (or how often) your partner contribution/revenue data is presented, this dichotomy may gradually come about or become obscured. It's smart to establish a regular schedule to periodically assess each affiliate's contribution and determine whether you're too dependent on too few of them.

The fact is, you can't always minimize the 80/20 situation so it's important to stretch out the glorious success the 20 percent delivers, based on some (or all) of these metrics:

- Average order value (AOV)
- Clicks
- Click-through rate
- Commissions
- Conversions/conversion rate
- Cost per acquisition (CPA)
- Cost per click (CPC)
- Return on ad spend (ROAS)
- Return on investment (ROI)
- Revenue

Take a good look at key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate each partner's performance. Strive for transparency and be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound) with metrics. Be prepared to drill down to a more granular level. You'll uncover actionable insights that can make a difference.

Contribution fluctuations — temporary or sustained?

Measure performance over an established period of time. Is each affiliate's performance fairly steady — or is it unpredictable? As you evaluate, determine whether any titillating spike or diminished revenue episode can be explained.

Is the more recent activity due to an affiliate's market seasonality or other temporary factors? Is it a minor blip, a unique event, or an anomaly? Or is the shift a sustained trend? What activity can be attributed to vouchers?

Trace performance trends to learn an affiliate partner's true strength.

How do we address the 80/20 rule with partners?

Make more informed decisions

In any given week, do you find yourself flying at 10,000 feet and taking in a global view of performance? While a high-level view is useful, it's also essential to go granular and dig into your data.

Have you set up the right criteria for organizing partner categories? Take the time to slice and dice your performance metrics using criteria such as:

- Geolocation
- SKU
- Promo code
- Partner
- Event type
- Contract
- Device

Looking at your data from a different angle can uncover new insights and perspectives.

Benchmarks must stand tall

Aside from what you initially see, comparing an action to the performance of other partners within the same category can help you zero in on the source of recent activity, and the overall performance value of each affiliate. Don't postpone or shy away from searching for answers to big questions, like "Where does our overall partner program need strengthening?" or "What else can we do to minimize (or at least manage) an 80/20 dynamic?"

Reactivation: Get more from existing partners

Reactivation supplements recruitment efforts and is a smart use of your time. Compare each partner's current contributions to where they were, for example, two or four months ago. If they've slipped from the top 20 to the top 40, it's well worth determining why.

Think creatively about which affiliates are worth rejuvenating and, where possible, play to each one's strengths. Should you offer an incentive? Or, upon closer inspection, do they need specific attention and recommendations that could trigger a solid, sustained improvement?

It's worth individually reaching out to top-performing partners that may need reactivation. However, it's not possible to give every partner in your program that same level of attention. When re-engaging with smaller partners, consider bulk messaging or email drip campaigns to automate your efforts.

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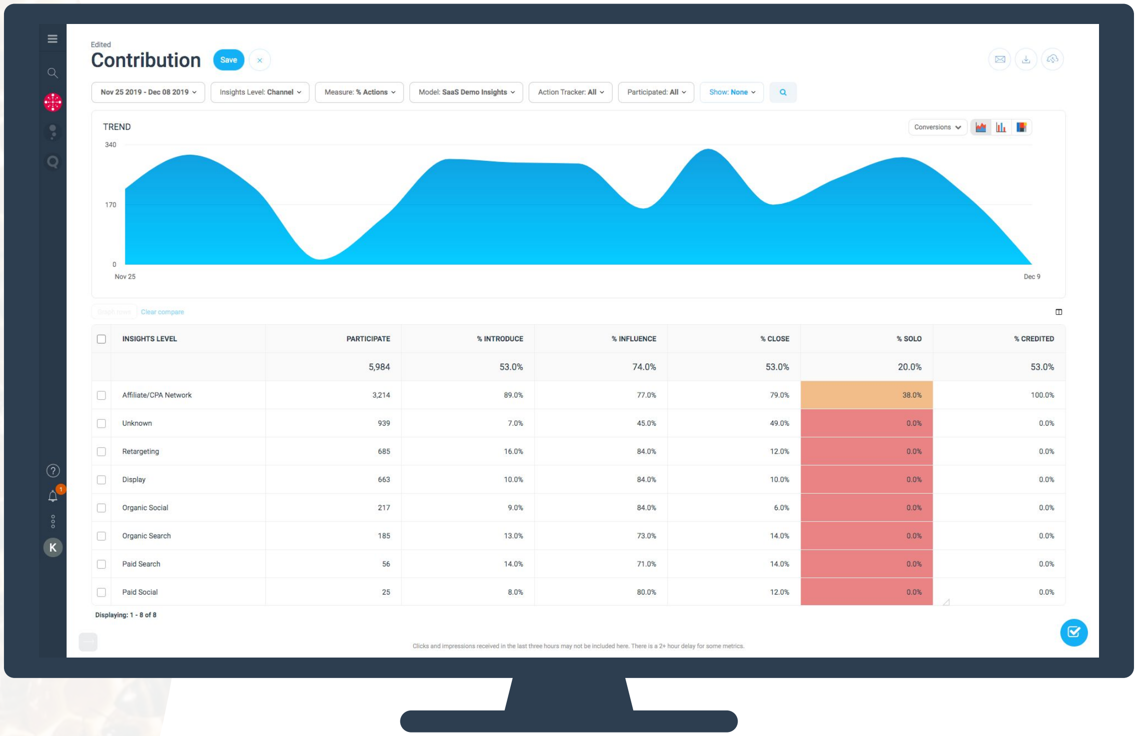
Impact's contribution report shows which partners deliver incremental value throughout the funnel.



The Contribution Report allows you to keep partners motivated by allowing you to assess the incrementality of each partner.

Strive to keep your program top of mind for your most valuable partners, and stay one step ahead by proactively staying in touch.

Go with goals

Right out of the gate, it's not surprising that you'll want to establish realistic dates and smart, strategic goals to measure partner performance. Creating that structure and rigor ensures you'll be able to identify partners that have slipped — and those worthy of reactivation.

Try to ensure that new partners are "click active" within a week and converting within a month. These are good benchmarks to begin with, but will vary according to industry and partner type.

Given the breadth and depth of what you're juggling, bear in mind that Impact can help by automating your partner workflows. From in-depth reporting to email triggers, automation offers a smart and efficient way to make sure your affiliates stay in the game.

Uncovering whether your partners need help with roadblocks is one more way to increase productivity.

CHAPTER 7

How can we reduce reliance on incentives?

Let's take a quick dip into the affiliate marketing dictionary to make sure we're all on the same page. You'll find two terms frequently referenced in this section: incentive and voucher.

An *incentive* essentially is a commission that a partner or affiliate collects from you or your firm, based on agreed-upon performance guidelines. An incentive can be a powerful motivator for a partner to put extra effort into its campaigns for you, ultimately boosting your ROI. The term "incentive" is broadly used, and may refer to a prize, performance bonus, paid placement, and more. It's important to actively monitor your incentive program throughout the lifetime of your affiliate relationships.

A *voucher,* also known as a discount code, is an offer your affiliate presents to its audience for the goods or services they're promoting on your behalf. For example, "Use 'XYZ' code for 10% off your next purchase."

Make the most of incentives

Identify value drivers

When was the last time you reviewed your partnership strategy and business with a clear-eyed analysis of how dependent your revenue is on discounts or vouchers? This healthy and smart practice can strengthen transparency. The idea is to confirm that robust revenue streams actually are not skewed, since profitability may be less accurate than initially perceived.

As with any analysis, first nail down the best KPIs to measure. Think about:

- Average order value (AOV)
- Cost of new customer acquisition
- Average order frequency
- Partner/customer retention rate
- Overall conversion rate increase

Discounts or vouchers need to be well controlled in any vertical. If they're distributed too broadly, you'll struggle to rein them back in.

But before arbitrarily deciding to cut back on incentives, be sure to take a good look at your vertical's discount or voucher mountain. Gain a broad, overall view of what's happening with your competitors' vouchers, and with coupons in your sector. Make it a point to reach out to relevant partners to get this information. At a minimum, ask your major partners for a rudimentary breakdown of the business they're conducting within your vertical.

The data they share will be anonymized, of course. But soliciting and aggregating that information will provide valuable context — and insights. It will bolster your confidence as you look down the road and make decisions. If you're ever tempted to pull back on vouchers and coupons, you'll have a good understanding of the market share your business could lose.

With these KPIs in mind, next you can gain a sense of how best to minimize or eliminate commissions from activities that don't directly support your KPIs. Assess partner performance across six key metrics:

- Clicks
- Conversions
- Conversion rate
- Average order value (AOV)
- Revenue
- Commissions

Strive for a balanced partner mix

Understanding what constitutes an optimal partner mix takes time, and it's no small task. Don't lose sight of the fact that different partners deliver different types of results. This includes how each impacts the conversion funnel, so take some time to properly categorize your partners.

Macro influencers have large followings, which can help with building broad awareness, and their average engagement rates sit at 1.21%[1] on Instagram. While that's impressive, before you celebrate, consider this: micro influencers on Instagram have over 3x higher engagement rates (3.86%) and can generate 22.2x[2] higher conversion rates than other types of influencers.

1. Jacinda Santora, "100 Influencer Marketing Statistics For 2021," Influencer Marketing Hub, updated April 22, 2021. https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-statistics
2. Shane Barker, "How Micro-Influencers Can Help You Boost Your Conversion Rates," Marketing & Growth Hacking, May 14, 2018. https://blog.markgrowth.com/how-micro-influencers-can-help-you-boost-your-conversion-rates-f8d04fecb8e2

This is just one more stark example of how an array of partners, large and small, is ideal.

Here's how to achieve that array. First, categorize your partners by group:

- Coupon/discount/cashback affiliates
- Loyalty/rewards affiliates
- Content
- Influencers
- Others

Once that breakout is complete, think about how many of those partner groups rely on some form of incentive. Beyond the peak time periods when everyone pays attention, there are more ways to keep a partner's eye on the ball and motivated — without coupons or vouchers. For instance, brainstorm and develop inspired, creative ideas for bonus arrangements. Provide a compelling "carrot" to drive your partners to achieve specific and well-defined goals tied to your KPIs.

Next, use that clear view of your partner mix to identify gaps and further diversify. Given the ebb and flow of a complex and often volatile economy, establish strategic goals (including key dates) to pursue partner types that will lead to an even healthier assortment for your enterprise.

CHAPTER 8

How do we make our program stand out?

Cutting through the noise is a fundamental and ongoing marketing challenge for many brands. So before you plunge into a new campaign, ponder these two strategic content questions:

1. **What's our brand's single most compelling point of difference?**

   Overarching brand positioning is the cornerstone of a solid content and overall business strategy.

   Once that distinction has been confirmed, an account manager should communicate it for an extended period of time. Your brand's point of difference should be reinforced well beyond a single quarter, and, depending on its effectiveness, maybe for a year or more.

2. **How can we create buzz around our latest campaign?**

   This is a shorter term yet more immediate goal. Identify unique or compelling aspects of your newest program that will garner interest.

Once these two fundamental questions have been fleshed out, select the most creative, engaging ways to communicate the answers to your existing and potential customers. Include the basics, as well as necessary supporting points.

Take steps to stand out

Create buzz

Before you finalize a new partnership campaign, create a schedule that gives you and your team a reasonable amount of time to brainstorm partnership program content, themes, and components. Potential announcement examples include:

- New products or services
- New campaigns and their themes
- Seasonal promotions
- Quarterly promotions
- Limited time offers (LTOs)
- Other

Next, explore all the digital media channels or tactics you can use to raise awareness. Think about using social media to promote a program, or leveraging display activity. Go beyond what was done the last time. Select what worked especially well, but open other doors for consideration, too.

Definitely leverage publisher communications and social media. But what other public relations strategies can you explore besides the obvious press releases and events? What's the best content for your headlines and graphics? As far as scope, what local, regional, and national options can carry your announcement?

Cast a wider net

While your primary target audience is your current partners, cast a wider net to attract new partners as well. Create the sense that you're sharing key information, and provide terrific new business and revenue opportunities.

Equip your partners with compelling content on product benefits that will appeal to their target audiences. Deliver up-to-date brand assets so they can effectively communicate with their audiences on your behalf. Remove any speed bumps. Make it easy for them to incorporate your brand assets by providing approved creative — including current offers, curated product catalogs, and videos. All these assets can ensure affiliate success at promoting your brand.

The best partnership programs provide good commission rates, pay promptly, and collaborate well. When you walk the talk, you'll inherently generate buzz and word-of-mouth recommendations across the partner community.

Fire up your partners' imaginations. Empower them. Provide prompts and themes they can build on.

Look ahead

At any given point during the year, anticipate when a promotional push could strengthen participation. Ask whether successful past promotions can be revamped with a different theme. Look at the calendar and plan innovative ways to increase engagement and conversions during historically sluggish, uneventful time periods.

Another smart question to ask is, “Can we initiate a fun competition with our partner network that would have news value?”

Incentivize partners to promote your brand by sending them samples or attention-getting promotional freebies. When a partner shares content about a product with its audiences, perhaps with an unboxing video, your brand gets the spotlight. Promotional elements like wearables can be a buzz-worthy perk for a partner — at minimal cost to you.

Build relationships

Once a new partner climbs aboard, clear and well-organized communication upfront can ensure an expanding and lasting partnership.

When a partner action occurs, ensure that the agreed-upon payment will be executed on time. Aside from a signal that you are well organized, timely partner payments show respect and build trust.

Take advantage of timing

Your team can greatly benefit from periodic updates with your partners. Exchange updates on business or quarterly goals, and make it a two-way street. Be aspirational and tailor communications to your partner's goals whenever possible. This is not just an administrative task, it's an opportunity for everyone to optimize all kinds of possibilities down the road. Use communications to:

- Capitalize on momentum
- Leverage recent insights
- Correct a small issue before it gets out of control

Clear and timely communication and payments should be a priority from the start. Honor the value your affiliates provide, and follow through accordingly. Otherwise what could easily be neglected as an administrative obligation could quickly lead to growing partner frustration.

Transparency and timely reporting is expected and essential. Your partners need to update their own reports and program revenue projections. If the obligation is overlooked at any point, mistrust and second guessing by a partner can arise. And if they drop the ball, look at it as an opportunity for course correction.

Build trust through reliable tracking

Remember, cookies are crumbling and browser-based tracking is disappearing (see the Impact's Advertising is dead ebook for a full look). Don't get left in the digital dust.

Now's the time that actionable, real-time data can make an impactful difference.

APIs that use multiple applications interact with and obtain data from one another. If you're not comfortable with APIs, a solution like Impact can add a universal tracking tag to your website.

Impact's JavaScript-based solution is Intelligent Tracking Protocol (ITP)-compliant, and more dependable than conventional pixel and gateway tracking. But API-based server-to-server tracking will be the most future-proof method to secure your program.

CHAPTER 9

How do we get the most out of our existing partners?

Strengthen communication for each target audience

Reevaluate your brand's currentadvertising/marketing campaign as frequently as possible. This includes copy, various offers, and landing pages. Ask yourself: How does text and the timing of messaging affect each partnership? Can we further optimize content? Does content need to be tailored — especially to reach a partner's most valuable customers? For example, when a partner continues to drive full-price sales, protect that margin and avoid sending them discount messaging.

Other important questions to ask yourself:

- What products are partner-driven customers buying?
- How profitable are those products or services?
- At what frequency and at what time are purchases made?
- When are the sales happening — at the beginning of the month or after payday?
- How does a partner's newer customer activity compare to existing customer activity?

Help your partners look at all relevant data, CPC, cost per lead (CPL), and ideally, AOV. What key insights can you and your client glean from data?

Here are the ways some Impact clients have suggested they'd like to see follow-up:

- Partner incentives that drive off-peak sales by increasing commissions during off seasons
- Bonus structures for new customer acquisitions to encourage a focus on this metric
- Reduced commissions on low-margin products to protect channel ROI

This guidance can help you see if the client is communicating with each partner in the best way possible, at the right time, and with the appropriate support and frequency.

Consider more flexible commissions and greater incentives

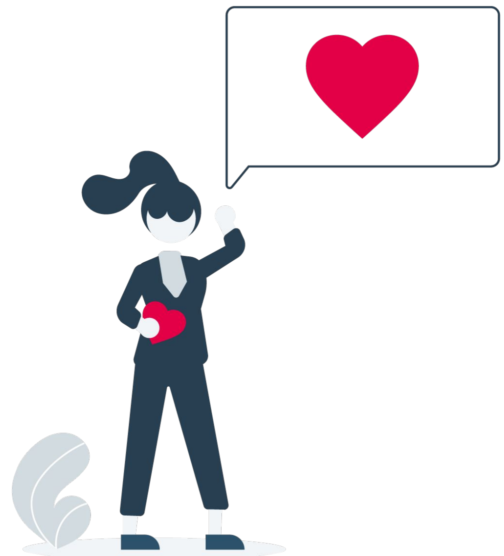
Next, appeal to your partners by establishing more flexible or tiered commission arrangements that motivate them even further. A more creative, calibrated approach increases incremental user journeys. This recommendation fits in perfectly with Impact's reporting suite.

For example, you can pay more for new customers, or consider a tiered bonus structure that increases payouts when a partner hits a certain volume for the month.

Take your business to new heights

Now that you know how to think about and address these nine common affiliate marketing issues, it's time to apply this knowledge to your business.

Be on the lookout for new opportunities to improve your program. You never know when a small change, whether recruiting a new partner or improving your program incrementality, will make a huge impact.



Hungry to learn more? Take a look at additional resources that highlight successful programs and industry best practices:

- Dive into 8 successful affiliate partnerships
- Best practices: Discovery & Recruit
- 13 best practices for affiliate partnerships

About Partnership Cloud

Impact's Partnership Cloud™ provides an integrated, end-to-end solution for managing all of an enterprise's partnerships throughout the world.

From discovery, recruitment, and contracting to tracking, protecting, and optimizing — through the entire partner life cycle — the Partnership Cloud helps you drive revenue growth from every type of partner, including traditional affiliates, influencers, strategic partners, app-to-app partners, premium publishers, and more.

To learn more, please visit https://impact.com/partnership-cloud/ or contact grow@impact.com to schedule a free demo.

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