



## Partnership Life Cycle

- Discover & Recruit ●
- Contract & Pay ●
- Track ●**
- Engage ●
- Protect & Monitor ●
- Optimize ●

# Best practices for tracking your partnerships

*Gather the vital data you need to run an effective partnership program*

## 1 The appeal of partnerships

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- Core steps
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- Spotlight on mobile partnerships

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## CHAPTER 1

# The appeal of partnerships

## A new path to revenue growth emerges

Partnerships are emerging as a clear opportunity for enterprises to grow their revenue. For many companies, partnerships contribute a large and growing share of revenue. High-maturity partnership programs contribute 28% of overall revenue on average, according to Invest in partnerships to drive growth and competitive advantage<sup>1</sup>, a study commissioned by Impact and conducted by Forrester Consulting.

More than half of the companies surveyed for the study already get more than 20% of their revenue from partnerships — and that share promises to grow as enterprises further adopt partnerships as a new revenue channel.

In fact, the ability to grow revenue and profit is among the largest benefits realized by companies that currently leverage Impact's Partnership Cloud, according to The Total Economic Impact™ of Impact's Partnership Cloud<sup>2</sup>, a Forrester Total Economic Impact™ Study commissioned by Impact.

The partnership economy has introduced all kinds of new partnerships that benefit companies that decide to work together. These new forms of collaboration have also brought with them unique life cycles that work differently from both traditional media buying and the previous concept of "[partner marketing](#)."

1. "Invest in partnerships to drive growth and competitive advantage" Impact Tech, Inc. 2019, <https://go.impact.com/PDF-PC-AW-InvestInPartnerships-Forrester2019.html>
2. "The Total Economic Impact™ of Impact's Partnership Cloud", Impact Tech, Inc., January 2020, <https://go.impact.com/rs/280-XQP-994/images/PDFdownload-TEI-of-Impact-Partnership-Cloud.pdf>



## The partnership life cycle

### A six-stage process for launching and sustaining a healthy program

The partnership life cycle refers to the way partner relationships progress through distinct stages, from discovery to optimization.

Every successful program must manage the full partnership life cycle. The third in a six-part series, this ebook focuses on the “Track” stage of the life cycle.

It is at this point that partnership managers set themselves up to correctly and accurately collect the data necessary to run an effective, high-performing program.



## The six stages of the partnership life cycle

Track is the third of six partnership life cycle stages. Here's what occurs during each stage of a successful partnership:

1. **Discover & Recruit.** Cast a wide net to discover partners from a universe of millions of potential candidates across the world. Recruit with scaled nurture campaigns.
2. **Contract & Pay.** Contract those eager to join your program and negotiate how you pay them for the incremental value they drive to your program.
3. **Track.** Set up your partners with links to track the value of the traffic they drive across all your properties, on any device.
4. **Engage.** Engage your partners with training to quickly turn them into productive partners. Maintain continuous communication to inform them about new products, creative, and incentives that drive revenue and keep your program top-of-mind.
5. **Protect & Monitor.** Protect your program from bad actors seeking to defraud it, and monitor your partners for compliance to your brand guidelines.
6. **Optimize.** Optimize your partnerships by measuring incremental value, fine-tuning incentives to motivate your most promising partners.

## CHAPTER 2

# An overview of tracking

### Set up your program to measure each partner's value across devices

Getting started is one of the hardest aspects of a partnership program. The previous two ebooks in this series discuss how the [Discover & Recruit](#) stage is about garnering partner interest, while the [Contract & Pay](#) phase is about getting partnerships set up. The Track stage represents the first phase of onboarding. It allows your partners to quickly and easily share the data you require to measure both their value and overall campaign success. Tracking is all about setting up tracking links, vanity URLs, dynamic coupon codes, and APIs so everything is tracked, including clicks, intermediate success events, and final conversion events.

**Tracking is a foundational part of the partnership program.**

It connects your recruitment efforts with the actions of the partnership itself: the conversions, traffic, sales, and new audiences that you've enlisted partners to provide. If you can't track, you can't measure the value of a partnership, and you certainly can't move on to the next stages of the life cycle.

Remember, the tracking stage is a two-way street. Yes, you need to track what happens with partners to determine their value, but your partners also need this same information to understand their own value and adjust tactics to be better partners in the future.



## Core steps

In your quest to build a solid foundation that has every partner up, running, and sharing necessary data, follow these steps through the tracking stage:

- Track
- Be creative
- Modernize
- Keep it comprehensive
- Supply details

These core pillars always remain the same. However, different types of partnerships bring unique challenges that require unique tracking actions specific to a partnership category. Partnerships with notable differences include affiliate and content partnerships, influencers, and mobile partnerships.



## Track

Once partners are fully onboarded, begin automatically tracking events connected to your partnership, such as customer purchases, coupon codes, app installs, or web traffic driven by a partner.

## Be creative

Sometimes partners drive valuable conversions without making your audience click through, so be sure to use mechanisms beyond tracking links and first-party cookies. Partner-specific promo codes are popular with certain types of partners like affiliates and influencers. They allow customers to enter a unique promo code during checkout and make it easy for you to attribute that conversion to the relevant partner. Unique URLs that lead to partner-specific landing pages are also popular for tracking traffic driven by offline media, such as TV, radio, print, and outdoor.



## Modernize

Browsers are cracking down on cookie-based tracking. Keep your tracking up to date with solutions that use the latest technology. Server-to-server tracking is an important tactic for future-proofing yourself against the continued decline of first- and third-party tracking cookies.

## Keep it comprehensive

Your success goes beyond conversions, so track leads, app installs, subscription upgrades, and any other success events you want to drive.

## Supply details

Consumers work and play on desktops, mobile web, apps, gaming devices, and other platforms. Your tracking has to go where they go. If you're using a software platform to manage your partnerships, ensure that you share as much PII-compliant info as possible to accurately capture the cross-device journey.



## What to track

Even if the general concept of tracking seems obvious, questions remain about what high-level data you need to collect. The sky's the limit when it comes to potential signals to track, but at a bare minimum, track the following:

- **Clicks** provide IP addresses, unique login names, device IDs, and many other pieces of information. Clicks gather the data that helps establish a pseudonymized identity and weaves together a customer journey.
- **Conversion** events, tracked via tags, contain the shopping cart data that helps you calculate average revenue per partner, profit margin, lifetime value, and other important metrics.
- **Shopping cart** data is important to capture exactly what SKUs your customers are purchasing, how much their shipping costs and taxes are, and other important attributes that allow you to make informed decisions about what your margins are and exactly how valuable a particular shopper's transaction is.
- **Revenue** is important because it helps you calculate the percentage of a payout due your partner. It's instrumental in calculating return on investment (ROI) for the overall program.

## Why track?

Why is it necessary to collect all these pieces of data? Data stitches together a customer journey that illustrates the role each partner played along the customer's path from awareness to consideration to purchase — and all their actions in between.

Today's fragmented media landscape means that consumers don't always click and convert in a single session. In fact, they may not even convert on the same device! Tracking helps you connect the dots so you know exactly what leads to conversions.

**You can then use that information to further develop and optimize your partnership program later in the life cycle.**

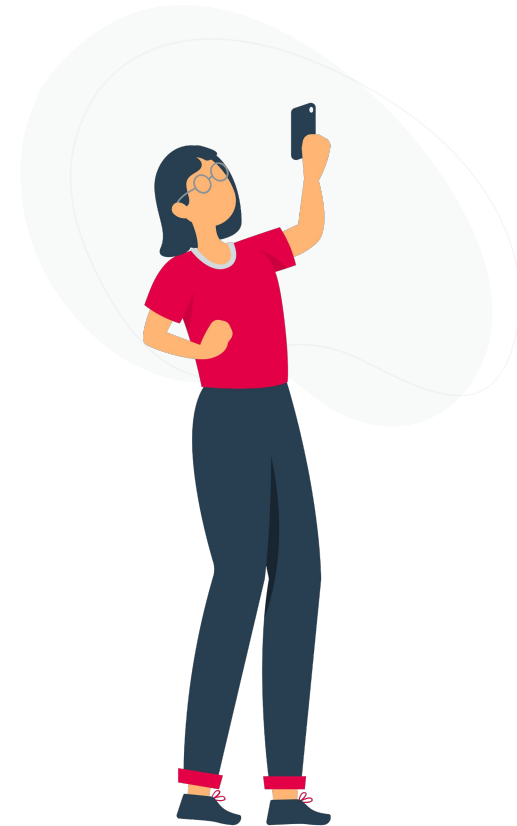


## Tracking methodologies

There are many ways to collect the data required in the tracking stage. These different methodologies distinguish simple clicks that amount to nothing versus ones that lead to important conversion events and define how conversion data is submitted to a tracking system upon completion of an action.

Most tracking methods share a common requirement: each partner needs to be given a unique tracking link. That link contains a few essential bits of info that allow the tracking system to identify who should receive credit for an eventual conversion.

**With that in mind, here are the most common methodologies used to track actions...**



## Javascript/First-party cookie tracking

First-party cookie or Javascript tracking is a straightforward tracking method for click and conversion reporting on online actions. It involves placing tracking code — usually a Javascript tag such as [Impact's Universal Tracking Tag](#) — on every landing page and the confirmation page where a conversion event takes place. You can also place the event tracker on any other intermediate, non-monetary success event such as account creation or sign-up for a newsletter. More complex event tracking is valuable for enterprises with more complicated business models involving multiple consecutive conversion funnels. For instance, consider a subscription company that has a conversion funnel involving a user first creating an account, then a subsequent conversion funnel leading to a first purchase.

**First-party cookie tracking is the simplest tracking method and is used as the default method for online event tracking.**



- **Server-to-server tracking** uses APIs to track clicks and conversion events. With this method, click and conversion data is sent to Impact automatically via an API call. To enable server-to-server tracking, an Impact client needs to work with their Impact technical services contact to connect to the necessary [APIs](#). This tracking method is widely considered to be the most future-proof, since it cannot be affected by browser-based user privacy changes such as Apple's Intelligent Tracking Prevention (ITP).
- **FTP tracking** is used to submit batch file conversion reports to your tracking platform. Impact provides two variations to FTP tracking: Advertiser FTP and Impact FTP. Advertiser FTP tracking requires you to create a dedicated FTP site to house their batch files, and gets picked up by the tracking platform on a predetermined, recurring basis. Impact FTP tracking requires you to upload their batch files to an FTP site on the Impact server on a regular basis.

Standard Javascript tracking involves firing a first-party cookie when a conversion event takes place. FTP tracking is different in that it does not use a tracking cookie. You'll need to keep track of click cookies and submit the conversion data back to the tracking system you have in place.

- **Promo code tracking.** Promo codes are a great way to monitor how partners aid your efforts. They are often shared as part of offline campaigns and may not always have clicks associated with their usage. Customers often type in a URL or arrive via search (as opposed to clicking a link or digital ad). The promo tracking mechanism associates a promo code used at time of conversion with a designated partner to ensure that the correct partner gets credit. Promo codes can also be tracked by server-to-server tracking (the conversion event and associated coupon code can be passed into the API) and FTP tracking (the conversion event and associated coupon code can be passed into the tracking system through a batch file placed into an FTP system).
- **Direct tracking** involves creating custom rules within your JavaScript tag. These rules let you assign credit based on the partner's referring URL, without the partner needing to append any tracking parameters to their links. This can be a useful technique for some partners, but isn't generally recommended for use with many partners simultaneously.

## Spotlight on affiliate partnerships and content partnerships

Many affiliate and content properties are used to the world of link tracking and don't think it unusual to pass as many parameters as possible. After all, these partners want to ensure that a brand is able to credit their traffic contributions and tie participation to the customer journey. **Promo codes** are a common way to track affiliate sales. Important partners are given unique codes that users type in to get a discount, and the partner is credited for their role in driving conversion.

Since manual management of code proliferation takes so much time, more scalable solutions are necessary. **Set up rules for each code** that govern who receives credit when a code is used. The most popular method is giving the affiliate or content partner credit whenever their code is used, as long as the consumer clicked on their link at least once. This ensures they get last-click credit, even when a user searches for a better code.

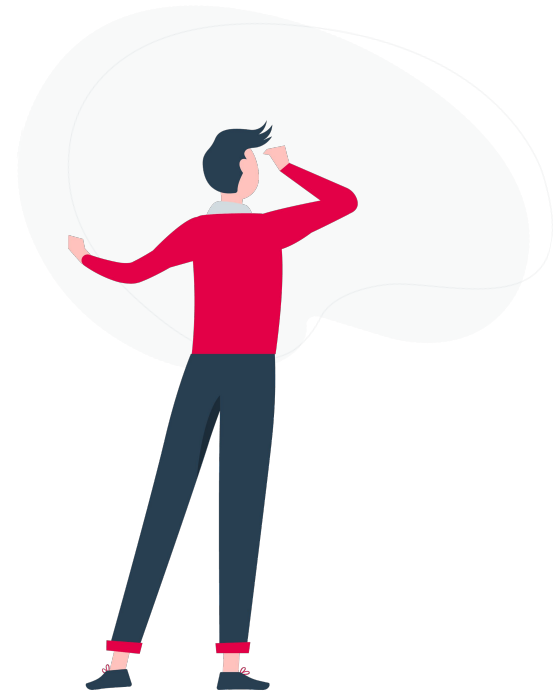


It's also important to have in place a system to **track conversion reversals and returns**. After all, the whole point of paying for performance is that you get guaranteed ROI. If a customer returns their order, but you don't recoup the partner's payout, you've lost money on the transaction. And as far-fetched as it sounds, it's not unheard of for bad actors to purchase products in order to receive their payout and then return the products later on. Monitoring reversals ensures that you're not over-crediting partners seeing high levels of returns.

**SKU tracking** is a critical component for some industries. A retailer might pay more on high-margin products, an airline might decrease payouts for popular flight segments, or an enterprise may decide not to allow payout on a certain product SKU. By tracking SKUs you can ensure that you're monitoring sales and making correct payouts.



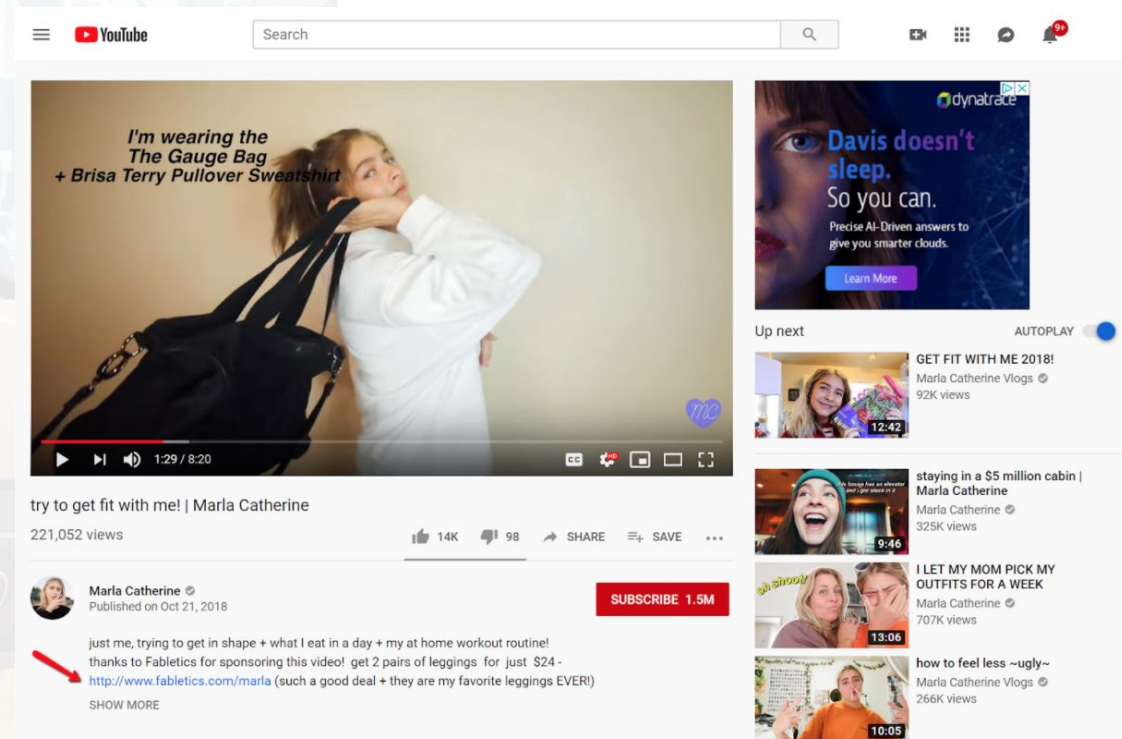
Finally, **maintain an up-to-date product feed**. Partners such as shopping comparison sites can only deliver value if they have the most recent information on pricing and inventory, and current product images. They must ensure that the tracking information in the feed allows you to identify the specific SKU being purchased.



**More sophisticated partners will use automation to take in this information, so it's critical to provide the latest data.**

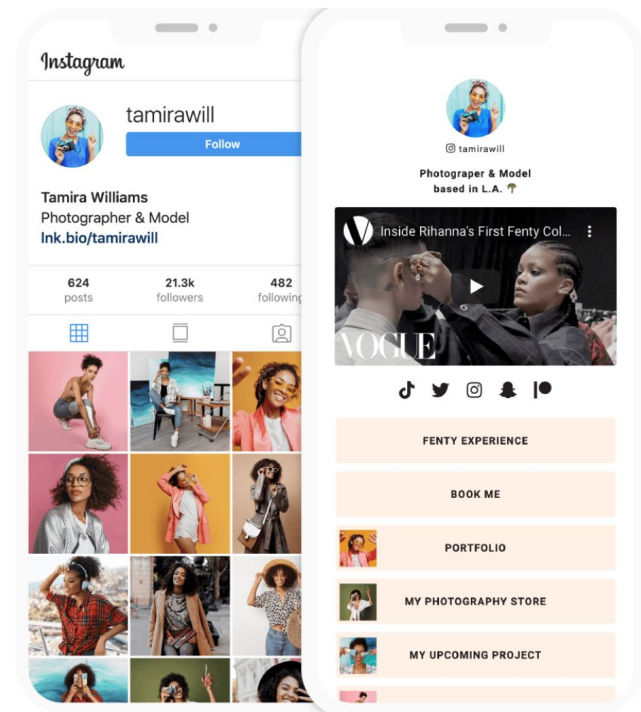
## Spotlight on influencer partnerships

Tracking takes a different form with influencers. Whenever an influencer displays a product, it needs to be as easy as possible for customers to access the product and for the partner to monitor conversions attributed to a particular post. This is where **vanity URLs** come into play. Often placed within a post's description box, these URLs make it easy to track which influencers are responsible for what customer activity. Vanity URLs are really a more user-friendly, easy-to-remember form of the tracking links that provide the foundation for the tracking methods above.



Some social platforms like Instagram don't offer easy link sharing outside of user "bios." With these types of platforms, unique **promo codes** are often the best way to monitor influencer impact on customer activity.

It's possible to give a social influencer credit any time their code is used, regardless of whether the user clicked their link. This is a great way to attribute credit to a social influencer who doesn't want to use a tracking link but wants to share a code with followers. Take care with this approach, however — if their code starts to appear on major coupon sites, the influencer may end up being credited with a large number of sales they didn't truly drive.



That said, **link in bio** solutions have been around since 2013 but have really surged in the [past year](#). Because social platforms like Instagram and TikTok prevent users from including clickable links in their posts, and only a single link in their profile, link in bio solutions allow influencers to take their users to a simple website that can link them anywhere – and can effectively host all of an influencer’s affiliate links. Enterprises will want to make sure that their affiliate links take one (or more) of these slots.

Influencers are often individuals — and many may not be tech savvy. Ensure that your **partner portal** makes it as easy and obvious as possible for influencers to pick up their tracking URLs and promo codes. Most will not have the patience to dig through layers of pages to find the right information.

Keep in mind that consumers often interact with influencers through social media apps on mobile devices. This makes **cross-device tracking solutions** critical, especially when a final transaction or conversion closes on a consumer’s desktop device.



## Spotlight on mobile partnerships

Most affiliate and partnership managers grew up in the web world but consumers increasingly spend money in mobile environments. In fact, mobile spending per shopper grew 68%<sup>1</sup> in the 2019 holiday season compared to the year before. Because apps are often managed by a separate team within an organization, it's critical that tracking **encompasses both web and mobile apps**. Retailers that fail to track partnership data on their mobile apps are leaving money on the table.

In the mobile app world, tracking mechanisms such as JavaScript that are typical for web-based monitoring won't work. Because apps are not web based, they require a **unique tracking mechanism**. Instead, companies often choose to track through SDKs (embedded within apps) or APIs (called from apps or directly from the server side).

As mobile grows in importance within the partnership space, many companies are adopting mobile partnership solutions that handle attribution for their partnership channel. These are different from the already established **mobile measurement partners** (MMPs) that track and measure all mobile marketing efforts that drive users to install apps. When you're vetting mobile partnership solutions, find one that plays well with others and gives you the option to rely on an MMP. You may also consider a partnership platform that handles deep linking and tracks your partnership channel on its own.

1. Digital Commerce 360: [Retail spending on mobile rises 68% during holiday 2019](#), January 28, 2020.

For partnerships, Impact offers TrueLink™, which provides mobile advertisers the ability to route, deep link, and track consumers as they move from a partner's app (or website) to an enterprise's app. This works well with mobile-specific technology solutions like MMPs and customer data platforms (CDPs). To learn more about the basics of running an affiliate or partnership program on mobile, download our ebooks, [Partnership leader's guide to the wild world of mobile apps](#) and [Exploring the deep linking frontier](#).

Always encourage your partners to **drive into your app** where there is the greatest propensity to convert, a higher average order value, and a greater likelihood to return. Use technologies like TrueLink to deep link into the app, and take users directly to the most relevant location within it.

At the same time, **give users a choice** if they don't have the app installed. Some really cannot be bothered with installing an app and just want to be directed to the mobile web. Impact provides tools to allow the user to choose the experience that's most convenient for them.



Part of the challenge of integration is getting the **deep linking** right. Linking to the correct page is easy on desktop web but may seem complex and intimidating in the mobile app space. Mobile app publishers may not be sophisticated enough to pull this off on their own, so getting it right often requires a layer of technology that manages the complexity on their behalf. Getting deep linking right ensures that links always work and tracking is seamless, regardless of the platform or your partner's level of sophistication. No matter what, deep linking must work without forcing your partner to change current operating procedures.

If your users do not already have a particular app and don't mind installing one, ensure that **deferred deep linking** allows them to proceed with their journey once they open the app. Deferred deep linking handles the common situation when the user does not have the app installed on their mobile device. Deferred deep linking allows the user to click on a partner URL, get taken to the app store, install the app, and upon opening the app, get taken to the specific page within the app they were originally intending to go to.

As noted in the [Discover & Recruit stage](#), mobile often calls for bespoke strategic partnerships. These deeper partnerships may require native software integration, which may extend onboarding timeframes. An **incremental approach** is often the best path forward as it moves toward quick successes while advancing an entire project along a step-by-step timeline. For example, both parties can identify the minimum level of integration required to deliver value to shared customers while also generating value to their partners and their management teams.

## CHAPTER 3

# Best practices for tracking your partnerships

Tracking is the step where the rubber meets the road. You've researched and identified partners, and hammered out contracts and payment terms.

**This stage is where you set up partners so you can effectively measure how they contribute to your partnership program.**

The core tracking steps are critical for all partnerships. However, since content partners and affiliate partners, influencers, and mobile partners are based in different native environments, they require additional steps to ensure smooth and seamless tracking. You'll want to make sure it's easy for each partner to onboard and start proving their overall value.



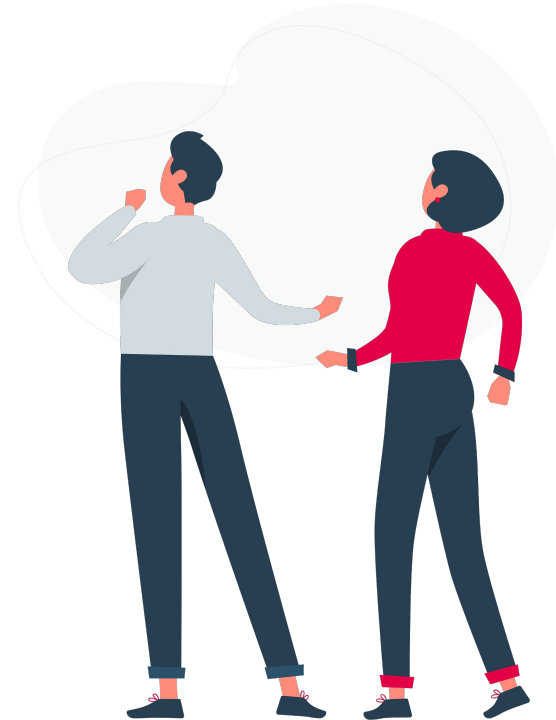
**To get the most out of the tracking stage of the partnership life cycle, remember to:**

- **Track** events connected to your partnership. At a bare minimum, track clicks, revenue, and conversion events. To go deeper, record partner-driven customer purchases, coupon codes, app installs, and web traffic.
- **Be creative** by using mechanisms that go beyond tracking links and first-party cookies.
- **Modernize** your tracking solutions with the latest technology.
- **Keep it comprehensive** by going beyond the basics to track more detailed actions.
- **Supply details** to the software platform you use for tracking so you accurately capture the cross-device journey.



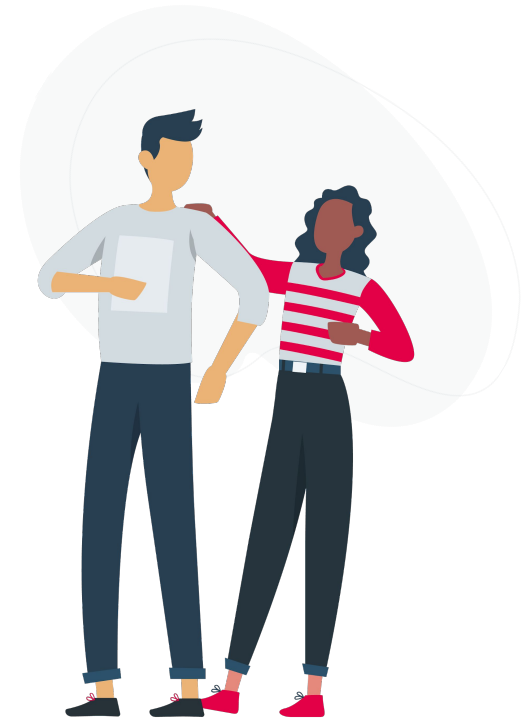
## For affiliates and content partnerships:

- Give important partners unique **promo codes** to better track how they're driving sales.
- Meanwhile, **set up rules for each code** that govern who receives credit when codes are used.
- **Monitor reversals and returns** so you're not paying out for products that are ultimately returned by dissatisfied buyers.
- **Leverage SKU tracking** to make it easy to handle payout margins on different items.
- **Maintain an up-to-date product feed** so your partners have the latest pricing information, inventory status, and images.



## For influencers:

- **Provide vanity URLs** that make it easy to track which influencers are responsible for what customer activity.
- When URLs aren't an option, **share unique promo codes** to monitor the impact influencers have on customer activity.
- **Consider link in bio** solutions that let your influencer's audience click into a micro-website from a link in the influencer's bio page, and where a number of your affiliate links can live.
- **Leverage a partner portal** that makes it easy for influencers to pick up their tracking URLs.
- **Use a cross-device tracking solution** to monitor customer movement from social apps to desktop conversions.



## For mobile partners:

- With more money being spent on apps than ever before, **tracking must encompass both the web and mobile apps** to fully capture conversions.
- **Understand the unique tracking mechanism** mobile apps require in order to record clicks and conversions, and use an SDK or API to handle tracking.
- Vet mobile partnership solutions to find those that **integrates well with mobile measurement partners**.
- Encourage partners to **drive into the app**, taking users to a relevant location that increases propensity to convert.
- Always **give users the choice** to visit the mobile web if they don't have an app installed.
- Use the right software to **guarantee that deep linking and tracking works properly**, no matter the mobile partner's level of sophistication.
- **Use deferred deep linking** to allow users who don't have the app installed to proceed with their journey once they install and open an app.
- **Onboard deeper integrations through an incremental approach** that moves toward quick successes but advances the entire project along a step-by-step timeline.



# 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](mailto:grow@impact.com) to schedule a free demo.

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