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Transforming partner channel dynamics and experience using agentic AI

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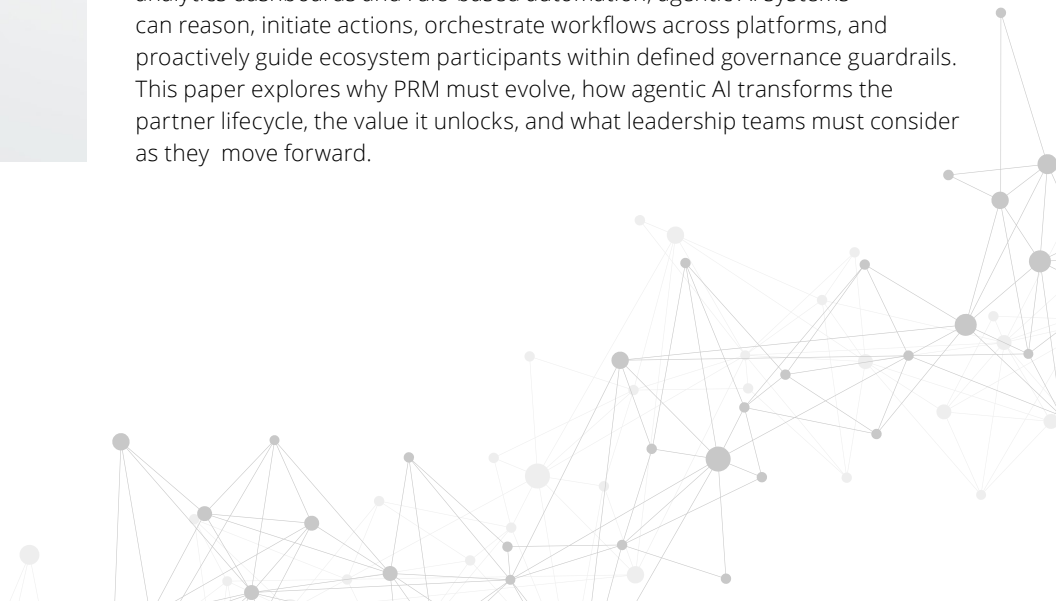


Executive summary

Partner ecosystems have become the primary engine of enterprise growth. In many industries, particularly technology and platform-led sectors, indirect channels, alliances, co-sell models, and marketplace dynamics now drive a significant share of revenue and customer acquisition. Partner relationship management (PRM), once considered an operational system supporting deal registration and program compliance, has evolved into a strategic enabler of growth.

Yet most PRM capabilities were designed for a simpler era—one characterized by linear sales motions, revenue-based tiering, and manual oversight. Today's ecosystems are multitiered, globally distributed, digitally mediated, and increasingly complex. At the same time, partner expectations have risen dramatically. They demand seamless onboarding, intelligent lead routing, real-time visibility, simplified incentives, and data-driven insights that help them grow.

Agentic AI represents a structural shift in how PRM operates. Moving beyond analytics dashboards and rule-based automation, agentic AI systems can reason, initiate actions, orchestrate workflows across platforms, and proactively guide ecosystem participants within defined governance guardrails. This paper explores why PRM must evolve, how agentic AI transforms the partner lifecycle, the value it unlocks, and what leadership teams must consider as they move forward.





The strategic imperative for PRM transformation

Ecosystems as core growth infrastructure

Enterprise growth strategies have fundamentally changed. Sales are increasingly shifting to digital channels, marketplaces account for a growing share of transactions, and non-transacting partners such as influencers and retention partners are becoming essential to the customer life cycle. Concurrently, marketing, sales, and channel organizations are converging to create unified customer experiences.

In this environment, PRM is no longer a supporting system. It is the digital backbone of ecosystem growth. It governs how firms recruit, enable, incentivize, measure, and retain partners. Organizations that treat PRM as strategic infrastructure rather than an administrative tool position themselves to scale ecosystem revenue with precision and agility.

Structural pressures driving urgency

Despite its importance, many PRM systems remain operationally constrained. They struggle to keep pace with multitier partner structures, cross-platform integrations, complex co-selling, subscription revenue models, and regulatory oversight requirements. Most legacy platforms function primarily as systems of record. They capture transactions but lack the intelligence to guide real-time decisions.

As partner ecosystems grow in scale and diversity, static processes introduce friction, and manual approvals slow deal velocity. Fragmented data obscures performance insights. Incentive structures fail to reflect actual partner behavior. Channel conflict increases when coverage rules lack transparency. In short, complexity has outpaced capability.

Why the timing is right

The transformation was once conditional on enabling several factors; no more, as these improvements have converged. AI technologies have matured beyond narrow automation into agentic systems capable of reasoning and action. Organizations now possess vast amounts of partner and customer data generated across CRM systems, marketing automation tools, marketplace platforms, and customer success tools. API-driven architecture allows interoperability across systems. Competitive pressure continues to intensify as ecosystem-led growth models widen performance gaps between leaders and laggards.

The question is no longer whether PRM must evolve. The question is how quickly organizations can transition from static administration to intelligent orchestration.





The modern PRM landscape: Trends and friction

Emerging trends are raising the bar for PRM

Partner ecosystems are becoming increasingly central to growth as buying environments grow more complex. The implication for PRM is clear: It can no longer serve primarily as an administrative layer for program management; it must evolve into a capability that helps organizations reduce friction, improve coordination, and support better decisions across the partner life cycle. That need is becoming more urgent as B2B buying itself grows harder to navigate. Recent Forrester research found that **86% of B2B purchases stall during the buying process, while 81% of buyers are dissatisfied with the provider they ultimately choose.** These findings suggest that many commercial models still struggle to deliver the clarity, speed, and confidence that buyers—and by extension ecosystem partners—now expect.¹

Meanwhile, digital expectations are accelerating. Forrester also reported that almost **95% of buyers expect to use generative AI in their decision and purchase process within the next 12 months**, signaling that intelligent, responsive, and self-service engagement models are quickly becoming part of the baseline expectation for modern commercial experiences. For PRM leaders, this raises the standard for partner-facing processes as well: Onboarding, enablement, quoting, deal support, and collaboration increasingly need to feel faster, more contextual, and more adaptive than traditional channel systems were built to provide.²

The experience gap remains material

The underlying challenge is not simply that partner ecosystems are growing; it is that the commercial infrastructure supporting them often remains too fragmented and too manual. Salesforce found that sales teams spend **70% of their time on non-selling tasks**, a figure it also described as largely unchanged versus prior years. In parallel, **86% of B2B buyers say they are more likely to purchase when companies understand their goals, yet 59% say reps do not spend enough time understanding their business challenges and objectives.** Taken together, these findings point to a familiar structural issue—internal coordination, administration, and process navigation still consume too much effort, while contextual engagement and value creation do not receive enough effort.³



These findings matter in PRM because partners often experience the consequences of that friction first. When approvals, disconnected systems, or unclear rules of engagement slow down internal teams, partners see the symptoms as delayed responses, inconsistent coverage, outdated enablement, and cumbersome program participation. In other words, the partner experience gap is often the downstream effect of broader commercial operating-model inefficiencies. The challenge is no longer just to digitize partner processes, but also to make them intelligent enough to reduce effort and improve decision quality in real time.⁴

1. https://www.forrester.com/press-newsroom/forrester-the-state-of-business-buying-2024/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

2. https://www.forrester.com/press-newsroom/forrester-the-state-of-business-buying-2024/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

3. https://www.salesforce.com/news/stories/sales-ai-statistics-2024/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

4. https://www.salesforce.com/news/stories/sales-ai-statistics-2024/?utm_source=chatgpt.com



What partners now view as table stakes

Recent public channel research also shows that partners continue to see meaningful gaps in the tools and resources provided by vendors. In Channel Futures' reporting on partner portal preferences, respondents said they would use vendor portals more if the experience improved in several practical areas: **marketing resources (32%), sales and presales tools (22%), technical training (18%), deal management (17%), and partner program guides (13%)**. These are not peripheral asks. They point to the operational core of partner experience: better guidance, easier access to relevant content, stronger enablement, and simpler support for revenue-generating motions.)⁵

The pattern is significant because it suggests that many fundamentals of partner engagement are still not consistently delivered. What once may have differentiated a partner program—usable portals, relevant content, practical enablement, and streamlined deal support—has now become table stakes. Partners increasingly expect the same clarity and ease of use from vendor ecosystems that customers expect from digital commerce and service platforms. When those basics are missing, engagement drops, and ecosystem value creation slows.⁶

Ecosystem complexity is increasing, not easing

The growing role of ecosystems in the full customer journey intensifies the strategic pressure on PRM. Canalys, citing Omdia research, reported that the **average customer now trusts seven partners across the customer journey** and encounters **28 presale moments on average** before choosing a vendor. This finding illustrates how modern buying has become distributed. Influence, validation, implementation, support, and renewal are no

longer shaped by a single vendor touchpoint but by a network of interactions across multiple ecosystem participants.⁷

That dynamic raises the cost of poor orchestration. When buyers and customers rely on multiple partners over an extended journey, gaps in coordination become more visible and more consequential. PRM, therefore, has to do more than track partner participation. It must help organizations manage complex journeys, connect data across touchpoints, and ensure that the right partners, content, and actions become activated at the right time. This point is precisely where legacy, rules-based PRM models begin to show their limits.⁸

Why agentic AI is relevant now

The growing link between AI adoption and commercial performance strengthens the case for agentic AI in PRM. Gartner reported that sellers who effectively partner with AI are **3.7 times more likely to meet quota** than those who do not. While that finding is sales-focused rather than PRM-specific, its relevance to channel ecosystems is clear: intelligent assistance, contextual recommendations, and workflow orchestration are becoming performance levers rather than just productivity enhancements.⁹

At the same time, the path forward is not simply one of automation but one of intelligent augmentation, with appropriate guardrails. The refreshed public data suggests a consistent story: buying is more complex, expectations are higher, partner-facing tools still underperform, and manual effort continues to consume too much capacity. In that environment, agentic AI has the potential to help organizations move beyond static PRM administration toward proactive ecosystem orchestration—reducing friction, improving responsiveness, and making partner engagement more relevant at scale.¹⁰



5. https://www.channelfutures.com/channel-business/partners-provide-an-earful-on-vendor-partner-portals?utm_source=chatgpt.com

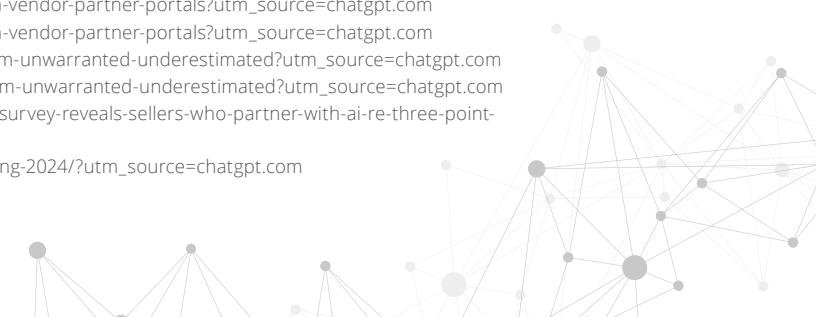
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Agentic AI across the partner life cycle

From program management to ecosystem intelligence

As partner ecosystems grow more complex and partner expectations continue to rise, traditional PRM approaches are increasingly insufficient. Static workflows, manual approvals, and fragmented data architectures were not designed to support the speed, scale, and coordination required in modern partner environments. Instead, organizations require systems that can continuously interpret ecosystem signals, initiate actions, and guide decision-making across the partner life cycle.

Agentic AI is beginning to play a transformative role. Unlike traditional automation—which executes predefined rules—agentic AI systems can reason over contextual data, recommend next-best actions, and orchestrate workflows across multiple systems while operating within defined governance guardrails. In practice, this means that partner management can shift from reactive program administration to proactive ecosystem orchestration.

Agentic AI does not replace the human relationships that define successful partner ecosystems. Rather, it augments them by reducing administrative friction, surfacing actionable insights, and ensuring that partners receive timely guidance throughout their engagement with the vendor.

Reimagining the partner journey

Agentic AI's impact becomes most visible when examined across the full partner life cycle. From onboarding and enablement to deal collaboration and renewals, intelligent systems can help reduce friction and improve coordination across ecosystem participants.

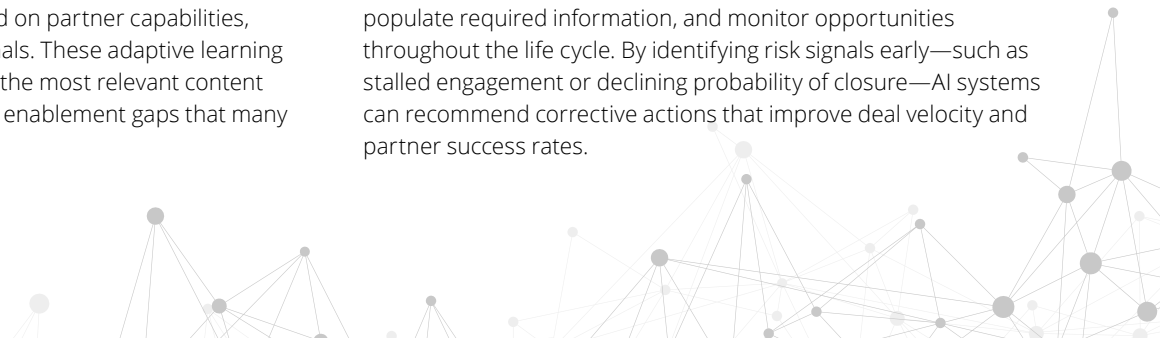
During onboarding, AI-powered document intelligence and conversational assistants can guide partners through activation steps while automatically validating required documentation. This ability reduces administrative burden and accelerates time-to-productivity. Instead of navigating static documentation or complex portal workflows, partners can receive contextual guidance tailored to their role, geography, and specialization.

Enablement processes can also become more adaptive. Rather than relying on static learning libraries, AI-driven systems can recommend personalized training pathways based on partner capabilities, product focus, and performance signals. These adaptive learning models ensure that partners receive the most relevant content at the right time, helping address the enablement gaps that many partners continue to report.



Opportunity management represents another area where agentic AI can materially improve outcomes. Predictive lead-scoring models can evaluate the likelihood of conversion based on historical deal performance and partner specialization. Intelligent routing mechanisms can then assign opportunities to the most suitable partner, reducing coverage ambiguity and increasing the probability of successful engagement.

Deal collaboration also benefits from intelligent orchestration. AI agents can assist partners with deal registration, automatically populate required information, and monitor opportunities throughout the life cycle. By identifying risk signals early—such as stalled engagement or declining probability of closure—AI systems can recommend corrective actions that improve deal velocity and partner success rates.





Intelligent incentives and performance management

Beyond deal execution, agentic AI can also modernize how organizations manage partner incentives and performance frameworks. Traditional partner tiering models often rely heavily on historical revenue thresholds. While simple to administer, these models frequently fail to capture the broader contributions partners make across the ecosystem, such as influence, technical expertise, or customer success support.

Agentic AI enables more dynamic and behavior-driven segmentation. By analyzing engagement patterns, deal quality, certification progress, and customer outcomes, AI models can cluster partners based on their actual ecosystem impact, which allows organizations to move beyond static tiers and toward adaptive partner strategies that recognize both current performance and future potential.

Similarly, incentive management can become more responsive. Instead of static reward structures that apply uniformly across the ecosystem, AI systems can recommend targeted incentives aligned with partner capabilities, market opportunities, and strategic priorities. This helps organizations encourage desired behaviors—such as entering new markets or promoting emerging solutions—while improving partner transparency around how incentives are earned.

Performance monitoring also becomes more actionable when AI is embedded within PRM platforms. Real-time analytics can continuously evaluate partner engagement levels, revenue contribution, and customer outcomes. When performance gaps emerge, AI systems can surface recommendations that help partner managers intervene earlier and more effectively.

Proactive renewal and retention management

Renewal management represents another critical area where agentic AI can deliver significant value. In subscription and consumption-

based business models, long-term growth increasingly depends on customer retention and expansion rather than one-time transactions. Partners often play a central role in these life cycle engagements, particularly in implementation, customer success, and support.

Agentic AI can help partners manage these responsibilities more effectively by identifying renewal risks early. Predictive models can analyze usage data, support activity, and engagement patterns to estimate churn probability. When risk indicators emerge, AI systems can notify partners and recommend proactive interventions, such as targeted outreach or service adjustments.

Renewal opportunities can also be prioritized based on probability and potential value, enabling partners to focus their attention where it will have the greatest impact. Contract automation capabilities further reduce friction by pre-populating renewal agreements and highlighting required adjustments, allowing partners to move more quickly from insight to action.

Together, these capabilities transform renewal management from a reactive process into a proactive growth opportunity.

Where leaders expect the greatest impact

Industry discussions increasingly highlight several areas where leaders believe agentic AI will deliver the most value across partner ecosystems. These include:

- Opportunity and pipeline intelligence
- Performance analytics and forecasting
- Personalized partner experiences
- Renewal and life cycle management

Each of these areas reflects a common theme: organizations are seeking ways to move beyond static reporting toward systems that can actively guide partner decisions and ecosystem engagement.

From insight to orchestration

Ultimately, the promise of agentic AI lies not in automating isolated tasks but in enabling a new operating model for partner ecosystems. By embedding intelligence directly within PRM workflows, organizations can reduce operational complexity while increasing responsiveness, transparency, and strategic alignment across partners.

Instead of relying on fragmented systems and manual coordination, partner ecosystems can become more adaptive and self-optimizing. Partners receive clearer guidance, partner managers gain deeper insight into ecosystem performance, and organizations can orchestrate complex partner networks with greater confidence.

In this way, agentic AI represents the next evolution of PRM—from a system that records partner activity to one that actively enables partner success.





Business value realization

Investments in modern PRM capabilities can connect to improved business outcomes, including seamless self-service experiences, a unified customer view, personalized engagement, and real-time alerts. These outcomes translate into measurable value.

By improving deal quality and personalizing interactions, partners can increase trust and conversion likelihoods, ultimately uplifting revenue. Operational efficiency improves as administrative overhead declines and workflows accelerate. Data-driven decision-

making enhances forecasting accuracy and strategic resource allocation. Experience differentiation strengthens partner loyalty and engagement.

Agentic AI amplifies these value drivers by shifting PRM from reactive reporting to proactive orchestration. Instead of identifying issues after they occur, intelligent systems anticipate and mitigate them in real time.

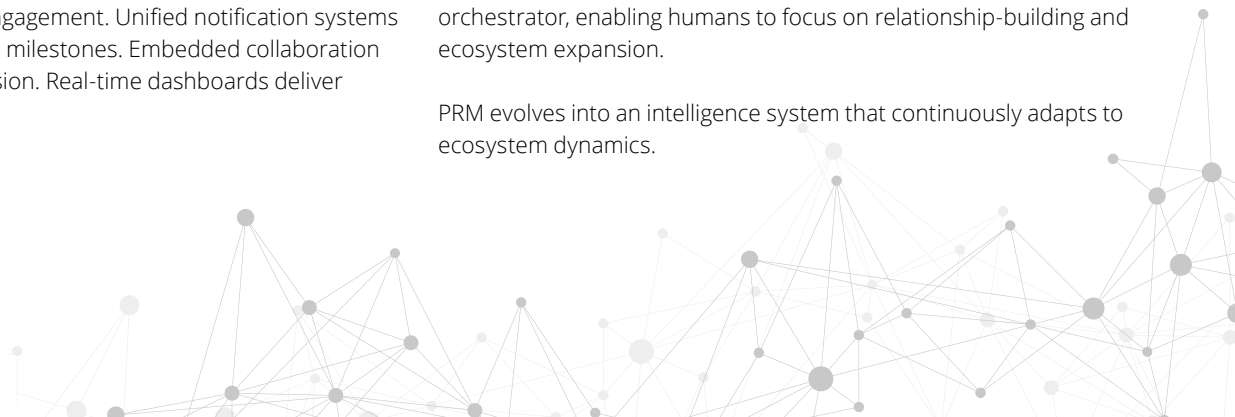


The future state of partner success

A next-generation partner experience is characterized by clarity, transparency, and intelligent guidance. Partners receive clear next-best-action recommendations aligned to their portfolio. Progressive onboarding supports early engagement. Unified notification systems provide visibility into program milestones. Embedded collaboration tools accelerate deal progression. Real-time dashboards deliver actionable business metrics.

In this future state, partners experience less administrative burden and greater strategic support. Partner managers shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive value creation. AI operates as a digital orchestrator, enabling humans to focus on relationship-building and ecosystem expansion.

PRM evolves into an intelligence system that continuously adapts to ecosystem dynamics.





Operating model and governance implications

The integration of agentic AI introduces important operating considerations. Governance must clearly define the authority boundaries of AI systems, establish human-in-the-loop controls for high-impact decisions, and implement escalation pathways where ambiguity arises. Transparency and explainability are essential to maintain trust among internal stakeholders and partners alike.

Equally important is data readiness. Agentic AI systems depend on unified partner and customer data architectures. Interoperable

APIs, scalable infrastructure, consistent taxonomies, and robust identity resolution frameworks are prerequisites. Fragmented data environments undermine intelligent orchestration and limit value realization.

Transformation, therefore, requires not only technology deployment but also foundational architectural alignment.



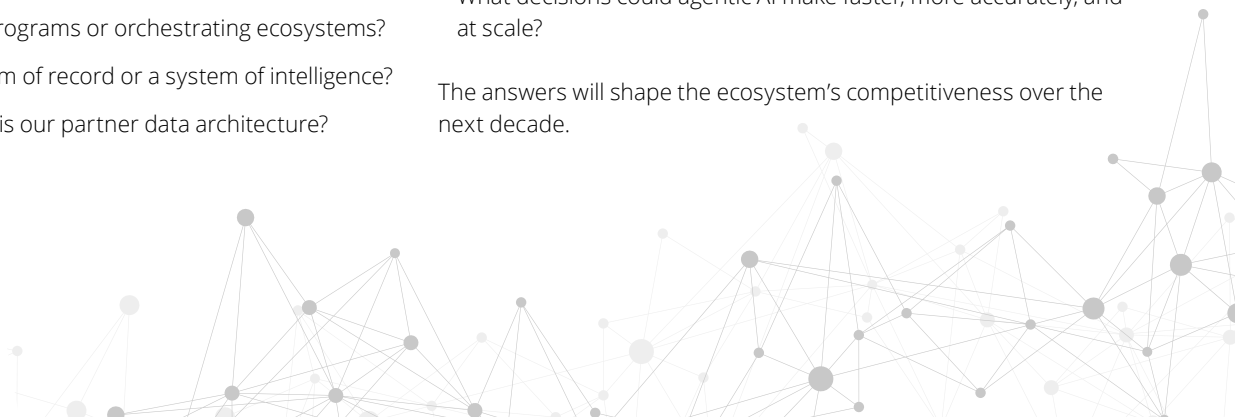
Strategic questions for leadership

As ecosystems become more complex and AI capabilities mature, leadership teams must confront several fundamental questions:

- Are we managing partner programs or orchestrating ecosystems?
- Is our PRM platform a system of record or a system of intelligence?
- How unified and accessible is our partner data architecture?

- Where does friction persist in the partner life cycle?
- What decisions could agentic AI make faster, more accurately, and at scale?

The answers will shape the ecosystem's competitiveness over the next decade.





Conclusion: From administration to intelligent orchestration

Agentic AI marks a transition from static workflows to adaptive ecosystem management. It does not replace human relationships; it strengthens them by removing friction and providing clarity. It does not eliminate oversight; it enhances decision precision through real-time intelligence. It does not simplify ecosystems by reducing complexity; it orchestrates complexity intelligently.

By 2030, the most successful enterprises will not differentiate themselves by the number of partners in their network, but by the intelligence, transparency, and responsiveness of their ecosystems.

The future of PRM is not incremental automation. It is intelligent orchestration. It is predictive engagement. It is agentic.

The organizations that act decisively today will define the ecosystem advantage of tomorrow.

Contact us

Adam Messer

Principal, Deloitte Consulting LLP
Sales Transformation
amesser@deloitte.com

Iffat Reutter

Senior Manager, Deloitte Consulting LLP
Sales Transformation
ireutter@deloitte.com

Deloitte.

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