Fluincy

# ECOSYSTEM ENABLEMENT

# PICTURE THIS:

A seller sets up a meeting with a customerusually after the customer has done extensive research, engaged their sphere of influence, and has finally decided to reach out. 50% of sales time is wasted on unproductive prospecting, and 65% of B2B decision makers want a digital buying experience and many are willing to spend $500K without even talking to somebody in sales, through an online purchase. The seller is feeling fortunate to actually be talking to a customer.

The seller has the customer meeting, does some discovery, and then continues down the funnel to negotiating a purchase.

Some amount of time later somebody from the partner team reaches out to the seller to say “hey, that customer that you talked to is mapped to one of our partners, can you let the customer know”.

The seller may or may not let the customer know based on the fragility of the deal, or the amount of friction it might cause in closing it.

There may or may not be a partner attach and the sales cycle, deal size, and retention may all have been negatively effected because of it.

Notice how the seller, in preparation for the customer conversation did not go searching for an ideal partner to co-sell with. They likely don’t even know what to look for, even if they were interested enough in their ecosystem to do the research.

This workflow has got to change. The very nature of sales and marketing is shifting dramatically and sales enablement will need change to meet the needs of evolving sales organizations.

Since 2017 the Sales Enablement adoption grew 343%. There's no surprise as to why. Sales enablement programs have had an incredible impact on revenue organizations.

76% of organizations see an increase in sales between 6-20% when they have a sales enablement program.

60% of best-in-class organizations have formal competency in sales enablement.

Teams with a sales enablement strategy are 52% more likely to have a sales process that is tightly aligned with the buyers journey

84% of sales reps hit their quotas when their employer incorporates a best in class sales enablement strategy

There are a number of definitions of sales enablement, but Forrester defined it as a "strategic ongoing process that equips client facing employees with the ability to systematically have a valuable conversation with the right set of customer stakeholders at each stage of the problem solving lifecycle to optimize the ROI of the selling system". Foundational to all definitions of sales enablement is ensuring that sales teams have the right content and knowledge to have effective conversations with customers.

Hallmarks of traditional sales enablement programs are centered on content. Connecting to content, presenting content, providing content for pitching, and measuring the effectiveness of the content. Sales enablement tools, then, provided a single source of truth for all customer facing content and how to use it. When sales enablement programs are at their best they attempt to close the alignment gap between sales and marketing.

Sales enablement is a critical component to a highly effective sales team. But in the decade of ecosystems, it has become apparent to those who are paying attention, that the alignment gap between sales and marketing can really never be closed, even by the best enablement.

Organizations that embrace the mindset of platform + ecosystem and begin adopting the structures and strategies that align with that mindset will see the greatest economic returns.

In the same way that platforms + ecosystems are replacing or refining traditional sales and marketing, so too does sales enablement need to be replaced or refined. Embracing the ecosystem mindset, with all of its nuance and required agility and orchestration requires also, a shift in mindset around what customer facing roles should know and do, and how ecosystem enablement professionals help them get there.

In order to understand how to transform sales enablement to ecosystem enablement it's important to underscore the principles of ecosystem.

Historically, the core question at the center of channel, alliances, partnerships, or whatever companies call them has been "what are you going to do for me"? The question is fundamentally flawed in a number of ways, but the good news is that this perspective is shifting, and partner professionals across industries are starting to ask "What can I do for you" as the first step in approaching new partnerships. This shift in mindset has a number of impacts in all aspects of the foundations of ecosystem.

## Co-Innovation

This is step one to developing an orchestrated ecosystem. How do organizations find ways to co-innovate? How do they find ways to fill in the gaps in each other's offerings? How do they work together to solve for recognized needs in the customer buying cycle?

## Sphere of Influence

Once organizations have decided on what their solution will be and how they fit into each other's ecosystems, then they have to leverage each other's influence in order to help customers discover this new solution. Influence is the new marketing. Ecosystem participants should want to let their partners into their spheres of influence.

## Co-Selling

Sellers have traditionally only been responsible for their solution, and finding customers who fit particular buyer personas. Ecosystem selling seeks out conversations for the ask of listening, and then brings their partners into the conversation to co-sell.

## Value Realization

Integrated products are better together. Revenue teams that leverage their ecosystems see larger deal sizes, shorter sales cycles, higher close rates, and higher retention rates.

## Network Effects

Highly effective ecosystems use relationship based network effects to drive monetization, expand customer bases, and become sticker.

## Trust and Sustainability

Ecosystems exist to be of service. They create and leverage trust and provide a win/win/win for partners and customers. The nature of this trust then drives additional innovation and the ecosystem flywheel spins faster and faster.This shift in mindset from "what are you doing for me" to "what can I do for you" also has massive consequences on how to execute partner, and ultimately, sales enablement. In the same way that sales enablement relies on a single source of truth, partner enablement has, historically, been centered on activities and assets that require an individual to seek out learning usually through some kind of content management or partner portal.

The “what are you doing for me” mindset causes most partner enablement efforts to be external facing, without giving a ton of thought to how ecosystems are being enabled internally. The result is a multitude of disparate portals that an individual has to seek out in order to find the right material. Typically, only 17% of marketing budgets are spent on partner facing materials, and 90% of B2B sellers don’t use enablement materials because they’re irrelevant, outdated, and difficult to find and customize. 72% of IT service partners aren’t able to connect partner offerings to buyer needs and challenges, and 65% claim that the quality of partner content is either poor or impossible to find. 42% of sales reps say they don’t have enough information before engaging a customer.

This isn’t good enough in the new ecosystem business model where top sellers must learn how to combine and design individualized solutions using platform and ecosystem. By 2030 $70 trillion of global revenues will flow through ecosystems. Ecosystem Platform business models in which partners and communities create network effects by co-innovating around a platform or platform features will require a new kind of sales mindset. Sales cultures and sales enablement must change to help sellers embrace this new mindset.

85% of sales leaders believe that sales teams will need to be skilled at customer problem analysis and solution selling. They’ll need to learn how to do networked account planning, and communication and relationship building will become critical skills. However, only 55% of those leaders believe that their teams are currently equipped to make this transition.

Ecosystem training should aim to create these critical skills that sales leaders indicate are necessary to obtain to be effective sellers in the coming ecosystem economy. These are skills. They cannot be taught with a video followed by a quiz, or addressed with a one pager. Ecosystem skills enablement will require a blended learning approach. Blended learning looks at the learning outcomes first, and then identifies which training objective to match to the outcome. If the objective is simply for the learner, in this case, the seller, to be aware of what the new thing is highlighting differences between identifying an ICP vs. Customer Problem Analysis would be enough. But just knowing the difference, does not help the seller to becomeproficient at doing so. So a webinar, podcast, or job aid isn’t enough to help them change their behavior.

Blended learning incorporates knowledge transfer with skill practice, application of new behaviors, performance assessment and just-in-time performance support. Learning involves not just remembering information, but manipulating, combining, and innovating with the information. Sellers will need to be provided opportunities to role play, to experiment, to observe these new skills, and then the safety to try them with their customers while being provided with coaching and feedback. KPIs will need to be built around these skills, and sellers will need to monitored and measured on their application of them.

Building an ecosystem enablement program around blended learning takes into account that encoding, or moving information from short term memory to long term memory, should be done, as much as possible in the same environment or scenarios where sellers will need to retrieve the information. This is called in-context learning. In-context learning is especially important for adult learners.

Much of corporate training, which also includes to a certain extent seller training, rarely takes into account the needs of adult learners. This is mostly due to the need for scale, primarily around compliance. But this compliance mindset around scaled learning has mostly eroded the practice of developing high quality learning content which puts learners at the center of the strategy and works out.

Adult learners are primarily self directed. They bring their own experiences to the table. And not just the experiences about the content, their past learning experiences. They are motivated by change, and are eager to learn anything that helps them to solve problems that improve their lives.

**So as you are building out your blended learning approach to ecosystem enablement, be thinking about the Knowles 4 Principles of Adult Learning.**

### 1. Adults learn best when they are involved in the planning of their learning and development

Find ways to involve your sellers, or a cohort of your sellers in the planning of their learning. Conduct a needs assessment and ask them (in a way that gets you unbiased answers) what they are currently doing (around the skill), what they wish they understood or were doing, andperhaps how they prefer to learn it. It doesn't do anybody much good to record and store a video series in a Content Management System, if what they really want is a Slack group where they can collaborate to share stories and wins and ask questions.

### 2. Adults learn best when they are able to act on and reflect on the skill they're trying to improve.

Providing actionable, and reasonable KPIs for which sellers can strive towards is the most impactful way to engage them with a change in behavior. Ensuring that these KPIs are not frivolous, and that they meaningfully impact a seller's day to day performance is critical to not frustrate the seller. Reflecting on these KPIs frequently with a coach or mentor will help the seller to embrace the new skill through accountability.

### 3. Adults learn best when they are challenged by problems, rather than merely hearing solutions.

This is a good thing for anybody creating an ecosystem enablement program, because, in truth, we don't really have many solutions to offer anyway. Everything about changing seller behavior from product selling to ecosystem selling is a new frontier. The best thing to do is to create an agile ecosystem enablement program that takes into account seller feedback, highlights seller innovations, and changes as quickly as their environments change. Organizing in this way will allow the sellers to take ownership of this problem, innovate new solutions, and create learning pathways that may not be apparent in any other way.

### 4. Adults learn when the subject is relevant or is something they care about.

Motivation is tricky. Sellers will find the learning relevant if executive leadership has stated clearly and with certainty that the organization is going to be primarily focused on Ecosystem as a revenue stream. When ecosystem feeds and surrounds the sales funnel, learning how to sell in the ecosystem directly impacts the sellers livelihood. Executive buy-in, company culture, and agile enablement should all help to overcome a lack of motivation.

Once you've developed your blended learning strategy to help sellers to change their selling behavior and embrace new skills, what then is to be done about the vast set of information about partners themselves? Enablement will have to become so much more than a repositoryof content. It will have to become cross functional. It will have to become Ecosystem.

# ENABLEMENT

In the past (or perhaps the present) the “what can my partners do for me” mindset kept partner enablement entirely separate from sales enablement, and kept each partner’s enablement separate from the others. The ecosystem mindset aims to consolidate partner enablement into a single source of truth, alongside and in collaboration with sales enablement. This consolidation of partner learning assets is critical to the success of ecosystem enablement, and is proof positive for partners that an organization is committed to elevating their joint value proposition. An organization that commits to enabling their sellers on ecosystem offerings and positioning has clearly embraced ecosystem as a primary revenue driver.

Ecosystem enablement will take a number of successful functions of sales enablement. After all, sales enablement was extremely successful. It doesn’t make any sense to scrap it, so ecosystem enablement will embrace what works, and evolve what no longer does.

Sales enablement works so well, because sellers were only required to understand and position their product. Sales enablement provided a foundation of understanding, and then was able to scaffold additional information on top of those existing motions. But ecosystem enablement cannot simply be a repository for ecosystem content. Sales enablement can work in that way because positioning products isn’t necessarily dynamic. Ecosystem offerings, are by their very nature, complex and evergreen. Because of this, ecosystem enablement will need to be dynamic in its delivery. It cannot only provide access to a static playbook, or battle card, or one-pager. Robust ecosystems will have multiple players that could provide a solution to a complex customer problem. No solution will be one size fits all, and every customer will likely benefit from a different set of partners. Not only that but the joint value proposition of one partner to another will potentially change when you add in additional partners, making for a multi-tenant value proposition. Static content in a repository will not be enough to enable sellers in this scenario. Because of this dynamism, it's not fair or feasible to ask an individual seller to be well versed on every partner in an ecosystem.

The first step is consolidating individual partner information into four key areas. The reason for doing this has roots in a couple of learning theory best practices. The first is consistency. Consistency is useful because it prevents too much mental energy being spent on little changes. Current partner enablement materials can be wide ranging in their consistency,making it too difficult for the seller to find what they need, and then be able to articulate it to the customer. The second is that it helps a seller to form a story and help them to be able to relay that story to the customer. Stories are a critical component to memory, particularly when we are allowed to connect to or create our own. Leveraging a simple consistent framework for partner enablement information allows the seller to learn quickly what they need to know. This framework consists of the following four vital pieces of information:

### 1. What the product or platform is

A seller or CSM doesn't need to know the in depth workings of a partner's product or platform. They need to know at a basic level what it is, what it's supposed to do, and who should use it.

### 2. What is the Joint Value Proposition

This is the kicker. Sellers need to know how the products make each other better because of their partnership. This needs to be in its simplest terms. JVP addresses which gaps in their own product the partner fills and then helps them articulate it.

### 3. Co-Selling Questions

This is a list of questions the seller could use in a customer conversation to determine if this solution is a good fit for a customers problem. It's something they can use while on a customer call.

### 4. Partner Enthusiasm

Partner enthusiasm will help the seller to understand how committed the partner is to building and following through on solutions with them. In here should be links to case studies, colleague feedback, and any incentives that the seller may receive from the partner.

But even with a simple framework, expecting that a seller will memorize these four parts for all of the partners in your ecosystem is an impossible ask. So this information needs to be just in time performance support. Specific partner information needs to be in an ecosystem enablement system and is ready to be accessed when a seller needs it.

The next question you may be asking yourself is, “how will sellers know when they need it”?

This is where an Ecosystem enablement system goes from a product, to a platform.

As impossible it is for sellers to remember all of the information about partnerships, it’s just as impossible to expect them to know which partners to seek information about in preparation for a customer meeting, particularly if it could be more than one partner, and engaging in multitenant value proposition.

Ecosystem enablement platforms will need to leverage AI or event based learning triggers to help sellers get the right partner information at the right time, preferably, just before they engage a customer. Ecosystem enablement platforms will need to think first about seller tech stack integrations so that partner learnings will be apart of their everyday workflows, and help them to engage their ecosystems through the ever widening ecosystem tech stack.

In this new paradigm of Ecosystem Enablement the seller’s new motion would be something like this:

The seller has setup a meeting with a customer through networked account planning and is now in the ecosystem mindset. They want to make sure they going to be curious, ask the right questions, and help to craft a solution for the customer using their ecosystem.

Thirty minutes before the customer meeting the Ecosystem Enablement platform notifies the seller that their upcoming meeting has a few partners that may be a good fit for based on previous interactions and account mapping.

The seller clicks or taps on the notification and it brings them into the learning platform where they quickly review the four parts of the partner learning framework to prepare themselves for the upcoming meeting. Armed with the co-selling questions they enter into the meeting with curiosity and ecosystem top of mind.

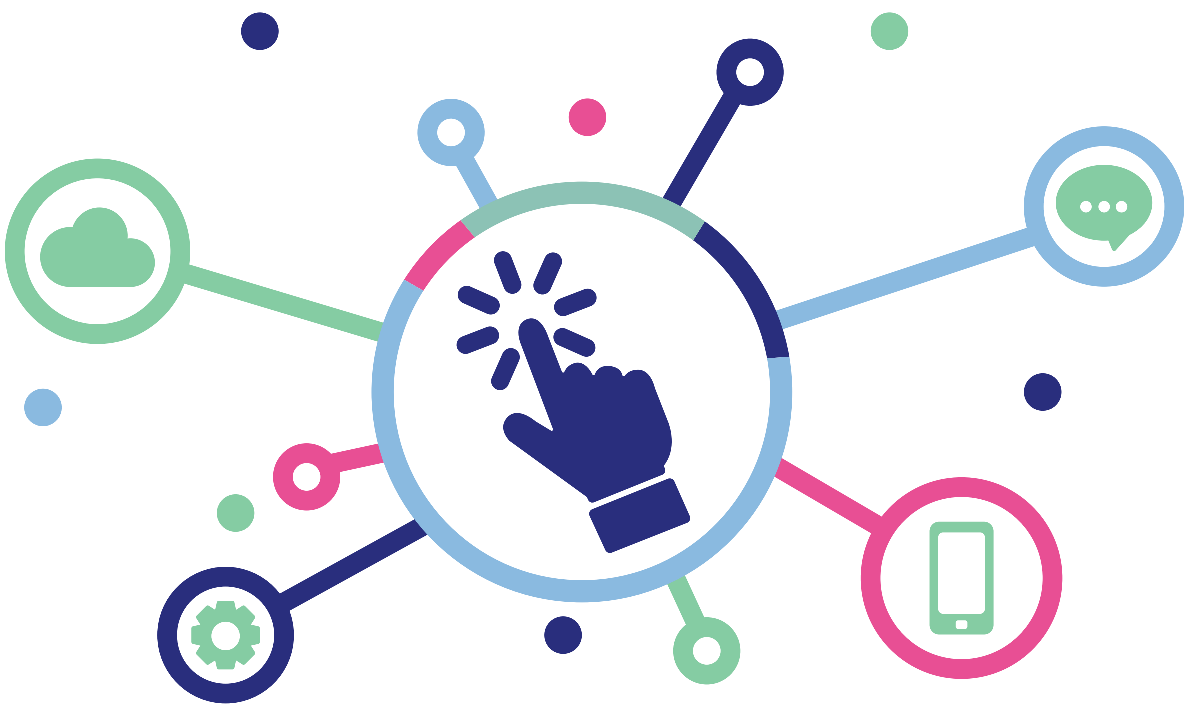
During the meeting the seller is using their skills of customer problem analysis and is able to tie their top of mind ecosystem learning to craft a solution. They ask co-selling questions from the ecosystem enablement platform and determine that one or more partners may be a good fit.

They present the joint (or multi) value proposition to the customer and ask they can have a follow up call with their partner. The customer agrees.

At the end of the call the seller uses the ecosystem enablement platform to reach out to an AE at their partner company through account based networking, and hops in the partner portal to register a deal. Finally, they use the integration with a partner engagement platform to send relevant materials as a follow up to the customer and to setup the co-sale meeting.

Imagine the kind of impact this workflow could have on revenues, ecosystem, innovation, and reciprocity, especially when it is deployed at scale. Businesses will be more connected, and more beneficial to each other than ever before. Complex customer problems will be solved through innovation and collaboration, rather than brute force, or half baked execution.

Ecosystems are the future of business, and Ecosystem Enablement will be a critical pillar to the success of that future.



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