

### **Eight Best Practices for Alliance Marketing**

1. Select preferred partners for fewer, yet deeper initiatives.
2. Joint marketing is a key component, not an afterthought.
3. Educate and sell the relationship internally.
4. Follow a clearly defined execution framework.
5. Create solution messaging and avoid technology-based messages.
6. Bring references, unique benefits, and leads to joint solution initiatives.
7. Build integrated, sustained programs to generate market traction.
8. Proactively propose partnerships and campaign ideas, do not simply react.

Crimson recently conducted extensive research into best practices in alliances and joint marketing. We collected and analyzed secondary research from the major industry analysts, trade publications and many other sources. We also interviewed more than 60 individuals from a variety of hardware vendors, software vendors, global SIs and channel resellers in both the U.S. and EMEA. ([See partial list of vendors interviewed](#)).

Based on this research, we uncovered eight best practices for managing alliances and for joint marketing. Whether or not your organization has established processes, you can use these findings to improve or validate your existing practices.

### ***1. Select preferred partners for fewer, yet deeper initiatives.***

Often, vendors are unwilling to choose a preferred partner for a specific solution because they wish to remain agnostic. However, this approach precludes a strong joint solution with any one partner. If a vendor is willing to choose a partner for a specific solution, it can credibly create a unique offering that will differentiate its solution in the market.

This does not mean that vendors should not work with other partners on an opportunistic basis – they should. Rather, vendors should concentrate corporate investments on the most strategic partner relationships while limiting resources for other partner opportunities.

### ***2. Joint marketing should be a key component of any alliance relationship, not an afterthought.***

If at all possible, vendors should build joint marketing commitments into the alliance contract. If the partners make a commitment up front, they can concentrate on how to best spend the dollars. If they neglect to do so, both partners will have to go to the well for funding each time one of them proposes a joint marketing activity and the alliance will quickly fray as both parties find themselves having to continually “resell” the alliance internally.

### ***3. Educate and sell the relationship internally.***

Often, partners announce an alliance without spelling out the specifics of the arrangement to all stakeholders. Yet, the greater the stakeholders' understanding of the value of the alliance, the more they can contribute to its success. ([See more detail](#)).

Partners should update all interested parties about the progress of the alliance and the associated marketing activities on a quarterly basis, at a minimum. The best companies constantly sell the relationship internally. By reminding stakeholders of the value of the relationship, more will climb on the bandwagon, which will keep the relationship moving forward.

#### **4. Follow a clearly defined execution framework.**

An execution framework helps vendors define the steps to take in choosing a partner, building an alliance, marketing it jointly, and measuring progress along the way.

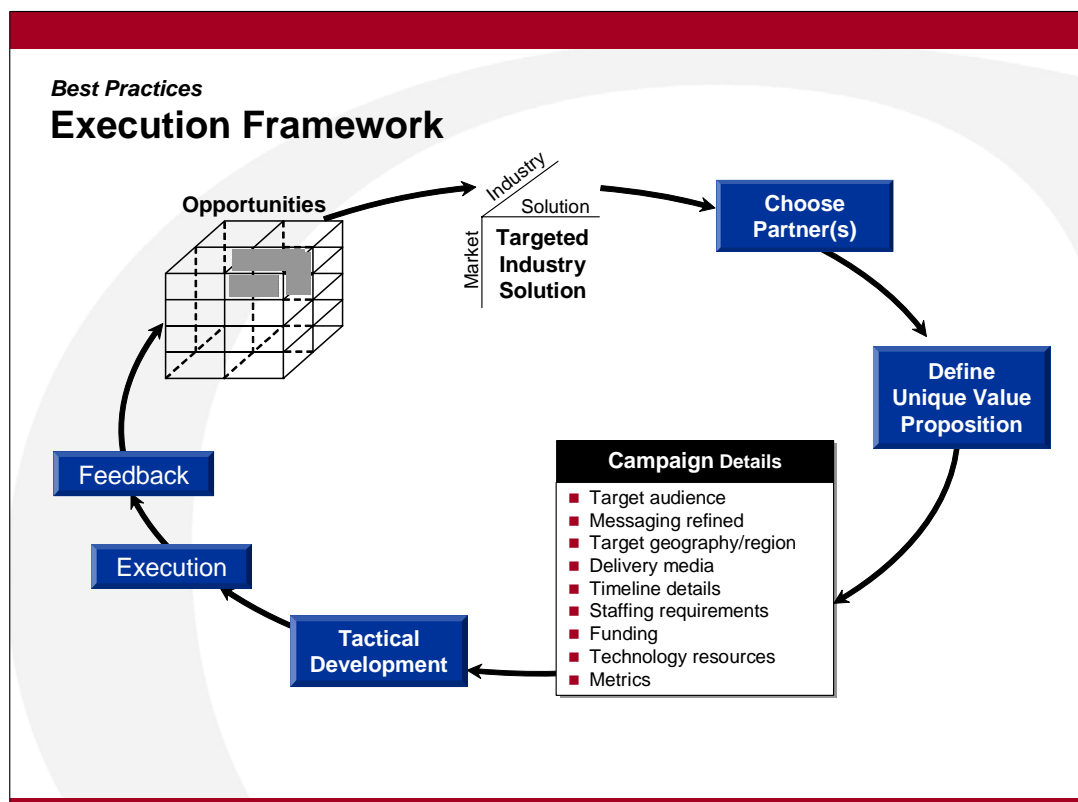


Figure 1 summarizes approaches to executing an alliance partnership used by a variety of top vendors. ([See more detail on the execution framework](#)).

#### **5. Create solution messaging for the joint offering and avoid technology-based messages.**

Today's market no longer tolerates technology-based messages. Corporate buyers of all types desire, and are receiving, solution-based messaging from alliances. In fact, an alliance is usually necessary to create a complete solution. Buyers benefit from a single message about a comprehensive solution that addresses a key business problem, supported in a credible manner.

## **6. *Bring references, unique product benefits, and leads to joint solution initiatives.***

Alliance partners want more than funding and brand recognition. The solution messaging should emphasize each vendor's unique value-add to the solution (experience, performance, references, and so on). Supporting messaging should link product benefits to the specific business problem being solved. Most importantly, bring leads. Without leads the alliance will not survive.

## **7. *Build integrated, sustained programs to generate market traction.***

Alliance marketing programs cannot be one-offs. They must be part of an integrated set of activities. Some of the worst practices we uncovered were reactive responses to opportunities that were not part of an integrated campaign; for example, attending a tradeshow here, placing an ad there, and so on.

Some of the most effective alliances were the longest-running. As any VP of Alliances will tell you, effective alliances reap rewards over long periods of time. We found that it is highly unusual for an alliance to bear fruit in less than nine months while success is more likely to occur in 18 or more months.

## **8. *Proactively propose partnerships and campaign ideas, do not simply react to opportunities partners suggest.***

The best practice with the highest impact is to be proactive. The best companies bring complete, well-constructed concepts to their prospective partners. They line up messages, creative materials, events and resources in advance, and then ask their partners to respond. This approach provides two distinct benefits. First, the program meets internal success criteria. Second, this approach makes it very easy for the partner to "just say yes."

## ***In Conclusion***

For an alliance to work, the two parties must work closely together to create business. Follow these best practices, be patient, manage the alliance closely, and you will be rewarded.

## ***About the Author***

*By Glenn Gow. Mr. Gow founded Crimson fourteen years ago. He has consulted on strategic marketing issues for some of the most successful companies in the world including Adobe, BEA, Cisco, HP, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Oracle, Seagate, Sprint, Sun and Symantec, as well as dozens of emerging companies. Under his leadership, Crimson achieved "Inc. 500" status when Crimson became one of the fastest growing companies in the United States.*