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WILL A.I. EVER REPLACE PARTNER MANAGERS?

A TOOL OR A CRUTCH?

THOUGHTS FROM LEADING GLOBAL PARTNER PROFESSIONALS

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C.E.O. A

Look, we are at the beginning of the end. A recent study at the World Economic Forum said 1/3 of all jobs will be automated by 2030, so why would partner manager jobs be any different? We want faster/repeatable/more efficient channel results, and we are going to leverage AI to it's fullest extent to achieve that. Our program is going to run on autopilot.

C.E.O. B

Our partner program runs on trust, and AI will never be able to quantify that. Sure, we're going to enhance and enable our partner team with the amazing benefits AI brings to the table, but it's a tool, not a crutch. Partner experience is crucial to the sustainability and success of our initiative, and our partners are people afterall.

Let the debate begin.

We are now at the beginning of what many perceive as an uncertain time in corporate history. Just last week big tech announced that AI's integration into their orgs will lead to 50% company-wide layoffs.

It's a scary time for many.

So will partner programs, and the people who run them, be subjected to the same treatment as this new technology emerges and takes increased control?

I asked the global channel community that same question on LinkedIn yesterday, and it was a hot topic that drew attention from multiple sectors from all around the world.

So much so, I was compelled to take their comments and turn them into this eBook.

Big thank you to all the contributors here.

Your valuable insights to the channel & ecosystem community about this controversial subject cannot be overstated

Vince Menzione

CEO, Ultimate Partner™ |
Podcast Host, Ultimate Guide
to Partnering® | Sparking the
Ecosystem

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Perhaps for high volume transactional business. Partnerships are relationships are built on trust, nurtured and grown over time.

There will be aspects that require human interaction at least in the foreseeable future!

Where I do see automation playing a strong role is in matching partners and sellers to opportunities.

We already see some of this today from some of the marketplace and co-selling platforms Tackle.io, PartnerTap, Clazar and WorkSpan.

Nicole D'Andrea

UX Engineering & User-Centered Design | NJ Licensed Real Estate Professional | IT Consultant

"

I think that's a really bad idea. We're going to develop ourselves right out of the picture. 😟

We need to leave certain things alone. It can't replace human emotion - empathy is the key factor in the UX world.

I suppose we could click an empathy button when our kids are sick and we want to leave work early. 😟

No conflict resolution, lack of creativity, no collaboration. If you replace leadership, then you might as well replace the whole team. Yikes!

Jason Yarborough

Relationship Builder. Partnerships Propagandist. Adventurer. ☠ Burn the Ships ☠

"

It's definitely an assist & replace kind of thing.

Love the use of AI for partner managers/leaders to automate time consuming tasks that free's them up to focus on GTM initiatives, enabling, and building relationships.

Bring on the AI so I can get closer to my partners.

Jen Waltz

Dynamic Senior Executive in Global Sales, Strategic Partnerships, and Channel Alliances | Proven Leader

"

This is such a fantastic topic, and you're raising some critical points about AI's evolving role in channel management. AI's potential is undeniable in augmenting the work of partner managers. Still, as you've rightly concluded, it's not yet a complete replacement—and may never fully be in some critical regions.

Here are my thoughts: I see the triple A's as outcomes: AUGMENTATION, AUTOMATION, ASSISTANCE.

AI is an incredible asset, but it thrives when used to complement, not replace, human efforts. The challenge is staying ahead of the curve by continuously learning to integrate AI into our workflows while nurturing the human connections that remain central to long-term success.

I look forward to seeing how others in the community handle this evolution in their channel strategies!

Vaughn Mordecai

Chief Revenue Officer @ Mindmatrix | Partnerships Guru | SaaS Sales Leader | Partnership Tech Evangelist | Recovering Market Researcher

"

I wouldn't count it out. Will it happen in the next 5 years? Nope. BUT...

1. You know all those layoffs in the Enterprise IT companies? I've heard many of them say that the spend they're clearing out is being aimed at driving more sophisticated AI solutions.

2. The buyer journey is pushing the traditional sales person further and further down the path. 28 touchpoints and 80% of decisions made before a salesperson is typically engaged. AI will shift and control that even further.

3. As the tech buyer becomes younger, their demand for 'relationship' could make way for a touchless and frictionless experience.

So, does this eliminate the CAM. Probably not. BUT, they better come up to speed with new expectations quickly, or they - personally - will go the way of the dodo bird.

Kent Henderson

VP WW Channel / Builder of GTMs, Programs and Orgs from Scratch

"

Strategic thinking. Hmmmm.

How would any partner genuinely create new demand for you absent strategic thinking?

I go back to every technological breakthrough that threatened to wipe out jobs...and has actually created new ones.

Elena Zapolyanskaya

Building b2b partner networks from scratch | founder @ PARTNER2B

"

I'm sure, it won't replace partner managers.

Even in direct sales, we still need SDRs along with hundreds of tools available.

Partnerships need more personalization on a deep level with unique value proposition, more precise partner research, and customized partner programs sometimes.

Yes, AI should be used as a tool to increase productivity.

No, it will never substitute a human partnerships manager

Alex Richards

VP Partnerships @ Glassbox 🤝 | Growth & Revenue Leader | Founder, Board Member & Investor | Ex-Apple, WPP, Medallia & SurveyMonkey

"

Streamline process, reduce tasks, help with data and platform connectivity - Yes with AI but it still has to be managed.

Relationships... Nope that is people through and through.

Eric Pohlig

Director - GSI Alliances & Partnerships

> "

Will buying ever become logical? How does AI take into consideration independent variables?

Removing the human component from any relationship negates the relationship.

Would you trust your organization to make complex decisions to a machine (who is only as good as the information that is inputted)?

Yes, man builds tools to simplify work. I may use a hammer with my right hand and you may use your left.

Would you let a machine dictate which is correct? Who gets to write the rules?

If machines determine relationships, what is your value?

Anna Palianskaya

Helping companies find technology and channel b2b partners | b2b Partnerships @PARTNER2B | Business Development | ex-PandaDoc

"

AI can handle a lot of partner management tasks, but don't forget it's not perfect.

We still need human oversight to make sure AI is used ethically and responsibly.

Antonio Caridad

Partnerships, Partner Operations, GTM Strategy, Partner Programs, Ecosystem-Led Growth

"

You cannot replace relationship building and trust with AI.

And even if we have AI talking to AI, that's not relationship building, that's just logic talking to logic, and depending on coding and training, each AI will find and fight for the best outcome based on its logic.

That's not a relationship.

It makes me think of the robots in the Alien movies, that have a prime directive and can "create relationships" until that goes against their directive, and then it all goes haywire.

Steve Hellin

Partnership Leader | Business Development, Strategic Alliances

"

I had to answer "Need to know more" to the poll because of how the question was worded: "Will A.I. ever replace..."

"Ever" could be a long time from now. I've seen enough sci-fi movies to easily imagine a world without channel partner managers.

This might also be the world without direct sales managers.

Do I think channel reps are going away in the next 5-10 years? No.

Do I think 1 rep should be able to do the work of 5 by leveraging AI tools? Yes.

Allen Smolinski

Strategy | Programs | Operations | Risk Management

"

AI to AI would still need a human to configure and manage.

AI would need access into another platform to come to conclusions and vice versa.

This is far to complex to think PAMs, TAMs and so on would go away altogether.

It would need global alignment to how things would be done and we all know that does not exist.

Will Taylor

I make partnerships profitable with RevOps, sales signals & tactical playbooks • Advisor • Buyer alignment, signal selling, and partnerships

"

AI and automation will only ever empower and enable partner people with the right information at the right time, not replace them.

Replace a lot of their tasks? Yes.

I'm particularly excited for AI that analyses everything to show us leading and lagging indicators.

Mihai Grigorescu

Strategic Alliances, Channels & Partnerships Ecosystems Executive | Sales | Leadership | Fractional Advisor | ex-Accenture | ex-Oracle

"

I wouldn't say replace alliance manager, but rather AI will be used to ease the partner selection, onboarding and management process.

1. Partner selection, AI will help identifying a list of partners based on your IPP.

2. Partner onboarding, chatbot and automated workflows (usually within a PRM) to help seamlessly activate partners.

3. Partner mgmt. Will be mostly out of PRMs using data collected from various systems and help the PAMs understand, prioritize and course correct their partner accounts accordingly.

That said, I believe AI will be a core building block in any successful and efficient partner program
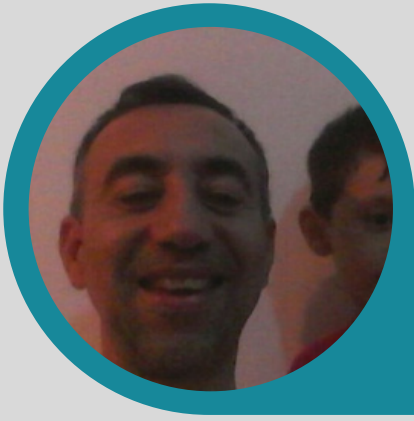
Amirhosein Akhlaghian

Teacher of the English course in high school - Iran

"

There is more evidence by an AI conclusion to answer your question as a human source.

For this conclusion the analysis of your words and the behaviour of your treatment through the discussion by AI compare by so many standard algorithms then the decision of how to answer is occurring.

Then this answer should not determine as the base for that question.

Ben Smith

Leader | Certified Scrum Master | SAP | SuccessFactors | Agile Evangelist | Jira Jedi | Freelancer | Remote or Hybrid

"

Interesting that you reference Klarna.

From what I hear of their customer experience, the people they have essentially follow a script in any case.

Yes, this offers a simplified and probably easy to automate customer experience.

No, it does not offer a good customer experience especially not for edge cases, where they offer little or no real support for the customer.

For example, a friend in the legal profession has picked up a lot of cases of consumers needing to sue vendors who don't engage with consumers who don't fit the automated process.

Having a process doesn't absolve the vendor from obeying the law, and consumers shouldn't need to have to sue to get their rights upheld.

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