EXECUTIVE BRIEF

PARTNER MARKETING ACTIVATION PLAYBOOK



How to turn strategic partnerships into customer relevance, field activation and measurable growth.

Ghassan Lababidi | 20+ years across Cisco, OpenText, Databricks and Koantek

The partnership is not the strategy. A signed agreement creates potential. Activation creates outcomes.

THE PARTNER ACTIVATION SYSTEM

1 RELEVANCE	2 NARRATIVE	3 ALIGNMENT	4 FIELD	5 DEMAND	6 MEASURE
Shared opportunity, customer problem and urgency	Why together, for whom, around which outcomes	Sponsors, roles, governance and investment	Target accounts, seller play, proof, enablement	Campaigns, ABM, events, marketplace, MDF	Market signals, adoption, pipeline, outcomes

In the full playbook: *the decision, the owner and the working template for each of the six stages.*

EXECUTIVE SELF-AUDIT: IS YOUR PARTNERSHIP RUNNING ON ANNOUNCEMENTS?

	FAILURE MODE	FLAG IT IF THIS IS TRUE
☐	Logo-first planning	The story would collapse if the two company logos were removed.
☐	Activity substitution	Launches, assets and events are easier to report than seller adoption or pipeline.
☐	Field disconnect	A frontline seller would struggle to explain when the partnership is relevant and what to do next.
☐	Organizational fragmentation	Alliances, Marketing, Product, Sales and Enablement define success differently.
☐	Portfolio dilution	Strategic partners get roughly the same attention and funding as lower-value ones.

More than two flagged? Your partnership is running on announcements, not economics. The full playbook maps each failure mode to its fix.

WHY THIS PLAYBOOK

DATABRICKS	OPENTEXT	KOANTEK
Architected the global MDF framework and co-created Built on Databricks.	Led partner marketing for the SMB cybersecurity business. 2023 CRN Channel Chief.	Ran alliances, marketing and enablement as one engine.

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MDF INVESTMENT DISCIPLINE: FUND COMMITMENT, NOT HABIT

	LOWER EXECUTION COMMITMENT	HIGHER EXECUTION COMMITMENT
HIGH STRATEGIC VALUE	**DEVELOP** Invest in readiness and proof. Release funds against milestones.	**ACCELERATE** Co-invest in measurable joint programs with accountable field owners.
LOW STRATEGIC VALUE	**DECLINE** Do not fund. Revisit when relevance or capability changes.	**SELECTIVE** Fund only with compelling near-term economics.

In the full playbook: *the five tests, scored 0 to 2 with a hard stop, that place any program on this matrix, plus the scoring sheet.*

THE 90-DAY PLAY

01 DIAGNOSE	02 DESIGN	03 ACTIVATE
DAYS 1 TO 30	DAYS 31 TO 60	DAYS 61 TO 90
Validate the shared opportunity, economics, proof and field readiness.	Agree narrative, use cases, owners, seller play and investment mix.	Enable a field cohort, launch one or two motions, set governance.

In the full playbook: *the gate at each phase (proceed, reshape or stop) and the template for each.*

THE PARTNER ACTIVATION SCORECARD

Eight dimensions, each scored 1 to 5. Any dimension scoring 1 or 2 needs intervention, whatever the total.

BAND	TOTAL	WHAT IT MEANS
SCALE	32 to 40	Operating system is strong. Scale carefully.
REFINE	24 to 31	Good foundation. Fix weak dimensions before broadening spend.
FIX FIRST	Below 24	Repair the operating system before adding campaigns or MDF.

INSIDE THE FULL PLAYBOOK

30-PLUS PAGES	SIX TEMPLATES	MDF TOOLKIT
Six stages, the eight scorecard dimensions and the three-way scoring exercise.	Opportunity brief, GTM canvas, account map, seller play, MDF plan, executive scorecard.	Five tests, decision rule, attribution definitions and a worked example.

Before you fund another tactic, define the job marketing needs to do.

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Partner marketing is the activation layer

Partner marketing is not a campaign function. It is the discipline that turns partnership strategy into market relevance, seller action and customer demand.

FOUR JOBS OF PARTNER MARKETING

MARKETING JOB	WHAT IT DOES	TYPICAL TACTICS	WHAT TO MEASURE
CREATE THE MARKET	Make the joint opportunity understandable and relevant.	Executive POV, research, PR, analyst engagement, category content.	Target-account engagement, share of voice, executive engagement.
CREATE PROOF	Reduce customer and seller risk.	Customer stories, demos, benchmarks, technical validation, lighthouse references.	Proof created, reference usage, opportunity progression.
CREATE PIPELINE	Turn relevance into conversations and opportunities.	ABM, workshops, assessments, events, campaigns, seller-led outreach.	Meetings, engaged accounts, qualified pipeline, progression.
CREATE SCALE	Make the motion repeatable across sellers, regions and partners.	Seller plays, enablement, partner kits, MDF, automation, localization.	Seller adoption, repeatability, partner-led pipeline, efficiency.

CHOOSE THE TACTIC BY THE PROBLEM

Nobody knows the partnership exists	CREATE THE MARKET
Customers hesitate or ask for proof	CREATE PROOF
Accounts engage but do not progress	CREATE PIPELINE
The motion works, but cannot repeat or scale	CREATE SCALE

Choose tactics by the job to be done, not by what is easiest to fund, copy or launch.

GO DEEPER

Put the full Partner Marketing Activation Playbook to work

The Executive Brief introduces the framework. The full 30-plus-page playbook goes deeper into the operating system, diagnostic tools, MDF decision frameworks, scorecards, the 90-day activation plan and six working templates.

Explore advisory engagements and the Ecosystem GTM Audit

ghassanlababidi.com/audit

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