

Synergy in action

Activating Your Ecosystem Mix

Not every ecosystem channel fits every company. The secret to ecosystem-fueled growth (EFG) is matching the right motion to your goals, your resources, and-most importantly-your ideal customer. This guide will help you figure out which motions to prioritize, when to use them, and how to get started.

Step 1: Start with Your "Who"

Fundamentally, figuring out which of the myriad ecosystem channels you can use comes down to what fits your current circumstances. And, like most marketing, you want to start with who.

- Who is the ideal customer you need to bring in to fill your gaps?
- Where do they work, where do they get their info, and how do they like to buy?
- Are there gatekeepers, influencers, or communities you need to tap?

Examples: If you're selling benefits to enterprise Human Resources, you often need to go through a broker, and you need to know their renewal cycle. So a customer referral program probably won't help you. But, obviously an outside sales program or maybe even an influencer program might work.

Or if you want to sell through a customer referral program, keep in mind that your activation rate will be ~10%, depending on your industry. So if you don't have many customers, you should consider something else here as well.



Step 2: Assess Your Ecosystem Options

Let's look at the primary types of ecosystem programs, quickly define them, and look at what circumstances make them a good (or bad) fit for your company. You can also get recommendations for your top 3 options depending on your goals and deal size using our [Mix Matching Agent](#).

Reseller Partnerships

Resellers can directly resell your product or service, or they can be value-added resellers (VARs) that provide services on top. We're going to lump things like distributors and wholesalers in here - basically any partner that can directly sell your product or service to the next step in the supply chain or to the customer.

Focusing on reseller partners that specialize in your industry and have their own sales teams, these partners are:



Good for companies that already have robust product-market fit

You also need good resources to train and enable resellers. They can help expand your reach and potentially go after ancillary markets that you do not have access to.



Bad for companies that have a price that's already outside your ICP's budget

i.e. have a high margin, as resellers need to mark prices up and/or pay commissions to make their business models work. Also won't work for you if you're creating a category or selling something completely new and different.

Technology Partnerships

Whether you're actively building an integration with a similarly-sized company or you're a great fit for anyone building on AWS, you probably have a technology partnership or two kicking around somewhere. These can be vital to your growth - some companies have built huge businesses through technology partnerships. They can also be a waste of time and resources, however, if you can't activate, enable, and track the partnership.



Good for companies that are heavily ecosystem-dependent

(i.e., depend on integrations to work) and have the resources to build and maintain the integration. Also great for companies that are a real value-add to their partner; you'll get much better support from your technology partner if you can directly impact their revenue. You don't want to be just another partner in their ecosystem. You want to be **the** partner. And you need to make it as easy as possible for them to sell, or bundle, your solution.



Bad for companies that struggle to prove additive value to their partner

Technology partnerships are especially hard for companies that are "nice to have" rather than "need to have."

Implementation & Service Partnerships

Implementation & service partners can be agencies, individuals, or other companies that help your customer implement and use your product. They usually charge via a contract or hourly, and sometimes will resell your products as well.



Good for companies with complex products

Companies that benefit from 3rd party implementation, maintenance, and upkeep. Also great for companies that are part of a "stack" and require complex workflows and integrations.



Bad for stand-alone products

Products that require very little setup or integration. There's just not much there for your partners to build a business out of.

Customer Referrals

In the universe of ecosystem-fueled growth, customer referrals have the highest octane. If you hear about a product or service from a happy user of it, aren't you more likely to check it out and buy it? Of course you are. It helps you validate your decision to purchase.



Good for companies with a large, happy customer base

Companies that can activate and track a fully-fledged customer marketing and referral program. Also good for companies that work best when one customer brings in another - remember Zoom during the pandemic? My retired parents even had a subscription.



Bad for companies with small customer bases

When you only see activation rates of ~10%, you can put in a lot of work creating a program, only to see very limited results. It's also bad for companies with unhappy customers, but that probably goes without saying.

Affiliate Programs

At its core, an affiliate program provides a unique affiliate link to folks who will talk about your product and then get paid when someone buys through the link. Affiliates traditionally use a content marketing strategy, but they can also use paid media and organic social media to generate traffic. You often hear affiliate marketing via podcast (e.g., "Any time you shop on Amazon.com, go to...").

Disclosure: SoundGTM was originally built as a B2B affiliate platform, and you can still use us that way.



Good for companies with transactional, online sales

Also good for companies that have a rabid fan base, like HubSpot did in its early days. Your affiliates need to be able to get the word out, so fans with review sites or blogs work well.



Bad for companies without robust tracking mechanisms

Or companies that can be viewed as commodities. Affiliate fraud can be rampant, so many companies use agencies to run the program. Affiliate programs won't work if you can't afford to monitor well.

Influencer Marketing

B2C is light years ahead of B2B on influencer marketing (but if you're at a B2C company, I'm not sure why and how you're still reading!). Still, B2B companies are looking at ways to activate influencers, especially in certain spaces, like sales. At its core, influencer marketing is a lot like affiliate marketing, but influencers sometimes get paid for traffic/likes/subscribes on top of sales.



Good for companies in noisy industries

Influencers can help you break through and get attention.



Bad for companies in industries without influencers (duh!)

You also need a robust tracking platform, or you won't be able to prove ROI.

Outsourced Sales

This one means exactly what it sounds like: outsourcing some or all of your sales process to another company or to freelancers. Most commonly, this is done with SDRs and appointment setters, but one of our awesome customers provides Sales-as-a-Service to do this full funnel. At this point, we should probably also include outsourcing to AI SDRs in "outsourced sales," since you have to support that similarly to outsourced humans.



Good for any company with an enterprise sales motion

And annual contract value (ACV) high enough to sustain the costs. You also need robust enablement structure so the outsourced company sells like you.



Bad for companies with highly transactional offerings

And low ACVs. Also won't work if you can't keep up with enablement and accountability - not all outsourced sales vendors are awesome. And AI can jump the shark if you're not watching - one of our custom GPTs once started writing poetry instead of LinkedIn DMs. With "Roses are Red" instead of ROI, buyers, confused, simply wave goodbye. (See what I did there?)

Step 3: Choose Your First Motion

So, you've got your Ideal Customer Profile dialed in, your pipeline gap circled in red, and you're staring at the ecosystem menu like it's a sushi conveyor belt. Here's the truth: If you try to eat everything at once, you'll end up with a stomachache and a mess. The secret? Pick one motion and nail it before you even think about seconds. (Which means you probably only want to pick one of the three our [Mix Matching Agent](#) will recommend!)

How to Pick Your Starter Motion (Without Regret)

1 Go Where the Path Is Shortest

Ask yourself: Which motion gets me to revenue, pipeline, or proof-of-concept the fastest?

- Got a big, loyal customer base? Referrals are your low-hanging fruit.
- Tons of integration requests? Tech partnerships might be your fast lane.
- Selling something complex? Implementation or service partners could be your shortcut.

2 Match Your Motion to Your Muscle

Be honest: Do you have the resources to support a reseller program, or will you just ghost your partners after onboarding?

- If you're a lean team, start with what you can actually enable and track.
- If you've got a marketing machine, maybe affiliates or influencers are your jam.

3 Follow the "One-Rep Rule"

If you can't explain the motion in one sentence to a sales rep (or your CEO) and get a nod, it's too complicated for your first try.

- "We'll pay customers \$500 for every closed referral." (Clear.)
- "We're building a three-tiered, co-marketing, revenue-share, account-mapping bonanza..." (Nope.)

4 Look for Early Adopters

Who's already raising their hand?

- If customers are already sending you leads, formalize a referral program.
- If an agency keeps asking about partnership, maybe it's time to pilot a service motion.

5 Don't Get Distracted by "Cool"

Influencer and affiliate programs sound sexy (wait a second..do affiliate programs actually sound sexy?), but if your buyers don't hang out on TikTok or read niche blogs, it's a waste of energy.

- Pick what fits your ICP and your product, not what's trending on LinkedIn.

A Quick Gut-Check Before You Commit

- Can you name 3 partners or customers who'd say "yes" to this motion tomorrow?
- Do you have a way to track, enable, and pay them without inventing a new spreadsheet?
- Will your team actually support this, or are you signing up for a solo act?

If you can't answer "yes" to all three, keep narrowing. The right motion is the one you can launch, support, and scale—not the one that sounds best in a board deck.

Pro Tip: Start Small, Win Fast

Pilot with a handful of partners or customers. Get feedback, tweak the process, and celebrate the first win like you just landed a Fortune 500 account. Momentum is your best friend—so build it one motion at a time.

Bottom line: Don't try to boil the ocean. Pick one motion, make it awesome, and let your early wins pave the way for everything else.

Step 4: Activate the Motion

For each motion, follow this quick-start checklist - for more detailed information and a customized to-do list for what you'll need to start one of these programs, check out our [Launch Plan Agent](#).

Reseller Partnerships

- Identify top potential resellers in your space.
- Prepare tailored sales plays and enablement materials.
- Set up a clear, auditable tracking and compensation process.
- Plan for regular check-ins and co-selling support.

Technology Partnerships

- Map shared ICP and value proposition.
- Build integration demos and joint messaging.
- Align on co-marketing and account mapping.
- Set up tracking for joint pipeline and wins.

Implementation & Service Partnerships

- Identify agencies or service providers already working with your customers.
- Create onboarding and enablement flows for partners.
- Provide case studies and workflow guides.
- Track partner-driven implementations and customer satisfaction.

Customer Referrals

- Make it easy: simple referral links, in-app widgets, or forms.
- Communicate the "what's in it for them" clearly.
- Remind and motivate regularly.
- Celebrate and recognize successful referrers.

Affiliate Programs

- Recruit affiliates with audiences matching your ICP.
- Provide unique links and regular content updates.
- Monitor for fraud and optimize payouts.
- Share performance dashboards.

Influencer Marketing

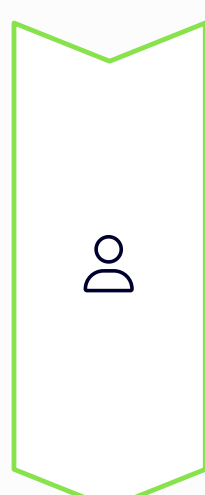
- Identify relevant influencers in your industry.
- Offer clear value and creative collaboration.
- Track engagement and conversions.
- Feature influencers in your marketing.

Outsourced Sales

- Vet and onboard sales partners or agencies.
- Provide the same enablement as your internal team.
- Share real-time dashboards and feedback.
- Hold regular pipeline reviews.

Common Pitfalls When Activating Your Ecosystem Mix (and How to Avoid Them)

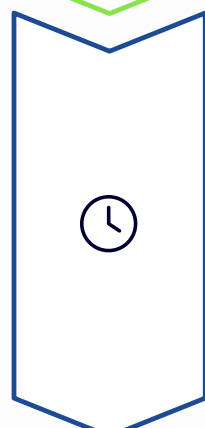
Activating your ecosystem mix is where vision meets reality-and where many programs stumble. Here are the most frequent and costly mistakes, with practical tips to avoid them:



Treating All Partners the Same

The Pitfall: Onboarding every partner with the same process, resources, and expectations-regardless of their potential or fit-wastes resources and dilutes impact.

The Fix: Rank and prioritize partners based on strategic fit, opportunity size, and alignment with your ICP and goals. Even if you don't publicly tier your partners, do it internally so you know where to focus your enablement and support.



Expecting Immediate Results

The Pitfall: Assuming new motions or partners will deliver pipeline or revenue right away leads to disappointment and premature abandonment.

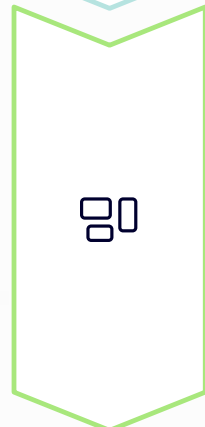
The Fix: Set realistic timelines-partnerships are a long game. Invest early in building trust, demonstrating value, and supporting partners before expecting returns.



Neglecting Partner Onboarding and Training

The Pitfall: Failing to invest in tailored onboarding and ongoing training leaves partners confused, unsupported, and disengaged.

The Fix: Develop motion-specific onboarding flows and enablement resources. Regularly train and update partners, and make it easy for them to access support.



Lack of Process Consistency and Standardization

The Pitfall: Each partner uses their own approach, leading to inconsistent customer experiences, missed opportunities, and unreliable pipeline forecasts.

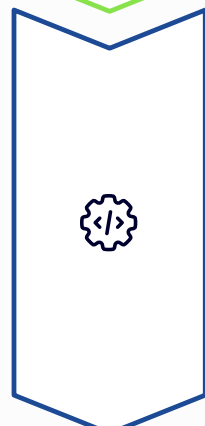
The Fix: Create a standardized playbook for each motion, with clear steps and best practices. Use a universal CRM or tracking system to ensure everyone follows the same process.



Misalignment Between Partner and Company Goals

The Pitfall: Launching motions or recruiting partners without ensuring their goals, incentives, and target customers align with yours results in wasted effort and friction.

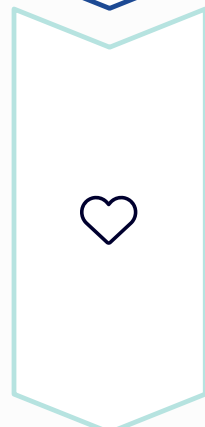
The Fix: Align on objectives, roles, and success metrics up front. Collaborate closely with partners and internal teams (product, marketing, sales) to ensure everyone is pulling in the same direction.



Making Programs Too Complex, Too Soon

The Pitfall: Over-engineering your partner program with tiers, tools, and requirements when you only have a handful of partners creates confusion and slows momentum.

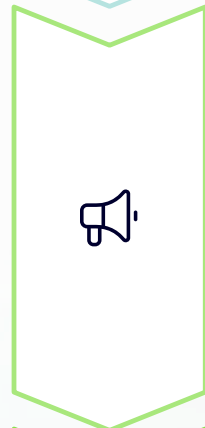
The Fix: Start simple. Launch with basic processes and resources, and add complexity only as your program grows and matures.



Ignoring Relationship-Building

The Pitfall: Treating partnerships as purely transactional or expecting partners to do all the work leads to disengagement and missed opportunities.

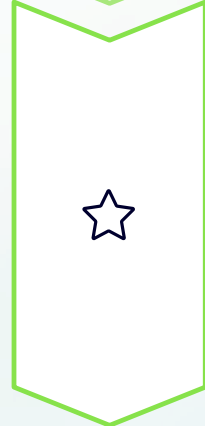
The Fix: Invest time in genuine relationship-building. Be proactive, human, and supportive-people want to work with those they trust and enjoy.



Failing to Demonstrate and Communicate Value

The Pitfall: Assuming partners will see the value of your program or product without proactive communication and proof.

The Fix: Regularly share wins, case studies, and clear value propositions. Show partners how working with you benefits them and their customers.



Focusing on "Cool" Motions or Brands Over Strategic Fit

The Pitfall: Chasing trendy motions (e.g., influencer or affiliate) or brands without confirming they fit your ICP, product, or business model wastes resources.

The Fix: Choose motions based on strategic alignment, customer needs, and your ability to support and scale them-not just because they're popular.

Bottom Line:

Activating your ecosystem mix is about focus, alignment, and disciplined execution. By avoiding these pitfalls, you'll set your program up for sustainable, scalable success-rather than a cycle of churn and disappointment.

Tips & Tricks for Early Success

Launching a new ecosystem motion is as much art as science. These strategies will help you avoid false starts, accelerate partner engagement, and scale what works.



Pilot Before You Scale

Start with a small group of high-potential partners or a single motion. Use this pilot to test messaging, processes, and enablement. Gather feedback, iterate quickly, and only scale once you've proven the basics work.



Co-Create Value Propositions

Don't assume you know what resonates. Involve your first partners in shaping messaging, offers, and incentives. The more ownership they feel, the more motivated they'll be to activate. You can use our [Value Prop Builder](#) to get a draft going.



Make Onboarding Frictionless

Remove barriers to entry. Provide clear step-by-step guides, quick-start kits, and a single point of contact. Use checklists and "first 30 days" plans to help partners ramp up fast. You can also get these lists from our [Launch Plan Agent](#).



Celebrate Early Wins Publicly

Even small successes deserve fanfare. Recognize partners for first deals, creative campaigns, or helpful feedback. Public praise (in newsletters, social, or community calls) boosts motivation and creates FOMO among other partners.



Automate the Mundane

Use simple tools (like Zapier or CRM workflows) to automate deal registration, lead routing, and status updates. Automation frees up your team to focus on enablement and relationship-building.



Over-Communicate in the First 90 Days

Send regular updates, reminders, and encouragement. Share what's working, highlight quick wins, and keep the energy high. Partners are most likely to disengage early if they feel ignored or confused.



Build a Resource Hub

Centralize all guides, templates, FAQs, and enablement content in one easily accessible place. Keep it updated and highlight new or popular resources in your partner communications. #Protip - you can use SoundGTM as your hub if you're a customer!



Stay Flexible and Ready to Pivot

If a motion or partner type isn't delivering, don't be afraid to pause, tweak, or shift focus. Ecosystem growth is iterative-the best programs evolve based on real data and feedback.

Remember: Early momentum is everything. The more you invest in partner experience, communication, and learning, the faster you'll see results-and the easier it will be to scale your ecosystem mix with confidence.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Choosing and activating the right ecosystem motion is the fastest way to see results from EFG. Start with your ICP, pick one motion, and focus on enablement and tracking. Use the resources here to get started-and when you're ready, move on to building your tracking and enablement systems.

This guide is your practical playbook for picking and launching ecosystem motions that actually work. For tracking, enablement, and measurement, see the next guide in this series: [Tracking, Enablement & Metrics: Making Ecosystem-Fueled Growth Work.](#)

Resources



[Ecosystem Mix Fit Agent](#)

Quick assessment to help you choose your best-fit motion.



[Launch Plan Agent](#)

Custom, downloadable project plans for each motion, tailored to your needs.



[Joint Value Proposition Builder](#)

When you've identified a great partner and want to build a value prop for co-messaging

About SoundGTM

We're painfully familiar with the challenges tech companies and workers face today because we've been in your shoes. Normal revenue channels and business development models are bone dry and the law of diminishing returns feels like it kicked in ages ago. Businesses and individuals are both staring down uncertain futures.

We believe that growth-stage companies deserve more control over their own destiny and shouldn't have to struggle with spreadsheets, finance, and administrivia just to drive referrals. That's why we created SoundGTM.

SoundGTM is the only referral platform built specifically for growth-stage businesses to expand their reach, fill their sales funnels, and drive net new revenue. And it's all without the time, expense, and headache of traditional referral programs.

www.soundgtm.com