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# The 10 Most Innovative Partner Co-Marketing Tactics

by Jonathan Silber, March 4, 2013

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Channel Company Marketing Professionals Need Help**

Many partners fail to develop communications strategies, market positions, or effective brands because of limited marketing prowess. They require heavy handholding from B2B partner marketers when it comes to perfecting their traditional marketing efforts and when adapting new digital marketing techniques.

### **Partner Marketers Are Investing In Innovation**

The top-performing partner marketers are putting increased emphasis on innovative strategies and new technologies to help their partners become more avant-garde marketers. Some of the cutting-edge activities that partner marketers will employ in 2013 include social media marketing, mobile marketing, and partner-featured video case studies.



## The 10 Most Innovative Partner Co-Marketing Tactics

Becoming A Trusted Marketing Advisor Requires Focus And Follow-Through

by [Jonathan Silber](#)  
with [Tim Harmon](#) and Tyler Otte

### WHY READ THIS REPORT

B2B partner marketers are tasked with improving the marketing prowess of their partner communities, but progress has been slow to date. With the rise of social media and avant-garde digital marketing platforms, partner marketers have never been more perplexed as to how to get their partners into shape. And with more partner marketers investing in the channel than ever before, it's not those that invest the most, but rather those that concentrate on the marketing tactics that deliver the highest return on investment that will reap the loyalty of their partners.

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In preparation for this report, Forrester interviewed leading technology marketing vendors for their insights on co-marketing tactics. Forrester also used data from two surveys conducted in the last 18 months.

### Related Research Documents

[Paving The Way To Partner Loyalty Maturity](#)  
December 4, 2012

[Tech Channels Have A Long Way To Go Toward Adding Marketing Value](#)  
May 24, 2012



## THE TIME FOR MARKETING ENABLEMENT IS NIGH

Marketing often represents a channel partner's greatest challenge. Consequently, many partners fail to develop communications strategies, market positions, or effective brands. But can you blame them? The average channel company's marketing professional works alone — or as part of a very small team — and is therefore forced to wear many hats. He or she is surrounded by much larger sales and technical teams and reports into management that often dismisses the value of marketing. To make matters worse, she is often more junior than her peers, is still trying to get her head around traditional marketing (much less, newer digital marketing) techniques and tools, and is conflicted as to what to do with limited budget and time. It should come as no surprise that 75% of channel companies report that they are not highly skilled in marketing.<sup>1</sup> While some partner marketers simply ignore their partners having limited marketing capabilities/capacity, others well understand the realities channel companies' marketing professionals face every day, and they work hard to address their marketing deficiencies.

Forrester interviewed the top-performing B2B partner marketers in the tech industry today — Cisco, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Juniper Networks, Microsoft, and VMware — to identify the leading and most innovative co-marketing tactics being utilized. Their practices provide insight into partner marketers' most fruitful channel-led demand gen activities, near-term channel marketing investments, and strategies for maximizing the ROI channel partners realize from their marketing efforts. Partner marketers' tactics range from the traditional — events, incentive programs — to the modern — social media, mobile. Forrester's interactions with the top partner marketers highlight the leading co-marketing activities of 2012 and the 10 areas where partner marketers should focus their efforts in 2013.

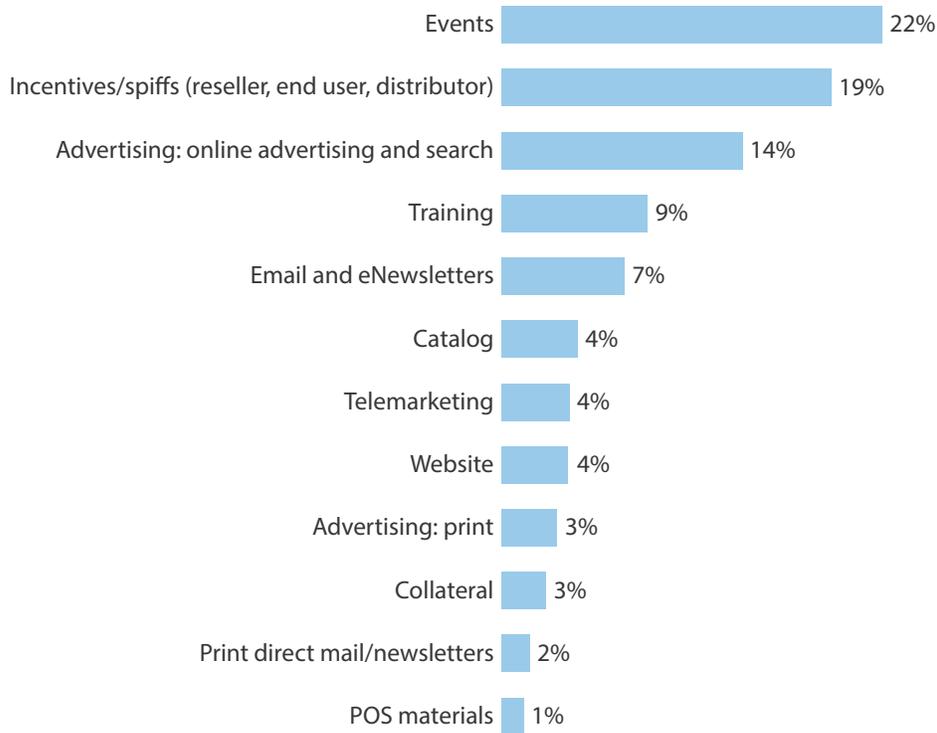
## The Leading Co-Marketing Activities Of 2012

Forrester partnered with a leading channel marketing company, Hawkeye Channel, to get an inside view into the most prevalent co-marketing activities in today's market development fund (MDF) mix.<sup>2</sup> Hawkeye Channel's aggregated breakdown of the most popular co-marketing activities employed by partners in 2012 reveals that (see Figure 1):

- **Events remain a channel partner darling.** Events represent the No. 1 most popular co-marketing activity of 2012. Events take many forms — from trade shows to lunch-and-learns to webinars to seminars to roundtables — but partner marketers are becoming more restrictive on the type of events they reimburse via MDF. Many partner marketers are improving their reporting processes and requiring enhanced proof of performance because of their need to demonstrate actual impact on revenue and demand generation. To the dismay of many channel partners and their customers, gone are the days of sponsored sporting events. This explains why events comprised 22% of activities, but only 13% of MDF claims paid after the fact.

- **Incentives endure as a channel partner staple.** Partner marketers have long maintained financial incentives and spiffs in their arsenals for incentivizing partners to meet (or exceed) sales goals and to keep them top of mind. In chorus, channel partners have eaten them up without fail. However, as detailed in Forrester’s “Reinforcing Channel Partner Bonds In The Era Of The Cloud” report, Forrester believes that in the next 12 to 18 months, partner marketers will retrofit incentive programs, which are currently designed to incentivize just revenue contribution, to provide more innovative, long-term strategies that incentivize both consistent revenue contribution and partner loyalty. The new innovative incentive models will combine performance metrics with loyalty qualifiers.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1** Events And Incentives Top The Channel Partner Co-Marketing Mix



Base: 17,952 projects representing more than \$178 million for partners of multinational/global high-tech companies

Source: hawkeye Channel, July 2012, activity for channelMDF program January – June 2012

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

## The 10 Most Innovative Co-Marketing Strategies And Activities Planned For 2013

The channel partner co-marketing mix is not slated to change dramatically in 2013, but the top-performing partner marketers are putting increased emphasis on innovative strategies and new technologies to help their partners become more avant-garde marketers. But because the vast majority of channel partners do not possess the marketing expertise or resources required to roll out compelling campaigns for — let alone, traditional co-marketing activities (without guidance) — it is even more critical for partner marketers to offer simplified campaign models for digital co-marketing activities (with heavy handholding), based on partners' target audience, segment, and most importantly level of marketing expertise. Some of the innovative strategies and activities that partner marketers will employ in the near term to fuel marketing efforts include:

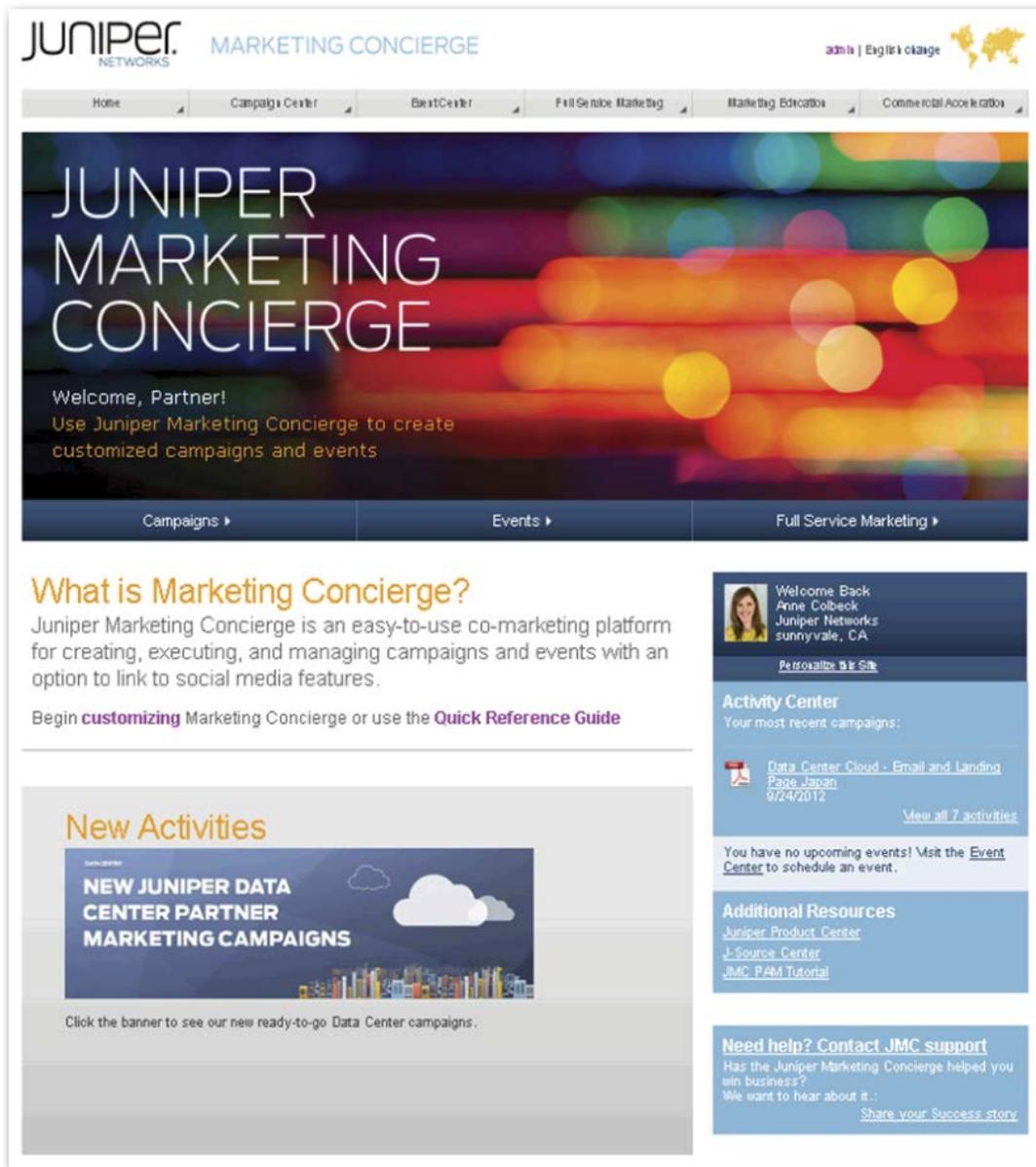
1. **Customer life-cycle relationship and marketing certification programs.** Most tech vendors certify their channel partners on technical competencies. But what has come to matter as much (or more) to customers is the relationship aspect, i.e., their overall experience and satisfaction with the partner, from consideration through production support. As an example, Cisco does this implicitly by factoring customer satisfaction into the metrics it uses to advance partners in its tier structure. Marketing competency is another important aspect. Tech vendors should consider adding a marketing certification for those partners that invest and succeed in the marketing and renewal/expansion processes, and reward channel partners for completing specific certifications with additional financial incentives. Using Cisco as an example again, it launched its Cisco Partner Marketing Professional (CPMP) program — an in-depth B2B marketing training curriculum designed for both partner marketing and Cisco expertise — in November 2012 and has now opened it up globally to 2,000 partner marketing roles. But because customers do not care “how well they’re marketed to,” partner marketers must amalgamate customer satisfaction scoring with marketing efficiency and then factor that integrated metric into their partner lead referral programs.
2. **Virtual marketing consultant.** A virtual marketing consultant provides “white glove” marketing concierge services that help partners take advantage of a tech vendor’s co-marketing offerings. It should comprise four core attributes: free, easy to use, multilingual, and available 24x7. Further, it can be offered either as a template or as a custom offering. Although Juniper Networks rolled out its Marketing Concierge slightly after its peers, its partner community has indicated that it was well worth the wait (see Figure 2). Now available in eight languages, it has experienced a total of 1,327 unique logins year to date, and interest has been strongest around social media marketing and mobile marketing. Partner marketers would be wise to roll out the service in an “invitation-only” fashion to ensure that it scales effectively.
3. **Social media marketing.** Forty-percent of tech vendors plan to increase their social media spending on channel enablement in 2012 (see Figure 3).<sup>4</sup> Now is the right time for the rest of the industry to catch up. Forrester believes that 55% to 65% of channel partners are already involved in social media marketing — the cornerstones being Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube — and

more than half of those channel partners currently have partnerships with social media agencies. Moreover, in 2013, channel partners are expected to make investments in social services, create more content, and hire social media employees/interns. Through InnoVAR, Juniper's monthly series of short marketing thought leadership webcasts, partners gain access to training on social media campaigns, including how to run an effective LinkedIn campaign (a partner favorite). Another example: Asigra has woven social marketing into the fabric of its incentive program and now compensates partners based on the number of times they blog, tweet, or retweet Asigra-related content.

4. **Channel partner events focused exclusively on marketing enablement.** Partner marketers should enable their channel partners to become better marketers by enhancing their marketing skills with events centered on marketing fundamentals, planning, execution, and metrics. Although a live event can be prohibitively expensive, a more cost-conscious alternative can offer the same experience via an online experience. Cisco, with its Marketing Velocity event, offers the only live global partner event in the industry focused exclusively on marketing enablement, and its partners have handsomely rewarded it for its commitment.<sup>5</sup> It complements its live event with a webcast series, with topics including social media communications best practices, optimized audience targeting, marketing automation, lead nurturing, and marketing message/position differentiation.
5. **Online events.** Online events have gotten a foothold in the marketing mix during the last six months. However, this marketing medium is new to channel partners and requires partner marketers to provide their partners with a networking coach (e.g., an event engineer). This event engineer is necessary for guiding partners through the process of creating online event invitations/registration/payment, web pages, mobile check-in, and social media sharing tools to increase awareness. Moreover, it is important for partner marketers to practice what they preach — if you want your partners to conduct live online events, you must conduct online events for your partners. For example, IBM hosts an annual Software Business Partner Kickoff Virtual Summit to help its partners discover ways to enhance their ability to deliver value to their clients.
6. **Online video.** Online video is already overtaking some of the most powerful forms of communication, and our research indicates that this trend is set to continue. Many partner marketers are touting video as a key new marketing medium; some are even calling video “the new white paper.” Considering that YouTube is the second-largest search engine in the world (after Google), the emerging importance of video shouldn't come as a surprise. What is surprising though is that several partner marketers indicate that animated video has become a big hit. For example, CommsXchange produced two animated videos in recent months — to promote Vodafone One Net and Microsoft Office 365 cloud services — after witnessing impressive conversion rates.<sup>6</sup>

7. **Partner-featured video case studies.** Innovative partner marketers are starting to include their partners in customer case studies, and some are even aligning them with corresponding video. For instance, SAP launched a “50 Customers in 50 Days” campaign in 2012 for its partners to identify and promote their best customers. Once selected, SAP customers then highlighted the value of working with SAP partners, and SAP posted these mini video case studies on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.<sup>7</sup>
8. **Webinar-featured marketing campaigns.** Many partner marketers are encouraging partners to incorporate webinars into their co-marketing campaigns to generate new leads, strengthen relationships, establish greater trust, and nurture existing leads. They are reporting that webinars have the ability to help partners gain visibility, increase prospect engagement, and improve their bottom line. Many partners we interviewed pointed out that their webinar-featured co-marketing campaigns delivered significantly higher response rates than any other marketing campaign they have run in the past; and IBM went so far as to state that webinar-featured marketing campaigns have the ability to increase partner campaign response rates by 17% to 20%.
9. **Mobile marketing.** According to Forrester’s annual “The State Of Consumers And Technology” report, nearly half of US online adults now own a smartphone and two-thirds own multiple connected devices. With such pronounced penetration, mobile is quickly becoming a mainstream marketing medium, and one that channel partners are expected to embrace in 2013, especially considering that mobile produces high-quality leads and fast conversion rates. Juniper has made mobile marketing a priority and recently hosted an InnoVAR web series, “Connecting With Customers Through Mobile Media.” In 2013, HP will be making a huge technology investment in digitalizing its partners — by integrating and simplifying its channel systems using salesforce.com to ensure seamless integration across field activities on mobile devices.<sup>8</sup>
10. **Prepackaged marketing plays.** Last but not least, a few partner marketers are bypassing channel partners’ marketing departments altogether with prepackaged marketing plays. They are tapping into technology marketing companies — for example, IDS Technology Marketing — to provide salespeople with tools to create their own cookie-cutter marketing campaigns (e.g., eCards that incorporate podcasts or white papers), effectively eliminating the marketing middleman in the lead generation process.

Figure 2 Juniper Provides “White Glove” Services Via Its Marketing Concierge



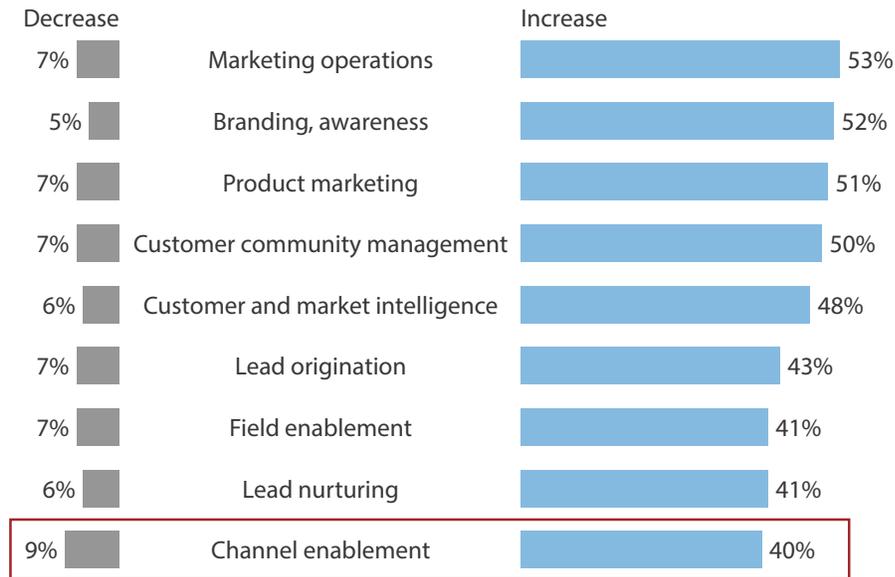
Source: Juniper Networks website

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Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

**Figure 3** Channel Enablement Continues To Invest In Social

**“How will your firm adjust levels of investment on social media for each of these in 2012?”**



Base: 535 B2B high-tech marketing executives at companies with 100 or more employees

Source: March 15, 2012, “The New Year Of Social Marketing” Forrester report

89981

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

**INVEST IN YOUR PARTNERS’ MARKETING APTITUDE**

Mastering the fine art of co-marketing tactics is no easy feat, but if you are serious about your channel marketing strategy, you will have to conduct some heavy handholding to win your partners’ trust. In addition to handholding, you will also have to do some serious pushing to ensure that your partners keep pace with the evolving marketing mix. Take into account the following best practices when crafting your co-marketing approach:

- **Communicate your marketing investment plans.** Simply telling your partners that you’re investing in partner marketing, and how much, goes a long way to winning their business. Despite the considerable upfront costs, invitation-only partner marketing events will pay back dividends by fostering partner loyalty and good will. Further, your investments should help to establish yourself as a trusted marketing advisor.
- **... but only invest in partners that invest in you.** Marketing enablement is a two-way street: Partner marketers’ investments in channel partners, allocated and applied

appropriately, beget channel partners' investments in them. Co-investment — in the form of shared marketing, joint account planning, collaborative selling, co-creation, and co-delivery of solutions — is what will tether channel partners to your company.

- **Focus on what works.** Not all marketing activities are created equal. Determine which campaigns are producing the highest ROI, are the easiest for partners (with limited marketing expertise) to roll out, and are generating the most buzz. Concentrate on those activities and conduct formal quarterly reviews to measure performance, augmenting training and support where appropriate.
- **Build integrated marketing campaigns.** An integrated marketing plan leverages the same messaging, promotions, and calls to action across multiple digital and traditional marketing activities (e.g., social media, mobile, video, email, telemarketing). These plans should be executed over a six- to 12-month period in a consistent fashion to create a sustainable lead generation and nurturing model.

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## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

### Methodology

Forrester's Enterprise And SMB Software Survey, North America And Europe, Q4 2009, was fielded to 2,165 IT executives and technology decision-makers located in Canada, France, Germany, the UK, and the US from SMB and enterprise companies with two or more employees. This survey is part of Forrester's suite of Business Data Services studies. Forrester fielded the survey from September 2009 to November 2009. LinkedIn fielded this survey online on behalf of Forrester. Survey respondent incentives included gift certificates and research summaries. We have provided exact sample sizes in this report on a question-by-question basis.

Forrester's Business Data Services fields eight business-to-business technology studies in 19 countries each calendar year. For quality control, we carefully screen respondents according to job title and function. Business Data Services ensures that the final survey population contains only those with significant involvement in the planning, funding, and purchasing of IT products and services. Additionally, quotas are set for company size (number of employees) and industry as a means of controlling the data distribution and establishing alignment with IT spend calculated by Forrester analysts.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that the practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. Other possible sources of error in polls are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. These other potential sources of error include question wording, question ordering, and nonresponse. As with

all survey research, it is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors without an experimental control group, so we strongly caution against using the words “margin of error” in reporting any survey data.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

We have illustrated only a portion of survey results in this document. For access to the full data results, please contact [Forsights@forrester.com](mailto:Forsights@forrester.com).

Forrester’s Q4 2012 US And Europe Channel Partner Business Model And Loyalty Online Survey was fielded to 265 channel professionals located in the US, France, Germany, and the UK, at SMB and enterprise companies with 10 or more employees. exëvo fielded this survey online in November to December 2012 on behalf of Forrester Research via its online panel of channel partners. Survey respondent incentives included a choice of cash, research time, and/or a summary of the research results. We have provided exact sample sizes in this report on a question-by-question basis.

We have illustrated only a portion of survey results in this document. For more information about this data, please contact [inquiry@forrester.com](mailto:inquiry@forrester.com).

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Data point from Forrester’s Q4 2012 Channel Partner Business Model And Loyalty Online Survey of 265 channel executives across the United States and Europe.
- <sup>2</sup> hawkeye Channel provides software and services that drive channel revenue growth for enterprise marketers who sell through indirect channels. With a unique blend of robust channel programs and expertise, hawkeye Channel helps clients easily integrate with their CRM platform, accurately measure channel performance and optimize channel incentives on a global scale. Source: hawkeye Channel (<http://hawkeyechannel.com>).
- <sup>3</sup> For further details on new incentive models including wallet share, certification investments, tenure, transaction frequency, and portfolio breath support, see the August 16, 2012, “[Reinforcing Channel Partner Bonds In The Era Of The Cloud](#)” report.
- <sup>4</sup> Source: Q4 2011 B2B Marketing Organizations And Investments Survey.
- <sup>5</sup> Cisco Partner Velocity live event. Only annual global partner live event in the industry focused exclusively on marketing enablement at no cost to partners. FY 2012 results: 238 partners from 155 companies from 25 countries representing \$5.7 billion in annual bookings contribution. The event includes keynotes from industry marketing experts and thought leaders, interactive workshops/topics partners have requested, regional breakout sessions, particular emphasis on integrated, multitouch marketing enablement, and executive one-on-one meetings.

<sup>6</sup> Source: “Microsoft 365 — A promotional and explanatory animated web video for Commsxchange,” YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elnhlRTZL2Q>).

<sup>7</sup> Source: “The Little Book of Big Quotes,” 50 Customers in 50 Days, Omega case study, November 23, 2012 (<http://www.sap.com/uk/our-partners/50customers/50customers.epx>).

<sup>8</sup> Recently acquired by Oracle.

## About Forrester

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