

Justifying the Value of a Certified Business Partner Channel

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Executive Overview

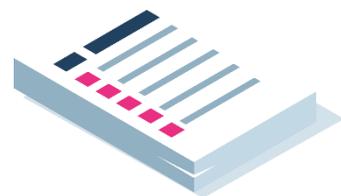
Vendors depend on their Business Partner (BP) channel to reach customers, often in different segments, and provide solutions based on the vendor's key products. Success depends on these partners being deeply skilled in those products. After all, how can you sell the strategic benefits of these products and services without having the deep skills to completely and successfully understand the customer's required functions?

Certifications are a proven method to demonstrate that the skills have been fully attained, by the BP company, as well as by the employees in that company. To encourage the attainment of the certifications, it is important to *demonstrate the value* of those certifications *to the vendor* (who must develop and deploy a certification program), *to the BP company* (who must pay for the skills and certifications to be achieved), and *to the BP's employees* (who must take time out of selling and implementing solutions to study for and take the certification exams).

Certifying your channel is a *business-smart* decision. This paper is intended to capture the value elements *for each of these constituencies*—i.e., the reasons why certification will be the key to success for each.

To that end, there are sections addressing:

- What is the Purpose of a Business Partner Channel?
- Key Components of a BP Program
- The Role of Skills and Certifications in a BP Program
- The Value of Certifying your BPs: to the Vendor Company
- The Value of Certifications: to the BP's Company
- The Value of Certification: to the BP's Employees
- The Value of Certification: to the BP's Customers
- How Questionmark Can Help



What is the Purpose of a Business Partner Channel?

- **Who are your partners?**

Your Partner Channel is comprised of any company or individual who is charged with taking the vendor product to market. Depending on the product or service being sold, your partners could be from companies such as: Resellers, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), Distributors, Consultants, Value-Added Resellers (VARs), or even the vendor's direct reps. The vendor should be sensitive to any unique skills requirements of these partner types, developing additional training and certifications as appropriate.

- **Success of your products in the marketplace**

To be successful in the marketplace, the vendor will need partners that are as skilled in the products as those who developed them—i.e., can explain the benefits and value, and can implement those key functions completely and successfully.

- **Reaching more of your customers, in different segments and geographies**

The strength of a partner channel is its “reach”. Big customers or small, local customers or worldwide, across multiple industries with unique requirements—a wide, varied community of partners can help reach them all.

- **Complementing your direct sales force, if appropriate**

Typically, a direct sales force is targeted to a finite, well defined set of the vendor's customers. This makes the recruitment and nurturing of a skilled partner community critical to the broad goals of selling the vendor's products.

- **Gaining firsthand insights into your customers' requirements**

With a loyal partner set spending weeks and years with your customers, they have a direct insight into the needs of your customers. This can lead to anticipated, future business, with direct feedback on what those customers need to be even more successful.

- **Making customers more successful, more satisfied and more likely to continue and increase use by providing onboarding and service**

With every successful, on-time implementation, the customer is more likely to stay with your partner, and with your new releases of the vendor's product. Skills play a major role in the proper



selling and implementation of the products that satisfy the customer's needs. Happy customer, happy business partner, and happy vendor... a win, win, win.

- **Scale up and out efficiently**

As the customer's needs grow, your partner is uniquely positioned as the best choice to grow the solution they first implanted.

- **(Via the above) increasing revenue**

Increased customer requirements lead to increased partner opportunity and revenue, which leads to increased vendor opportunity and revenue... another win, win, win.

Key Components of a BP program

- **Setting product sales/support strategies**

If the vendor's portfolio has a variety of products, it stands to reason that they will need a variety of partner types, each skilled deeply in the products they will take to market. As a result, a vendor will want a partner channel strategy that matches the products, as well as the different customer segments they want to be successful with. For example, major Banks or large manufacturing customers have different needs than those in an Small and Medium-Sized Business (SMB) segment. Skills requirements for your partners are different as well. Knowing the right product in the vendor's portfolio to match the customer, means building your skills on those products and why they will best address the customer's needs. Selling and installing the vendor products is usually the first step to success. However, many partners will bring their own value add to the customer in the form of services that complement or extend the base products. This will further bond the customer, partner and vendor for many years, and for much revenue growth.

- **Recruiting BPs to match that strategy**

As mentioned above, different products and different customer segments, will best be served by recruiting partners that best match those elements of the vendor's strategy.

- **Building the skills plan to prepare the BPs to be successful in sales and implementations**

Channel partners have a huge dependency on the vendor for building their skills. Courses must be developed to impart the skills needed by the partners. A comprehensive delivery strategy is required to reach all the partners, while minimizing the partner's



time out of the field. The training strategy has to develop the skills needed for sales, as well as implementation, and should provide tiered learning for the intermediate as well as advanced student. A certification strategy must also match the ability to reach all partners, around the world, on the range of products, and be able to document the skills of those partners—to the vendor as well as to the customer.

- **Measuring the success of the channel**

Once the channel is skilled, and has achieved certifications to document those skills, it is very helpful to have a method to capture and measure the skills by partner, and the revenue by partner. This will enable the vendor to assess the costs vs benefits, the Return on Investment (ROI), of building and certifying the skills of each partner, and the channel as a whole. With this intelligence, corrections and improvements can be made to the skills strategy, the channel strategy, and possibly even the product strategy. It can also help the vendor recognize and reward the best performing partners and motivate other partners to reach for improved skills/certification levels of the proven leaders.

- **Support structure for your BPs**

Another important component of a BP program is a solid support structure for your channel partners. A successful partner, even when well-educated and certified, needs a resource to come to when a customer problem arises beyond their skill. This support needs to be very responsive as the customer might be “down”, or the partner’s credibility might be on the line. With the measurement tool mentioned above, the vendor can prioritize the form of the support, the response time with which it’s provided, and whether there is any cost for the support.

- **Marketing (to BPs and to their audience)**

The BP channel is much like the vendor’s customers. As a result, regular communications to the channel are very important. Sharing new products, new courses, certification schedules, etc. is all necessary to keep your partners informed. True marketing can include promoting success stories through case studies, especially for your best partners. Documenting and promoting the measurements mentioned above (the ROI of your channel partners) can motivate all partners to strive to increase their own achievements. Finally, a tiered BP program, allows the vendor to tier entitlements, benefits, and promotional opportunities—such as speaking at a major customer conference.



The Role of Skills and Certifications in a BP Program

- **Getting your partners fully skilled in all your products: sales and technical**

The obvious role of skills and certifications in the channel is:

- that the partners are ready and capable of taking the vendor's products to market,
- matching the key features of the products to the customer's requirements,
- installing the right products quickly and efficiently,
- leading to ongoing growth opportunities to grow a successful customer.

To continue to meet this invaluable role of both skills and certifications to the channel, the vendor will need to proactively update and grow the programs providing these assets to their partners.

- **Measuring the effectiveness of a particular BP**

The aforementioned measurement tool will help the vendor track, grow and reward the partners based on their skills and willingness to grow them, tracking revenue per certified individual and revenue per certified BP firm. It will also provide a tool for promoting and tracking the partners' continued skills growth, assuring the channel is always moving ahead with the newer vendor offerings.

- Revenue per Certified Individual
- Revenue per Certified BP firm



- **Guiding lead passing to your best BPs**

When revenue and certifications can be measured together, incentives like increased lead passing to the top performing partners is an attractive incentive.

- **Promoting your most successful and most skilled BPs, often a way of giving incentives and/or entry into tiers**

Another incentive that can be based on revenue and certification achievements can be promotion of the BPs that are top achievers. This marketing promotion can attract new customers to the partner, resulting in additional revenue growth—any partners wish.

The Value of Certifying your BPs: to the Vendor Company

- **Growing measurable sales/technical channel skills**

There is a clear relationship between a highly skilled BP channel and the success of the vendors' products in the marketplace. Here are a few of those benefits...

- Faster/quality implementation of your products: certified partners will implement your products just as designed, with few, if any, false starts, and the functions performing as advertised. An SAP study reported that "We always staff our implementations with a professionally certified lead consultant for each module. This makes us stand out from the crowd and position us as the experienced and safe partner choice."¹
- Reduced support costs around customer installs: a product installed exactly right by a certified partner will lead to many fewer needs for support from the vendor's team. An IDC study showed that 40% of downtime is due to significant lack of training.²
- Demonstration, to your customers, your commitment to quality in their solutions: customers will much prefer a partner that can demonstrate their skills, as validated by the vendor with certifications for those skills.
- Increased customer satisfaction for your products: efficient implementations by certified partners, on schedule and at a promised cost, will leave the customer satisfied and willing to continue with further implementations of the vendors new function as it becomes available. One SAP partner stated, "There's a direct correlation between professional, certified consultants on a project and satisfied clients. Projects with professional, certified consultants are more likely to be successful, resulting in happy and referenceable customers. The SAP Global Certification digital badges are a quantifiable indicator of our SAP SuccessFactors

"We always staff our implementations with a professionally certified lead consultant for each module. This makes us stand out from the crowd and position us as the experienced and safe partner choice."

-- SAP

"There's a direct correlation between professional, certified consultants on a project and satisfied clients. Projects with professional, certified consultants are more likely to be successful, resulting in happy and referenceable customers."

-- SAP

¹ [SAP News Center, The Value of Certifications: Learning as a Sustainable Competitive Advantage](#)

² [ITCC white paper: Why Get IT Certified? The Value of IT Certification](#)

expertise. Being SAP experts is not just a claim we make, but we have the data to prove it.”³

- Skilled BP feedback on required/suggested improvements to your products: with the certified partner as the vendor’s eyes and ears inside the customer, there is a direct pipeline of the customer’s future requirements back into the vendor’s team.
- Build relationship with BP employees: by measuring the certifications achieved by BP employees, the vendor can promote and highlight successes of the best partners in the channel.
- Increased mindshare for your products vs competitors: certified partners have demonstrated a real investment in the vendor’s products by building skills and then certifying those skills. The more investment on the vendor’s products, the larger mindshare in their products versus competitors.
- (If you get it right) industry excitement about your products: numerous IT journals and magazines such as Certification Magazine will write articles on industry leading products, using the certification story as a lead message.

The Value of Certifications: to the BP’s Company

- **Partner firms are only successful if they can build a team(s) of their employees with deeply developed, certified skills. Some of the resulting benefits can include**
 - Multiple skilled teams available for opportunities: more certified individuals in teams, means the ability to address multiple opportunities in parallel, and results in more revenue. According to IDC, 75% of (partner) managers said they believe certification is important to team performance. ⁴

“75% of (partner) managers said they believe certification is important to team performance”

-- IDC

³ [SAP News Center, The Value of Certifications: Learning as a Sustainable Competitive Advantage](#)

⁴ [ITCC white paper: Why Get IT Certified? The Value of IT Certification](#)

- Faster/quality implementations for customers yielding more profit: once a deal is bid, it is critical to the BP team to meet all deadlines and provide a quality solution the first time. Delays due to implementation problems will lead to cost overruns and erode the partner's profits. Also reported by SAP, "We have seen organizations able to achieve a 10 percent reduction in deployment time per month on average because of better-skilled workers"⁵
- Reduced support costs on your implementations: doing it right with quality the first time means the customer will have fewer requests to the partner firm for problems requiring support, and fewer costs. IDC shows 66% of (partner) managers believe certifications improve the levels of service and support offered to IT and users/customers.⁶
- Gaining top leads from the vendor: vendors will often pass key leads to partners that are top revenue producers, and/or with top certified teams.
- Promotion/recognition, by the vendor, as a top BP company, and customers more likely to choose: many vendor partner programs use certifications as a measure of program level (e.g., basic, advanced or premier). The higher-level partners are provided articles about their firm and their successes, given speaking opportunities, passed qualified leads, and promoted to the vendor's customers.
- Higher likelihood of repeat or growth business for a satisfied customer: it makes sense that satisfied customers will continue working with a certified partner that has successfully implemented a solution for them previously. In the SAP report, "Two recent sales wins with net-new customers specifically called out our consultant certifications and the depth of knowledge we have in our organization as reasons for choosing us as the vendor of choice."⁷

"We have seen organizations able to achieve a 10 percent reduction in deployment time per month on average because of better-skilled workers"

-- IDC

"66% of (partner) managers believe certifications improve the levels of service and support offered to IT and users/customers"

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"Two recent sales wins with net-new customers specifically called out our consultant certifications and the depth of knowledge we have in our organization as reasons for choosing us as the vendor of choice."

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⁵ [SAP News Center, Creating Competitive Edge Through Skill Certification: Why Recognizing SAP Skills Matters](#)

⁶ [ITCC white paper: Why Get IT Certified? The Value of IT Certification](#)

⁷ [SAP News Center, The Value of Certifications: Learning as a Sustainable Competitive Advantage](#)

- Certifications provide overall value to the partner company: There are always costs in getting the partner’s employees skilled and certified. The question is whether there is a positive ROI on that investment. There are two statements that help attest to the ROI for the partner company. One states the intangible benefits...

Having Certified Staff Adds Value to My Company (Strongly Agree Ratings)				
Having Certified Staff	Sol Prov	SI	ISV	SVC Prov
Generates more business for us	65%	37%	48%	44%
Generates higher staff productivity	70%	44%	29%	42%
Helps generate business with new customers	65%	44%	33%	33%
Differentiates us from our competition	56%	44%	29%	49%

IDC Industry Perspectives on Certification

The second comes from [Global Knowledge’s 2020 study](#), citing real dollar savings... 94% say certified individuals provide value far beyond the cost of certifying; 50% say the incremental value is >\$10,000, and 16% say that incremental value is >\$30,000.⁸

“94% say certified individuals provide value far beyond the cost of certifying; 50% say the incremental value is >\$10,000, and 16% say that incremental value is >\$30,000”

-- Global Knowledge

The Value of Certification: to the BP’s Employees

- **Business partner firms are only as strong, skilled and successful as the collection of employees they hire, train and deploy on opportunities. Those IT Professional employees will also receive real benefits as a result of building skills and achieving certification of those skills. Some examples include...**

- Job security- deeper value to the BP Company: once certified, the employee is looked upon as a company asset. Certification Magazine’s 2021 Salary Survey indicated that 77.8% of (partner employees) agree they have experienced greater demand for their skills since becoming certified.⁹

“77.8% of (partner employees) agree they have experienced greater demand for their skills since becoming certified”

-- Certification Magazine

⁸ [Global Knowledge 2020 IT Skills and Salary Report](#)

⁹ [ITCC white paper: Why Get IT Certified? The Value of IT Certification](#)

- Advancement and marketability- recognized for promotion to lead positions: skills are a recognizable employee asset, documented by the certification of that skill. Global Knowledge 2020 study shows that IT Professionals who obtained a new certification saw salary increases of \$13,000. ¹⁰
- Salary/bonuses after getting certified: partner companies want to reward their best employees as they advance, and as they develop advanced skills. Certifications prove the attainment and mastery of a skill. In addition to promotions, firms often recognize skills advancements with money. Certification Magazine's 2021 Salary Survey indicated that 47.8% of their Salary Survey respondents got bonuses or incentive pay; 61.9% of those got a raise; and 74.9% said getting their certification was the key factor.¹¹
- Women in IT: An interesting study by Global Knowledge in 2020, documented that 86% of the women surveyed have at least one certification; their annual salaries increased 8% year over year, and their 2020 salaries were 9% higher than men (up from 6% less in 2019)¹²
- Recognition: of their verified skills by fellow employees and team members: increased skills stand out among peers. What you're certified in, and how many you've achieved is well recognized. For many, the peer recognition is equally as important as a promotion or salary increase. In a 2020 study by IDC for the IT Certification Council, 55% of IT managers said certifications increase the credibility of IT consultants.¹³
- Professional credibility & personal resume- showing skills in key products for future jobs: many companies are on the lookout for existing skills on key products. This motivates a partner firm to recognize the skills achieved by their employees—in order to retain them. It also represents a calling card for the employee in the outside marketplace where those skills are in demand. Certification Magazine's Salary Survey 2021 found that over 48% of certified individuals have

"IT Professionals who obtained a new certification saw salary increases of \$13,000"

-- Global Knowledge

"47.8% of [respondents] got bonuses or incentive pay; 61.9% of those got a raise; and 74.9% said getting their certification was the key factor"

-- Certification Magazine

"55% of IT managers said certifications increase the credibility of IT consultants"

-- IDC

¹⁰ [Global Knowledge 2020 IT Skills and Salary Report](#)

¹¹ [ITCC white paper: Why Get IT Certified? The Value of IT Certification](#)

¹² [Global Knowledge 2020 IT Skills and Salary Report](#)

¹³ [ITCC commissioned research, IDC: Four Ways Certifications Help Organizations Achieve Their IT Strategies](#)

been employed and growing in their job roles, using their certified skills, for more than 10 years.¹⁴ These are all examples of how the certifications can significantly benefit the employee in their current job, or in pursuing a next job.

- More certifications can accelerate an employee's value: an IDC 2020 study performed for the IT Certification Council showed three interesting findings resulting from becoming certified: show that certifications help organizations achieve their IT Strategies, and further that more certifications can result in a significantly higher salary increase. Global Knowledge found IT professionals with 6+ certifications see salaries 8% higher than the worldwide average.¹⁵
- Confidence: building skills and achieving certifications leaves the partner employee with the internal feeling of growth in their career.

"Certifications help organizations achieve their IT Strategies, and IT professionals with 6+ certifications see salaries 8% higher than the worldwide average"

-- Global Knowledge

The Value of Certification: to the BP's Customers

- **The benefits to customers are tightly coupled to:**

Comfort of knowing/buying from a reputable source and from salespeople who know what they are talking about, results in the customer being less likely to be mis-sold to. This is a statement of confidence in the partner firm making a bid. The cost and schedule components of a bid are less important to the customer than the confidence that is in those numbers. Skills, verified by tangible certifications, give the customer a litmus test on the likelihood the project will be completed on time, at cost, and with total quality.

- "Projects with professional, certified consultants are more likely to be successful": again, the certifications become a measure of confidence in accepting the project bid. If the customer believes this, then leading with your certified credentials in your bid is an excellent competitive strategy.
- Less support issues, faster path to value: once implemented, a customer does not want to be interrupted by down time, while support issues are being chased. Using

¹⁴ [ITCC white paper: Why Get IT Certified? The Value of IT Certification](#)

¹⁵ [ITCC commissioned research, IDC: Four Ways Certifications Help Organizations Achieve Their IT Strategies](#)

a partner with deeply certified staff will increase the probability of a successful solution, and an earlier ROI.

- Shows customer that the vendor cares about quality: Certifications, listed right up front in a bid, demonstrates to the customer that the vendor has wrapped its products in skills and certifications to verify those skills. The customer can see that this partner firm possesses the vendor's skills and can provide their solution with quality.

How Questionmark Can Help

Questionmark can be used to easily develop your certification program. We offer a one-stop shop for all your assessment needs, enabling test publishers and certification bodies to build revenue and protect the integrity of their brands. Delivering credible certifications is essential to delivering the value we've discussed thus far.

We provide a secure enterprise-grade assessment platform that enables your organization to easily amend and adapt test content. Our one-stop shop combines:

- Secure test-taking with a range of proctoring services
- Authoring and vendor content
- E-commerce
- Reporting and analytics
- Badges to demonstrate success for those that pass exams

Credentialing organizations need an online assessment platform that enables them to make changes to assessment content quickly and helps them to make the test available right away. They need a provider who is not going to charge them a fee each time or make them go through a difficult process. They need one enterprise-grade assessment platform that allows them to bring together a range of critical services and features so that their channel partners are certified on the latest and most relevant product knowledge.

Questionmark can scale to meet global demand as well as manage smaller projects efficiently. By enabling credentialing organizations to quickly adapt assessment content, and to manage everything from a single platform, we help make these organizations nimbler to market with new and updated assessment content. We enable our customers to maintain business continuity, protect their brand and build revenues, all without having to integrate with other platforms.

Please reach out to me directly at kristin.bernor@questionmark.com with any questions or comments. Please also visit our website at Questionmark.com to request a demonstration. You can schedule the demonstration immediately and at your convenience.

Summary

- If a channel is a key component of your vendor company strategy, then building a highly skilled, measurable set of BPs, will grow your product revenue.
- There are numerous, key benefits of certifications to both the BP company, as well as their sales and technical employees... and therefore to your customers.
- The value of certifying your channel far outweighs any cost of providing skills, certification programs and exams, or getting the BPs certified.

References

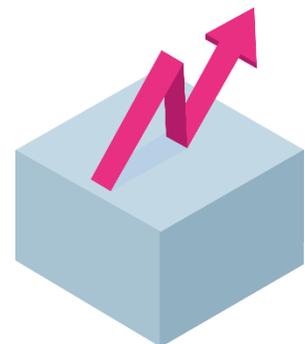
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[ITCC commissioned research, IDC: Four Ways Certifications Help Organizations Achieve Their IT Strategies](#)

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[SAP News Center, The Value of Certifications: Learning as a Sustainable Competitive Advantage](#)



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About Questionmark

We help employers and their people unlock their potential to deliver better performance.

Questionmark provides a secure enterprise-grade assessment platform and professional services to leading organizations around the world, delivered with care and unequalled expertise. Its full-service online assessment tool and professional services help customers to improve their performance and meet their compliance requirements. Questionmark enables organizations to unlock their potential by delivering assessments which are valid, reliable and fair, which can be defended.

Questionmark offers secure powerful integration with learning management systems (LMS), learning record stores (LRS) and proctoring services making it easy to bring everything together in one place. Questionmark's cloud-based assessment management platform offers rapid deployment, scalability for high-volume test delivery, 24/7 support, and the peace-of-mind of secure, audited U.S., Australian and European-based data centers.

Working with Questionmark

To further explore how Questionmark could work for your organization, or to book a free consultation and demo, please see: <https://www.questionmark.com/request-demo/>

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