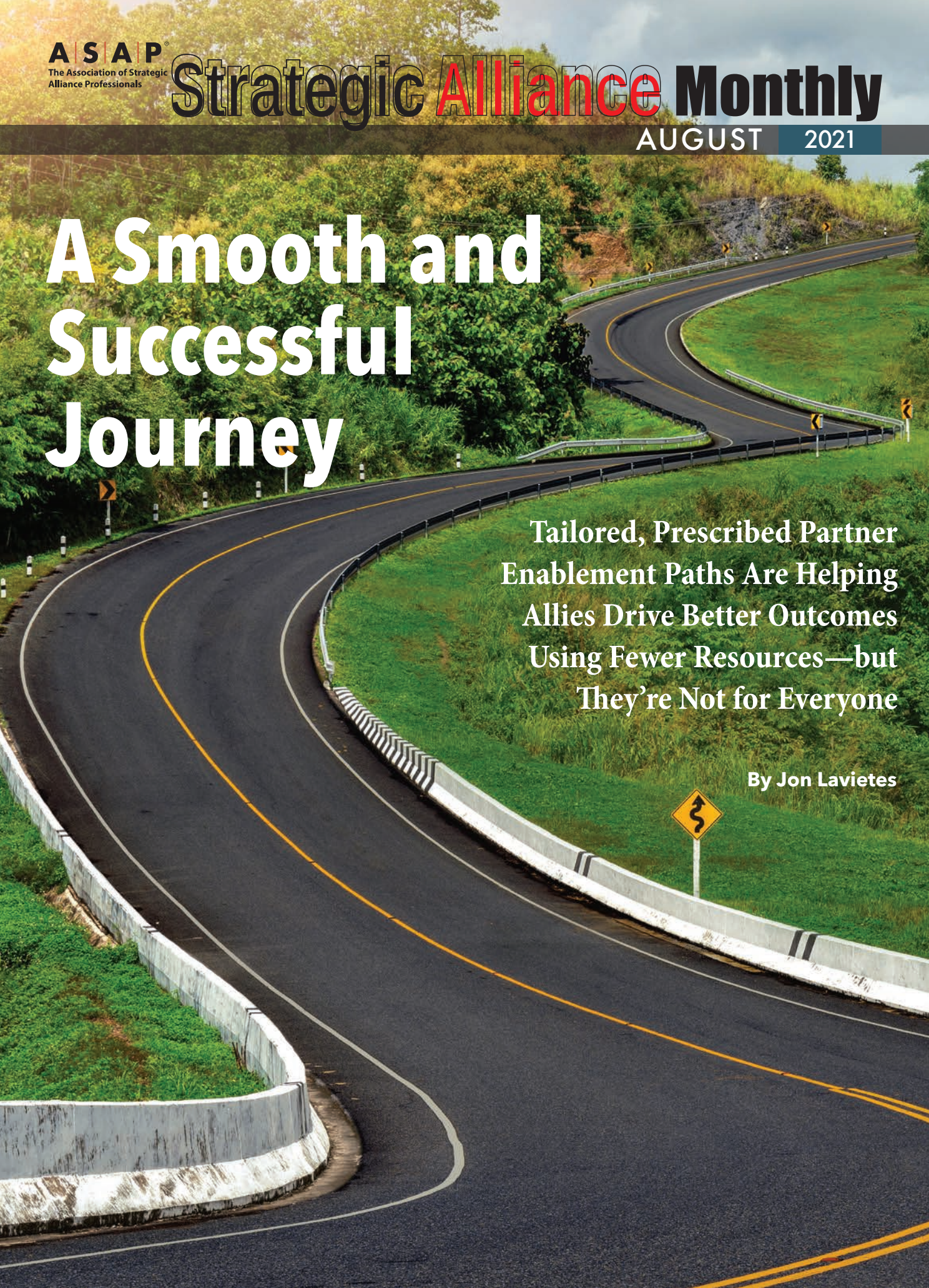
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A Smooth and Successful Journey

Tailored, Prescribed Partner Enablement Paths Are Helping Allies Drive Better Outcomes Using Fewer Resources—but They're Not for Everyone

By Jon Lavietes

Partner enablement has come a long way recently. In the tech industry's past life, when a vendor signed an alliance agreement or brought on a reseller, the new partner was on its own to sift through the dozens of training courses and thousands of documents—logos, messaging, case studies, white papers, data sheets, technical manuals, and the like—on the vendor's portal and figure out for themselves which elements applied to their joint business.

That has changed drastically in the last few years. The onus is now on the companies to perform the legwork of assembling the appropriate training, certification, and information in proper order and serving it up at the appropriate time, so that the partner doesn't have to expend an inordinate amount of time doing so. It's the age of the "journey" in partner enablement: self-guided, prescriptive, sequenced, and tailored packages of events and information that help partners discover and immerse themselves in the parts of the vendor's solutions and services that they need to know in order to make their partnership successful. These journeys can encompass any combination of technical, sales, marketing, and service intelligence.

We delve deep into the topic in an in-depth feature coming in the Q3 2021 issue of *Strategic Alliance Quarterly*, but the gist is that these journeys automatically shepherd partners through the entire process of signup, onboarding, training, and continual education, as well as sales planning, marketing engagement, and service delivery, among other functions. Throughout the journey, alerts are generated to nudge partners along, and badges and prizes are awarded at various stages that earn partners greater privileges with the vendor.

Ninety Days and Three Times the Deals

Louis Rinfret, founder and CEO of end-to-end alliance management software vendor allianceboard, outlined a basic workflow being used at one of his client companies.

"First, they invite their partners to familiarize themselves with the partner programs—understand the benefits and requirements. If they're interested, they can apply by completing an online form. Then, they can verify their compatibility by using the [vendor's] guidelines, or get tested by the client. If it gets approved, they become a valued partner. Based on that, they can jointly market solutions," he said.

When done right, these self-guided journeys get partners up to speed more quickly, boost results more dramatically, and require less time and resources of partner managers. **Norma Watenpaugh**, CSAP, longtime ASAP board member and CEO of Phoenix Consulting Group, spoke of one journey a major cybersecurity company put together that mapped out in painstaking detail what the partner would do each day of the first month and a half, a campaign that helped its ally drive a threefold increase in deal registration, and a tenfold spike in user accounts in the collaboration's first year.

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"The company mapped out the first 90 days of exactly what partners would do day one, day two, day 30—all the way through



until they found that they were active and productive. That's a big difference [from] saying, 'Here's the big checklist and good luck,'" she recalled.

Red Hair and Blue Pants: Tailoring the Journey So Partners Earn More Green

Indeed, the industry has finally remedied the old way of having the partner fend for itself inside your portal. It was inevitable that everyone would come to the realization that this model was causing alliances to leave revenue and innovation on the table. Partners would waste valuable time and energy wading through curricula and files that were of no use to them—systems integrators didn't have much need for price books and reseller information, for example.

"When the partner is digging in and spending time just trying to figure out where they should be and what they should learn, and if it's not teed up or tailored to who they are and what geography they're in, or whether they have red hair or blue pants, that stuff matters," said **Mark Rogers**, senior vice president of channels and strategic alliances at partner relationship management (PRM) software provider Impartner. "Partners are not going to adjust themselves and change the way they do business to try to fit your model."

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Making It Real—and Rinse and Repeat

Today, journeys can be as high- or low-touch as is needed. Examples of the former include instances of companies bringing in third parties to help implement automated email and social media marketing campaigns and in-person journeys where vendors pay to give partner technical and sales reps hands-on training with their products and services in the field, both of which are detailed in our *Strategic Alliance Quarterly* feature.

Bill Thomas, CA-AM, vice president of global strategic alliances at Adaptigent, noted that many use cases need to be seen, not just read about, in order for partners to truly understand what can potentially rock a customer's world. He brought up the joint demo environments used by vendors and global systems integrators (GSIs) such as PTC's Centers of Excellence, which make theoretical solutions tangible.

"That's what makes it real," he said. "If you don't show them an actual proof of concept or a use case that might resonate with them, then you just kind of risk them glazing over and saying, 'Shoot, it has all these capabilities, but how does it apply to me?' The whole idea is to get customers from curious to committed very quickly. And you have to do it in a way that very quickly makes sense of how their business might benefit from it."

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But highly standardized journeys are arguably best for low-touch, high-volume programs. Rinfret recounted one Global 100 customer that uses allianceboard's certification templates to grow the number of certified partners rapidly.

"These things are very repetitive. If you have a volume program you want to have some kind of framework that you apply at scale and expend the least amount of energy every single time," he said.



Not All Journeys Are Created Equal

Of course, prescribed journeys aren't always a possibility. "Big Four" accounting and technology firms sell business transformation and integration services, which aren't as standardized as "shrink-wrapped" software with technical specs and specific functionality. Implementations vary widely depending on each client's needs.

"We don't provide formal training on what an implementation is going to look like," said **David Erlenborn**, CSAP, managing director of alliance strategy at KPMG.

Erlenborn said that most of KPMG's enablement efforts on behalf of alliance partners are done at a "person-to-person level" through relationships with their respective sales leaders and teams. The closest thing to a guided journey the company provides are prepackaged case studies and tailored presentation slides, most of which are put together for larger tech players that need to provide their field reps with anytime access to those materials.

"It's building relationships with their salespeople and having materials available to help them understand what we do. No one will go into a formal training course."

"It's a very small number who are at the scale where they need to organize that way," he said.

Since the firm organizes its capabilities by industry segment rather than technology function, it focuses on providing partners with an understanding of the broad business challenges it helps clients address in each vertical market.

"We want them to understand the class of problems we solve," said Erlenborn. "In most cases, it's building relationships with their salespeople and having the types of materials available to help them understand what we do. No one will go into a formal training course."

Rock Throwing or Revenue? This One Should Be Easy

In the instances where tailored journeys can be applied, when done correctly, they not only generate hard ROI, they make both your partners' and partner reps' lives easier. Rogers recalled the days when partners had to badger alliance and channel managers for cobranded collateral, demos, or other information that wasn't readily available or easily findable. He likened these efforts to galvanize partner managers into action to throwing rocks.

"The channel manager is running around like a chicken with his or her head cut off trying to be responsive to the partner," he said. "They should be focused on revenue-generating opportunities, not on rock pitches."

Be sure to check out the full feature on partner enablement in the Q3 *Strategic Alliance Quarterly,* which will arrive in ASAP members' inboxes in September. The article examines the rise of marketing and service enablement as equals to long-standing staples technical and sales enablement, showcases more real-world examples of journeys, and discusses the challenges of putting them together. ■





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As a practitioner of collaboration in a variety of perhaps non-traditional alliance functions myself, I've found so many key elements of partnering and collaboration management for synergistic outcomes were perfectly encapsulated by ASAP's offerings.

—Kevin Little, CSAP
Senior Partnership Director
Novo Nordisk

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