

P E R S P E C T I V E

Partner Portal: Core to Partner
Relationship Management



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In their attempt to focus on customers, banks generally neglect the aspect of partner relationship management which is a key while servicing a customer. This paper illustrates how banks can leverage their network of partners effectively to achieve a better partner relationship and increased customer satisfaction through Partner Portal.

Portal:

- A door or gateway
- A site serving as a guide or point of entry to the World Wide Web and usually including a search engine or a collection of links to other sites arranged especially by topic (<http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/portal>)
- An enterprise portal is a Web-based interface for users of enterprise applications (<http://www.webopedia.com>)

Channel Partner:

- The name used to describe a company that partners with a manufacturer or producer to market and sell the manufacturer's products, services, or technologies— usually through a co-branding relationship. Channel partners may be distributors, vendors, retailers, consultants, systems integrators (SI), technology deployment consultancies, and value-added resellers (VARs) and other organizations (<http://www.webopedia.com>)

Portals, as defined above, are entry points to World Wide Web. Services like search engines and links to useful pages provided by portals are generally free and owner of these portals generate income through advertising. Based upon the business need, portals can be of various types. Following are some of portal types:

- **Web searching portals:** Portals designed for the purpose of providing search facility on the Web
- **Self-servicing portals:** Portals designed for the purpose of reducing operational cost by providing self servicing tools to employees/customers/partners

- **E-learning portal:** Portals designed for the purpose of education/training/knowledge sharing
- **E-commerce portals:** Portals designed for the purpose of trading/transaction/information exchange among multiple entities related to a business/supply chain

Before, we move to the concept of partner portal and its importance to partner relationship management, let us have a look at brief history of portal.

Brief History of Portal

History of portals can be divided in to three phases as follows:

Phase 1: Portals started with the purpose of sharing information available on static Web pages. Consumers of this information were mainly employees and customers of the organizations.

Phase 2: With the advent of Common Gateway Interface (CGI), portals entered in to the growth phase. Number of websites and their users grew exponentially and there was a need to organize information about these websites in a meaningful manner. This resulted in the birth of Web-searching portal. Portals also expanded in terms of information available on dynamic Web pages. In this phase, portals redefined the way of transactions for many businesses. Portals have become business hub where many people can do business transactions with many people. User of portals varied from employees of an organization to employees of partner organization to customers of organization

Phase 3: Today, portals have already entered in to this phase and are evolving day by day. This phase is defined by the depth of already available features as well as new features available on portals. In

terms of depth, the focus is on seamless integration among partners' applications with the objective of automating complex business processes across applications. This will certainly result in reducing operation cost of whole ecosystem.

In terms of new features, the focus is on use of rich media applications, business analytics, ease of navigation and availability of portals on different devices for example: mobile, IPTV , among others.

Partner Portal

These are portals which help in partner collaboration. These portals give partners direct access to resources pertaining to marketing, sales and support/services of products/applications provided by manufacture/vendor. Apart from partners, these resources are generally unavailable to other end users. Generally, single sign on mechanism is used to logon the user. However, users get access to various applications and resources based on the organization and the role of the partner.

Partner Portal Features

Typically, following features are expected from partner portals:

- Self profiling of partners
- Lead management
- Deal registration
- Marketing resources
- Fund management
- Partner training and certifications
- E-catalogs
- Contract management
- Incentive management

In brief, concept of Partner Portal is core to Partner Relationship Management. By providing above features an organization tries to achieve better partner relationship. Today, partner portal has become a necessity for big organizations in industries which rely heavily on indirect sales, for example: automobile, financial services, and information technology, among others.

Partner Portal in Financial Industry

Like other industries, financial institutions are also using portals since the dot com era. Banks started using portals owned and managed by other companies like Yahoo. The purpose was to market financial products through these portals.

Then banks entered in the Internet banking phase and developed their own portals. But, the focus of Internet banking portal was completely towards end customer. Banks started using their Internet banking portal as another channel to market their products. As banks matured, they started to market products of partner organization through these portals.

Today, banks even allow selling products offered by partner organization to be sold through portals owned and managed by banks. But the focus of portals still remains towards end customers.

In financial industry, next phase of partner portal evolution will see portals more focused towards partner relationship management. Some large financial institutions have already started such portals where both customer and partner can log on through single sign-on mechanism. Partner when logged in, can access only those screens which are relevant to particular transactions. Partners of a bank can be following:

- Locker suppliers
- Computer hardware, software and support agency
- Cheque book suppliers
- Stationary suppliers
- Plastic card suppliers
- Courier agency
- Direct Selling Agency (DSA)
- Retailers
- Customer Reward Management Agency

Let's take a case of Courier Agency "A" which is supposed to deliver monthly, quarterly and annual account statements of Bank B's customers in some specific region (Bank B may have contract with different courier agencies for different regions). Partner Portal is supposed to provide facility for A to log on to bank's portal and update the status of dispatch as follows (for example):

Bundle No	Statements No.	Collection Date	Dispatch Due Date	Status and Date (success/Failure/Pending)	Remarks
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This will help Bank B in analyzing the status of dispatch and take further action in case of any customer request/complaint.

Now, let's take a case of a retailer. One famous retailer in apparel industry recently joined hands with a private bank in India to offer its customers payment through the bank's credit cards in 3 EMIs at 0 percent interest rate with some terms and conditions. Suppose a customer wants to avail this offer and makes payment through credit card and the transaction fails. Now, a transaction may fail due to several reasons, some of them being following:

- Credit limit available for this month is less than EMI
- Card expiry due next month
- Network failure

In this case, if retailer does not know the reason of transaction failure then it may suffer loss of a valuable customer. However, if partner portal is able to provide details of transaction process and the reason why it got rejected, retailer may probably be able to retain its customer. This is the case where business processes of different partners cut across. Capability of partner portal in helping collaboration depends on its ability to integrate partners' application seamlessly.

Benefits of Partner Portal for Banks

Following diagram represents a sample model of Partner Lifecycle.



The central idea of Partner Lifecycle Management is "Communication". Through partner portal banks can develop a seamless communication system which will help in end to end management of Partner Lifecycle.

Banks can derive following benefits from partner portal:

- **Collaborative partner ecosystem**

It has long been the vision of some large banks to have a solution which can bring not only banks and suppliers for banks but also other constituent members of partner ecosystem at one place. Partner portals have capabilities to make collaboration possible for all constituents of partner ecosystem so that they can deliver the best possible solution to their collective customers. How far the collaboration is possible through partner portal depends mainly on the design of partner portal. Partner portals for banks should be designed in such a way that it should serve the purpose of relationship between bank and partner ecosystem that surrounds it.

- **Increased cross-sell**

Partner portal provides a platform where financial institution can show case themselves as one entity which can service the customer for all his/her financial needs. Banks can cross sell products like life insurance, general insurance, mutual funds through partner portal. Bank's can provide facility of linking customer's account to these products for payment options. Also, banks can provide customer a complete view of their financial exposure to different assets and liabilities. Based upon risk profile of customer banks can provide suggestions to them for different products. One thing that banks need to take care is that they should provide end to end facility for partner products i.e. banks need to take care of not only marketing and selling of product but also servicing also through partner portal. To take care of this aspect partner portal should have the capability of seamless integration across partners' applications. This will result in increased trust and more cross selling opportunities for partners.

- **Integrated supply chain management**

Partner portal can help banks in integrating their supply chain through single platform. Banks can provide their representatives and customers an option to order material like cheque book, demand draft through partner portal. At the same time banks, through some business rules, can enrich their partner portal to directly place the order to different suppliers for these materials. In this way banks can increase the efficiency of their supply chain. Here again banks need to take care of servicing aspect. Partner portal should provide the facility to customers/representatives and suppliers to track the material and escalate to designated bank authorities in case of any delay.

- **Integrated efficiency in business**

Partner portal can help banks in selling their products at different locations where banks do not even have service outlet. For example, an automobile retailer while providing a financing option to customer through partner portal can also suggest for accidental insurance, fixed deposit etc

to customer. This way bank may sell their products through different retailers and this will result in reduced operational cost for banks. One aspect that banks need to take care most here is that retailers are the face of the bank in front of customers and hence, retailers need to be trained and certified by banks to sell these products on the bank's behalf.

Summary

Partner portals provide an excellent opportunity for banks to consolidate all their partners at one place. A well designed partner portal can extend the reach of a bank across borders and across products. This will not only result in increased efficiency for banks but also help banks in achieving better partner relationship and increased customer satisfaction through integrated servicing option across partner applications.

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