TECHNOLOGY BUYER'S JOURNEY

TECHNOLOGY BUYER'S JOURNEY

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INTRODUCTION

CompTIA
Business Applications Advisory Council

CompTIA
Channel Development Advisory Council

Tech buyers today are more informed, more empowered, and more complex than ever. But they still need help, especially to navigate through a constantly churning sea of vendors, products, services, and options in order to choose a solution that meets their specific business need. A seller's ability to recognize where a customer is on the buyer's journey, and then provide appropriate steps and actions to move them along to the next step, can be critical to success. To help solution providers achieve better customer service and increase their value to potential customers, CompTIA's Business Applications Advisory Council and Channel Development Advisory Council collaborated to map out a typical buyer's journey. The result is a long-form infographic that illustrates and explains the roles that vendors, distributors and solution providers should play, respectively, to help customers move the buyer along.

The Tech Buyer's Journey was created to help tech sellers understand what has changed in the modern buyer's journey and what new processes are necessary to better serve buyers.

WHAT IS THE BUYER'S JOURNEY?

The buyer's journey is a visualization of the end-to-end process and steps that customers take when making a technology purchase. The journey is divided into 17 steps and four phases (marketing, sales, technical and customer success) and provides guidance on how everyone involved can add value to the customer experience.

WHY WAS IT CREATED?

The resource was jointly developed by CompTIA's Channel Development Advisory Council and Business Applications Advisory Council to help solution providers, vendors and distributors determine where their customers are in the journey and what they can do to help.

WHO SHOULD USE IT?

The buyer's journey was designed to provide value to almost everyone in the IT supply chain, including marketing, sales, technical and customer success teams within individual companies.

HOW CAN IT HELP YOUR BUSINESS?

The ability to understand today's buyer's journey is critical to success and to ensuring long-term relationships with customers.

HOW DO I APPLY IT TO MY BUSINESS?

Use the buyer's journey as a guide. Introduce it to your marketing, sales, technical and customer success teams and ask them how the steps align to your current processes. Then analyze where you have gaps or overlap in resources and how you can fill in the gaps or reallocate resources to create a smoother journey. Talk to your customers along the way to ensure they're proceeding along the map as expected and talk about what's next and how you'll help them get there.

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Phase 1: Marketing

The buyer's journey **begins here**. Content and marketing collateral are developed to identify business pain points, get the customer to recognize the pain point, and inform them that you have a solution for their problem. The goal of this phase is to provide the customer with the information they need to want to move forward, and into the **Sales phase**.

PAIN	DISCOVERY	AWARENESS	RESEARCH

VENDOR   DISTRIBUTOR   SOLUTION PROVIDER

STEP 1:
PAIN

The buyer may not be aware of the pain yet or they may have already identified it, but something must be wrong to drive a buyer to start the journey.

››› WHAT'S CHANGED FOR TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?
- The speed of market changes can create customer pain
- "Buzz" and information overload can be confusing
- Financial pressure and resource constraints are challenging
- It's a digital world—every company is a tech company

››› WHAT IS THE NEW PROCESS IN THIS STEP?
- Abundant information online is increasing customers' pain awareness
- Policy and compliance are driving pain
- Customers ask more probing questions to uncover pain
- Empathy goes a long way with prospects
- Keep reminding the buyer of the pain throughout the sales process

| PAIN | DISCOVERY | AWARENESS | RESEARCH |

STEP 2:
DISCOVERY

At this point, the buyer discovers that not everyone has the same pain they are feeling and recognize that something must be done. They may start to hear about potential solutions, at which point marketing activities are key to opening doors.

››› WHAT'S CHANGED FOR TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?
- SEO and keyword search attract buyers
- Line of business has more influence
- Less sales engagement
- Buyers are looking for solutions

››› WHAT IS THE NEW PROCESS IN THIS STEP?
- Digital and social media are the new norm
- Internet searches used in process
- Peer networking means a faster process
- Customer references and third parties used in process

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| PAIN | DISCOVERY | AWARENESS | RESEARCH |

STEP 3:
AWARENESS

Once buyers discover the level of their pain, they can identify whether the pain is increasing, decreasing, or staying constant, which triggers how aggressive they may be in the market. For example, the buyer may receive complaints internally or externally from their own customers and ask questions internally to gauge pain levels. Marketing efforts may have the greatest impact in this phase, so it's important to make sure buyers are aware of your solutions.

»» WHAT'S CHANGED FOR TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?
- Education increases buyer awareness
- Buyers are looking into details for solution points
- Strong focus on results and business outcomes
- Buyers are consuming data at increased rate, increasing potential awareness of pain and the need to fix it

»» WHAT IS THE NEW PROCESS IN THIS STEP?
- Data/demographic-based approaches
- Buyer personas are used to identify purchasing triggers that can be used to generate effective marketing campaigns
- Use cases and success stories are key to understanding value and benefits of a solution
- Buyers continuously seek insights from third parties

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| PAIN | DISCOVERY | AWARENESS | RESEARCH |

STEP 4:
RESEARCH

Buyer is beginning to review potential solutions, likely on their own but relying on advice from peers, others in their industry and external objective recommendations.

»» **WHAT'S CHANGED FOR TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?**
- Self-guided process for many customers

»» **WHAT IS THE NEW PROCESS IN THIS STEP?**
- Researching vendor sites or directly engaging vendors
- Peer groups and industry meetings provide valuable resources to get information
- CIOs increasingly are collaborating with line-of-business decision makers

PAIN | DISCOVERY | AWARENESS | RESEARCH

MARKETING

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THE CHANNEL?

Vendors, distributors, and **solution providers** each play unique, critical roles in the tech buyer's journey. During this initial phase, it's important to demonstrate that your company has the expertise and experience to analyze pain points and the right solution to minimize or eliminate the pain.

⟩⟩⟩ VENDOR

Here are some tactics that vendors can employ to help customers recognize and want to seek help for pain points.

- Use cases
- Industry success stories
- Advisory groups
- Campaign kits
- Co-branding collateral
- Content syndication
- Consumption data / assessments
- Market development funds
- Education events
- Market data and trends
- Marketing automation tools
- Channel enablement

⟩⟩⟩ DISTRIBUTOR

During this phase, distributors have a responsibility to bridge the messaging between vendors and solution providers. Examples of tactics to be more effective may include:

- Multi-vendor messaging
- Reference architecture
- Business Intelligence data based on past purchases
- Account-based marketing delivery
- Education events
- Market data
- Advisory councils
- Campaign kits

⟩⟩⟩ PARTNER/ SOLUTION PROVIDER

By leveraging a wide variety of content created by vendors, distributors, and their own, solution providers may represent the closest touch point to the customer. Effective tactics include:

- Co-branding
- Social media
- Education events
- Marketing automation platforms to improve campaigns
- Customer engagement, i.e., it's time for business discussions
- Proactive use of all channel resources

Phase 2: Sales

After moving through the **Marketing phase**, it's time to start selling. These next six steps move the buyer along from evaluating potential solutions to making the actual purpose. The goal of this phase is to convince customers that your solution will solve their pain point at a price that makes sense, and then prepare them for the next phase, **Technical.**

ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION	COMPETITIVE REVIEW	LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW	NEGOTIATION	QUOTE	ACCEPTANCE

STEP 5:

ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION

As the buyer starts to compare the pros and cons of various solutions, sales engagement becomes key. Customers who feel their salesperson is exceptional are 10x-15X more likely to remain loyal.

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»» WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?

- Timely follow up and responsiveness are key
- Longer sales cycles are possible
- Analysis of what customers have vs. what they want now
- Return on investment
- Customers try to "self-serve," leading to mistakes
- Security must be considered
- Total business impact, including tax, budget, and workflow processes

»» NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:

- Trials (auto convert and/or outcome-based)
- Pilot programs
- Proof of concept justification
- Departmental level interaction
- Lines of business involved

ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION	COMPETITIVE REVIEW	LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW	NEGOTIATION	QUOTE	ACCEPTANCE

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STEP 6:

COMPETITIVE REVIEW

Once the buyer has narrowed down potential options, Sales engagement will increase, making it easier for the buyer to compare your solution to your competitors.

››› **WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?**
- Faster access to information
- Multiple consumption options (financing, licensing, etc.)
- More awareness of options
- Integrations are valued

››› **NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:**
- Online comparison functionality to differentiate between solutions, functionality
- Outside agnostic views provide credible reviews
- Minimum viable solutions are considered
- Customers may be concerned about future proofing

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| ASSESSMENT • EVALUATION | COMPETITIVE REVIEW | LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW | NEGOTIATION | QUOTE | ACCEPTANCE |

STEP 7:

LEGAL/SLA/ CONTRACT REVIEW

The buyer validates the solution with internal or external experts on legal and other ramifications to ensure and analyze compliance, depending on industry or vertical market. Contract terms and conditions are reviewed.

»» WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?
- Many products are now offered as a service (XaaS)
- Agreements are expected to be honored, i.e., delivery on time with no price changes
- Performance analytics are required

»» NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:
- Service level agreements (SLAs)
- Month-to-month terms, no commitment
- Monthly payment options
- Termination clauses
- Migration and data recovery considered
- Indemnification discussed
- Performance / downtime credits expected

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| ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION | COMPETITIVE REVIEW | LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW | NEGOTIATION | QUOTE | ACCEPTANCE |

STEP 8:

NEGOTIATION

At this stage, the buyer appears keen on buying a solution and is actively engaged with negotiations on price and contract terms and conditions.

››› **WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?**
- Less negotiation and/or special pricing than in the past (especially for SMB)
- Customers consider the "shelf life" of the technology
- Length of contract/term is discussed
- M&A possibilities are considered, i.e., what happens to support if the vendor gets purchased

››› **NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:**
- Program-driven processes, i.e., tied to consumption or per-use models
- Customers want to understand the cost basis (of consuming as ongoing service vs. project-based costs)

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| ASSESSMENT • EVALUATION | COMPETITIVE REVIEW | LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW | NEGOTIATION | QUOTE | ACCEPTANCE |

STEP 9:
QUOTE

The proposal, including pricing, contract length, terms and conditions, support, etc., is solidified.

››› **WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?**

- Quote to purchase decision is faster
- Consumption-based models may make quoting more difficult because of a need to estimate costs based on utilization
- Public, published pricing is now common as special pricing situations and discount programs dry up

››› **NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:**

- Products/services are often tied to new XaaS agreement terms
- Online quotes and proposals are now common
- There's more of a need to provide models and hypotheticals that help predict usage costs based on consumption
- Rate tables are required in consumption service models
- Threshold management or metering may be required to limit consumption or manage costs

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| ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION | COMPETITIVE REVIEW | LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW | NEGOTIATION | QUOTE | ACCEPTANCE |

STEP 10:

ACCEPTANCE

The buyer has agreed to purchase, and all agreements and contracts are signed. Orders need to be processed quickly, accurately, and with no discrepancies.

››› WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?

- There's less "C-level" involvement as line-of-business (LoB) leaders get more involved
- In some cases, purchase orders are not required, especially for consumption-based service agreements

››› NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:

- Acceptance/approval from line-of-business leaders.
- Functionality for online click/purchase
- Instant delivery requested

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| ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION | COMPETITIVE REVIEW | LEGAL/SLA/CONTRACT REVIEW | NEGOTIATION | QUOTE | ACCEPTANCE |

MARKETING

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THE CHANNEL?

Vendors, distributors, and **solution providers** each play unique, critical roles in the tech buyer's journey. During this phase, it's important to work together, leveraging a proven sales process in place to help the tech buyer seamlessly move from a prospect to warm lead to customer.

›› VENDOR

Here are some tactics that vendors can employ through distributors and solution providers to keep the sales process moving.

- Training, with a focus on product features, value, motion sales overlay and compensation plans
- Return on Investment (ROI) tools
- Trials and not-for-resale equipment and demos (in house use)
- Sales content (i.e., easy-to-use videos)
- Clear product road maps
- Flexible consumption models

›› DISTRIBUTOR

During this phase, distributors have a responsibility to bridge the messaging between vendors and solution providers. Effective tactics include:

- Training, with a focus on specific models and processes
- Product comparisons / Provide a rich experience with other solutions
- Business intelligence Tools (ATIACH Cross Sell) - predictive
- Proposal generators
- Pre-sales resources

›› PARTNER/ SOLUTION PROVIDER

Vendors and distributors have proven libraries full of sales resources and tools, while other sales tactics could be useful here, including:

- Training, with a focus on specific models and processes
- Product comparisons / Provide a rich experience with other solutions
- Business intelligence Tools (ATIACH Cross Sell) - predictive
- Proposal generators
- Pre-sales resources

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Phase 3: Technical

The three important steps for both buyers and sellers in this phase go a long way to ensure a positive customer experience. But there's a lot that's changed too. Vendors, distributors and solution providers need to ensure they're prepared to manage each technical step in a new way.

| DELIVERY | TRAINING | IMPLEMENTATION |

SKIP AHEAD

>> VENDOR >> DISTRIBUTOR >> SOLUTION PROVIDER

STEP 11:
DELIVERY

The product has been delivered and planning has started for training and implementation to ensure a successful launch. Project implementation will soon begin and it's critical at this step to set customer expectations and milestones.

››› **WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?**
• Shift from product ownership to as-a-service models
• Customers expect to turn on services immediately rather than wait for product shipment
• Buyer does not want virtual inventory

››› **NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:**
• Products and services are API-enabled, instantly provisioned
• SLA-driven expectations of delivery
• Buyers expect delivery anytime, any quantity
• Products and services are pre-configured to streamline setup
• Services are bundled into managed services, i.e. "We do it for you"
• Pilot programs can be converted seamlessly into production

DELIVERY | TRAINING | IMPLEMENTATION

YOU ARE HERE

STEP 12:

TRAINING

Customers, including all relevant employees, are trained on all aspects of the solution. The goal is to encourage utilization and reinforce value. Also, open the door to additional opportunity to drive consumption of additional services.

» WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?
- Training is consumed on-demand and on the fly (in app)
- Online training replaces on-site training
- Buyer expectations to download and use immediately
- Cross-product integration becomes important, training should reflect this

» NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:
- Pilot initiated
- Training is online and on-demand; with "quick-hit" videos available anytime
- Self-guided training becomes the norm
- Integrated product training is expected

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| DELIVERY | TRAINING | IMPLEMENTATION |

STEP 13:

IMPLEMENTATION

The solution is deployed and being used in the field by trained employees and staff.

››› **WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?**
- Fast to use. Buyers can download and start using immediately. Auto-configuration is expected
- Implementation requirements are documented (i.e., reference architecture)
- Data migration is getting more complex. Be cognizant of that
- Buyers and sellers want the quick start methodology with channel expertise to avoid mistakes others have made

››› **NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:**
- Pre-configured. Instant on
- Templates can jump start usage
- Migration automation is expected
- AI is being applied to streamline implementation and use

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DELIVERY	TRAINING	IMPLEMENTATION

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MARKETING

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THE CHANNEL?

Vendors, distributors, and **solution providers** each play unique, critical roles in the tech buyer's journey. During this initial phase, it's important to demonstrate that your company has the expertise and experience to analyze pain points and the right solution to minimize or eliminate the pain.

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VENDOR

Technical support for implementation and training is critical at this juncture. Here are some tactics that vendors to ensure success:

- APIs/ web hooks for both purchasing and provisioning
- Multi-tenant management console
- RMM / PSA Integration (MSO) - service management capabilities

DISTRIBUTOR

Once again, distributors play a key role ensuring that delivery, training and implementation tools are effectively communicated and received by both vendors and solution providers. Tactics to consider:

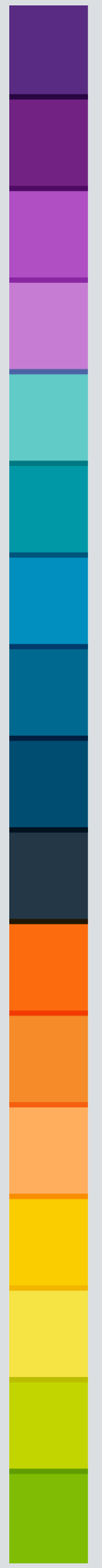- PCAT form - API (Aggregation)
- PSA integration (MSP)

PARTNER/ SOLUTION PROVIDER

As the resource closest to the customer, training and implementation success will ultimately be determined by the partner/solution provider. Here are some tactics to consider:

- Pilot / trial conversion
- Onboarding
- Migration / set up
- Training

Phase 4: Customer Success

The three important steps for both buyers and sellers in this phase go a long way to ensure a positive customer experience. But there's a lot that's changed too. Vendors, distributors and solution providers need to ensure they're prepared to manage each technical step in a new way.

SUPPORT	BILLING/PAYING	ADOPTION	QBR/POST-BUSINESS REVIEW

>>> VENDOR   >>> DISTRIBUTOR   >>> SOLUTION PROVIDER

STEP 14:

SUPPORT

For this final phase, proactive and reactive support resources should be in place. Sellers should expect higher support requirements, especially early, but those will decline as adoption rises over time. Also, customer experience is critical to avoid buyer's remorse. Any problems that arise should be viewed as an opportunity to reinforce commitment.

WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?
- Local presence is preferred by customers, reinforcing the value of channel partners
- Buyers will expect consolidated support and immediate access, i.e., online, chat, or call anytime
- Fast remediation is expected and a chance to build loyalty
- Strive for no downtime and to solve issues the first time

NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:
- Automation can help streamline support processes, i.e., chat bots
- Customers should instantly access support information, based on severity
- Partners are expected to be product experts in support of buyers
- Price is differentiated by support, not by product cost
- 24/7 coverage expected
- All support should be documented/backed by SLAs

| SUPPORT | BILLING/PAYING | ADOPTION | QBR/POST-BUSINESS REVIEW |

YOU ARE HERE

STEP 15:

BILLING/ PAYING

Invoicing begins for the solution implemented. Look to avoid or minimize risk of non-payment due to solution delivery concerns.

WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?

- Offer a perpetual purchase order, rather than one for each order, to streamline billing and automate payments
- Billing predictability is expected from buyers, based on quantity, price and/or consumption
- Metered service is more complex and could spark anxiety over overages
- Transparency leads to fewer issues down the road
- IoT and consumption from other non-traditional devices can complicate the bill

NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:

- Recurring invoices
- Threshold management control (for consumption)
- Customers should have access to usage anytime
- Expense management tools can help centralize customer billing
- Integration into billing apps provides more automation, fewer problems

SUPPORT	BILLING/PAYING	ADOPTION	QBR/POST-BUSINESS REVIEW

YOU ARE HERE

STEP 16:

ASSESSMENT + EVALUATION

At this step, users are becoming more comfortable with the solution, but continued support and reinforcement is still key for success. Provide additional training and best practices to fully leverage the solution and build more of a trusted advisor relationship with the client.

WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?

- Higher speed to decision making in today's fast-paced world
- Change management is logged and reported, providing increased accountability and documentation
- Collaboration between all parties drives increased adoption
- Mobile app expected. Use anytime, anywhere
- Ease of use expected

NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:

- AI Enabled in mobile applications, providing increased usability, flexibility
- Summary reports show business value in real-time
- Data visibility must be constant and accessible
- Support of mobile apps in today's on-the-go world

SUPPORT | BILLING/PAYING | ADOPTION | QBR/POST-BUSINESS REVIEW

YOU ARE HERE

STEP 17:

QBR/ POST-BUSINESS REVIEW

Quarterly business reviews are key to maintaining customer satisfaction and high retention rates. Be sure to include all stakeholders and demonstrate continued value and relevance in the market. QBRs also provide an opportunity to cross sell and upsell. Finally, ask customer if they're willing to act as a reference for future marketing.

WHAT'S CHANGED WITH TODAY'S BUYING ENVIRONMENT?

- Business reviews must be tangible, providing real metrics
- Customer expectations must be managed, with the goal of raising the bar around desired business outcomes
- QBRs should include the business leaders, not just IT leaders

NEW PROCESSES IN THIS STEP:

- Metrics optimizations need to be addressed to meet today's expectations
- Additional sales opportunities are based on enhancing business outcomes
- Take a more proactive approach when possible, i.e., don't wait for quarterly reviews
- Measure business outcomes to help customers determine ROI and value to the business

SUPPORT   BILLING/PAYING   ADOPTION   QBR/POST-BUSINESS REVIEW

YOU ARE HERE

MARKETING

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THE CHANNEL?

Vendors, distributors, and **solution providers** each play unique, critical roles in the tech buyer's journey. During this initial phase, it's important to demonstrate that your company has the expertise and experience to analyze pain points and the right solution to minimize or eliminate the pain.

VENDOR

To ensure customer success, distributors and vendors need access to as much customer data—and analysis—as possible. Some tactics and tools to consider:

- Share data and metrics for regular business reviews and KPIs with customers

- Share trends and use cases that allow comparisons between the tech buyer and its peers

DISTRIBUTOR

Distributors are keepers of tremendous amounts of data, plus their advanced billing capabilities provide solution providers with an opportunity to differentiate through automation and flexibility. Consider:

- Aggregate billing opportunities to streamline admin costs and provide customers with a holistic view of usage, costs, etc. (PSA, ERP Integration, MSP tool integration)

PARTNER/ SOLUTION PROVIDER

As the resource closest to the customer, training and implementation success will ultimately be determined by the partner/solution provider. Here are some tactics to consider:

- Business reviews

- Upsell / cross-sell opportunities

- Look to drive more consumption and unlock additional value

- Perform compliance checks

- Monitor usage for trends, possible improvements

- Reconcile business goals with performance

- Conduct technology review / audit to discuss long-term roadmap

- Built a program-based price that simplifies offerings

- Optimization to maintain customer satisfaction

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