



The death of the portal:

**Why B2B channels must brace
for the agentic shift**

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For years, indirect channel management has followed a predictable, if frustrating, blueprint. You recruit partners, build a partner relationship management (PRM) portal, upload product specs and marketing PDFs and hope for the best. When deals get sticky, people step in to negotiate margins, resolve channel conflict or manually verify inventory. This operational model is built on linear processes and administrative oversight. And it's completely out of step with where B2B commerce is heading.

We're moving rapidly away from simple, disjointed automation toward what McKinsey recently coined the "Agentic Organization," a paradigm shift where artificial intelligence moves from a passive assistant to an active, autonomous organizational entity.

- 90% of B2B buying interactions will be intermediated by AI agents by 2028.
- \$15 trillion in B2B spend will be driven through autonomous systems.
- 89% of B2B buyers are already using generative AI (GenAI) for self-guided research.

In the B2B channel space, this change isn't a slow burn; it's a forcing function. The reality we must face is stark: if your channel operations aren't agentic, your business will become structurally invisible to a multi-trillion-pound procurement engine.

From “omnichannel” to “channel-less” ecosystems

Over the last couple of years, enterprise conversations have focused on GenAI “copilots”: chatbots that help partners find technical documents or rewrite co-branded emails. While useful, these tools are limited. They’re fundamentally reactive, waiting quietly for a person to ask a question.

Agentic AI flips this dynamic. An agent doesn’t just display a dashboard or draft text; it has a degree of cognition. It can plan, reason, access external tools via APIs and execute multi-step workflows across different corporate systems without a human approving every single turn.

“This triggers a massive macro shift: we’re moving from traditional omnichannel marketing to a completely channel-less architecture. Instead of building interfaces designed for human touchpoints, organizations must build systems that cater directly to agent-to-agent (A2A) communication.”

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Imagine a partner pipeline that continuously heals itself through this automated choreography. An AI agent tracks engagement metrics across your partner ecosystem, monitoring portal logins, certification velocity and early-stage deal tracking. If a historically productive systems integrator falls dormant, the agent doesn’t just flag it on an internal report. It acts. It autonomously reviews

local market data, identifies a localized product gap, packages up a tailored incentive or margin bonus and pushes a set of hot, pre-qualified leads directly into that partner's CRM to kickstart the relationship.

This is the shift from broad, one-to-many broadcast marketing to automated, one-to-one ecosystem orchestration.

The zero-click reality

A profound shift in how B2B buyers want to interact drives this evolution. B2B procurement has always suffered from high friction. Modern buyers have zero appetite for navigating complex vendor catalogs, sitting through generic pitches or waiting weeks for a customized quote. They want speed, transparency and digital self-service.

This preference is giving rise to “zero-click commerce.” When a buyer's autonomous purchasing agent sources components or software, it doesn't browse website interfaces. It looks for highly structured product data, live API-driven availability and real-time localized pricing.

If a multi-party deal desk requires a cloud vendor, an independent software vendor (ISV) and a global systems integrator to collaborate, an agentic workflow can act as an automated mediator. It can cross-validate multi-party pricing margins, enforce programmatic discount guardrails, reconcile regional tax codes and simultaneously route the final contract for digital signature. If your partner network can't surface this level of live, dynamically adjusted data straight to a buyer's purchasing agent, the deal is lost before a human sales representative even knows the opportunity exists.

Redesigning the human and AI workflow

Leaders at organizations like McKinsey and BCG agree that AI won't replace humans in this agentic era. Instead, organizations are profoundly redesigning their team structures. Channel and marketing teams are pivoting from manual, repetitive tasks to orchestrating AI teams. With core platforms doing the heavy lifting — whether you use enterprise-level CRM agents like Salesforce Agentforce, mid-market growth automation via HubSpot Breeze AI or bespoke go-to-market architectures on low-code frameworks like Relevance AI and Gumloop — the human role fundamentally evolves into three key disciplines:

- **AI workflow architecture:** Designing, provisioning and continuously optimizing the prompts, tool access points and autonomous sequences that agents navigate.
- **Quality and brand monitoring:** Acting as the ultimate authority to check AI actions for compliance, bias, regulatory adherence and strict brand alignment.
- **Strategic nuance:** Injecting original insight, empathy, creativity and the high-level relationship-building that machines simply cannot replicate.

The structural blueprint: Cognition, tools and guardrails

Transitioning to an agentic paradigm requires an evolution in corporate architecture. You can't simply bolt an autonomous agent onto a messy legacy core. To make this work safely and securely, you should view the architecture through a distinct three-tier framework:

1. **Agent cognition (the brain):** Reasoning, long-term memory and strategic trade-off evaluation based on ecosystem-wide datasets.
2. **Tool acquisition (the hands):** Secure, programmatic API access to the core stack, including CRM, PRM, ERP and CPQ platforms, to execute transactions.
3. **Guardrail control (the brakes):** Hardcoded legal, financial and brand compliance ceilings that bound the agent's autonomous execution power.

Getting AI-ready: Where leadership must start

AI doesn't fix broken processes or bad data, it simply accelerates them. If your partner catalogs are fragmented, your CRM data is missing and your contract terms are trapped in legacy silos, an autonomous agent will fail instantly. For leadership, the immediate priority is fixing your digital foundation:

- **Deconstruct processes into agent-ready tasks.** Map your current partner journey, from onboarding and marketing enablement to deal registration and fund allocation. Identify the high-friction, administrative steps you can hand over to autonomous execution.
- **Treat data as an enterprise product.** Move away from monolithic, locked infrastructure in favor of modular, composable and API-first data architectures. Your systems must talk to external partner systems natively to facilitate agent-to-agent commerce.
- **Implement proactive guardrails.** Shift your compliance and audit focus from retroactive cleanup to proactive bounding gates. Build the architectural guardrails that separate an agent's reasoning from its execution power.



The B2B channel of the near future won't be managed through a portal login and a monthly catch-up call. Highly integrated, autonomous ecosystems will run it, transacting at a speed people simply can't match. The companies building the roads for these agents today are the ones that will capture the \$15 trillion market tomorrow.

Deepen your insights

Explore how agentic AI is transforming enterprise technology in this panel discussion featuring tech analyst Bernard Marr in conversation with Shayan Mohanty, Chief Data and AI Officer at Thoughtworks. Together, they examine governance, modern architectures and how organizations can prepare for the shift toward autonomous systems.



Available on YouTube

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