

# Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

## Episode 118: How to Leverage 9 Overlooked Partnerships to Accelerate Your Agency's Growth

### Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

#### **Audrey Joy Kwan:**

Are you missing out on nine hidden types of agency partnerships? Most agency owners know about basic referral partnerships, but what if I told you there are nine different types of strategic partnerships that could transform your agency's growth? And I bet you're only using one of them? In this special episode, I'm pulling back the curtains on partnership strategies that are quietly generating results for agencies. These aren't your typical let's trade referral agreements. They're growth engines. And this episode might completely change how you think about growing your agency. First, you'll discover the nine partnership types most agencies don't even know exist. Then we'll explore why traditional networking isn't enough anymore and what to do instead. Plus, how to make your marketing and sales feel effortless through strategic partnerships. And we'll uncover a partnership type that's transforming how agencies handle talent and scaling. I'm sharing exactly how to implement each type of partnership, complete with real examples from agencies just like yours. If you want to put these strategies into action, join us at the strategic partnership mixer [rsvp agencytogether.com/mixerevent](https://agencytogether.com/mixerevent). That link is in the show Notes.

Okay, let's stop leaving growth opportunities on the table. Let's transform your approach to partnerships. Tune in.

#### **Audrey Joy Kwan:**

Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you want to grow an agency to seven figures and beyond without working more hours in your business, you're in the right place. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan. I know what it takes to build an agency, including supporting an agency owner in selling and exiting. I also have a Master's degree in communications specializing in organizational development. My team and I have worked behind the scenes of multiple seven figure agencies and have coached and consulted with over 150 agency owners. All this to say when you join us on the Small But

Mighty Agency Podcast. You get real world experience and practical tips to help you work less, earn more, and lead with integrity. So let's go.

**Audrey Joy Kwan:**

Welcome back to the Small But Mighty Agency podcast! I'm your host, Audrey, and today we're diving into something that could completely transform your agency's growth trajectory - but only if you're ready to think bigger about strategic partnerships. You know, most agency owners I talk to view partnerships as just a way to get referrals or expand services. But what if I told you that's just scratching the surface?

Here's what's exciting - there are actually nine distinct ways to leverage strategic partnerships that can rapidly grow your client base and make your marketing and sales efforts feel less like pushing a boulder uphill and more like having a team of people helping you reach your goals. Yes, it's going to transform your client acquisition, but it's also going to change how you think about growing your agency entirely.

Now, I know what some of you might be thinking - "Audrey, I already do referral partnerships." And that's great! Referrals are absolutely vital for growing an agency. In fact, they're often the lifeblood of client acquisition, especially for smaller agencies. But here's the thing - strategic partnerships take referrals to a whole new level.

Let me paint a picture of what I mean. Strategic partnerships aren't just about sending business back and forth. They're about creating opportunities that wouldn't exist if you were working alone. They're about sparking innovation, unlocking new markets, and positioning your agency as an indispensable partner - not just to your clients, but to other amazing agencies as well.

In today's episode, I'm going to walk you through all nine types of strategic partnerships. Think of these as different lenses you can use to spot partnership opportunities you might be missing right now. Some of these might surprise you, and I guarantee you'll walk away with at least a few new ideas you can implement right away.

Let's dive into these nine partnership strategies that could transform your agency's growth this year:

Let's kick off with what I consider the foundation of strategic partnerships - service-based complementary partnerships. You know, it's funny - this is often called the "classic" partnership approach, it's the one that most agencies are familiar with, but don't let that fool you into thinking it's basic or overdone. When done right, these partnerships are like finding the perfect dance partner - someone who moves differently than you but creates something magical when you work together.

Think about it - we all have our sweet spots, right? The services we absolutely crush. But clients today? They're looking for comprehensive results. That's where these partnerships become pure gold. It's not just about having a buddy to send referrals to - it's about creating this seamless, end-to-end experience that makes your clients feel like they've hit the jackpot.

**Let me share a real example that brings this to life.**

A partnership like a branding agency team up with a web design agency. A branding agency is amazing at creating stunning visual identities, but they might kept running into clients who ask, "Great, but who's going to build my website?" Instead of just referring these clients out and hoping for the best, they create a partnership where the web design team is brought in from day one.

The magic? Everything flows perfectly. The brand guidelines seamlessly translated into web design, the messaging stays consistent, and clients got this gorgeous, cohesive brand presence without having to play project manager between different agencies. It's like watching a perfectly choreographed performance where every move builds on the last.

Or here's another one I love - a content marketing agency paired up with a PPC specialist. Now, we all know content and paid advertising should work together, but how often does that actually happen? In this case, they created this incredible system where the content team's keyword research and messaging directly informed the PPC campaigns, and the PPC data helped shape future content strategies. Their clients were seeing these amazing results because everything was working in harmony instead of operating in silos.

**Key Benefit:** Here's what makes these partnerships so powerful - they're not just about expanding your service offering. They're about creating this complete ecosystem where everything just works. Your clients get better results because there's no disconnect between services. You can take on bigger, more complex projects because you have a trusted partner who gets it. And the best part? Both agencies grow faster because you're not just referring business - you're creating a more valuable service that attracts higher-quality clients.

Think of it like this - instead of being one piece of the puzzle, you become the puzzle master who can put all the pieces together. That's incredibly valuable to clients who are tired of juggling multiple vendors and trying to make everything work together themselves.

Now, let's dive into something that maximizes niche expertise and how you approach your niche market - it's called industry-focused complementary partnerships.

This is where things get really interesting, because we're talking about teaming up with agencies who live and breathe your same industry, but bring totally different superpowers to the table.

You know how in a great band, every musician plays a different instrument but they're all playing the same song? That's exactly what these partnerships are like. You're both experts in your industry, but you each bring something unique that makes the overall performance better.

**Let me share a story that perfectly illustrates this.**

A real estate marketing agency is crushing it with their digital campaigns, but they kept hearing the same feedback from clients: "The marketing is great, but our listings don't look as good as they could." Instead of just referring clients out, they formed this incredible partnership with a virtual staging agency. Suddenly, they weren't just marketing properties - they were transforming how these properties were presented AND marketing them effectively. Their clients were getting better results because every aspect of their listing was optimized.

Here's another example that blows my mind every time I think about it - a health-tech web development agency partnered with a compliance-focused agency. In the healthcare space, having a great website isn't enough - it needs to meet different regulations like accessibility. This partnership meant clients didn't have to worry about whether their amazing new website would pass a compliance audit - everything was handled seamlessly from day one.

**Key Benefit:** When you partner within your industry like this, you're not just offering more services - you're deepening your expertise. Clients see you as a true specialist who understands every facet of their industry challenges. And here's the best part - because you and your partner agency speak the same industry language, your solutions feel completely natural and integrated. It's like having a secret weapon that helps both agencies stand out in a crowded market.

Alright, now we're going to talk about something that might seem counterintuitive at first - cross-industry collaboration partnerships. But magic happens, here. It's like being an explorer discovering this amazing new territory that nobody else has thought to check out.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute, Audrey - why would I want to partner with an agency that serves a completely different industry?" Well, let me tell you why this can be absolute gold for your agency.

Here's the beauty of it - agencies in different industries often come across clients who would be perfect for your agency, and vice versa. Think about it: since you're not

competing for the same piece of pie, you can freely share leads, exchange insights, and create unique solutions together. It's like having a network of friendly neighbors who all serve different types of clients but love sending business to each other.

Let me share an example that shows the power of crossing industry lines - something I see happening every day in Agency Together, my network for agency owners. Every month I witness incredible collaborations between specialized agencies. For example, a digital marketing agency focused on law firms, a branding and design agency serving non-profits, and a social media agency dedicated to healthcare clients. On paper, these agencies serve completely different sectors, but that's exactly what makes their partnership so powerful.

These partnerships absolutely thrive because there's zero competition in the mix. Instead of guarding their client relationships, they're freely sharing strategic connections and referrals. When the law firm marketing agency meets a non-profit that needs help with branding, they know exactly where to send them. When the healthcare social media agency comes across a law firm struggling with their digital presence, they've got a trusted partner to refer them to.

**Key Benefit:** By sharing leads and unique insights, this network of agencies creates opportunities that none of them could achieve alone. And here's what I love most about this approach - it doesn't just expand your network, it makes growing your client base feel natural and organic. There's no cold outreach or hard selling involved - just trusted partners pointing clients in the right direction when they need specialized expertise.

Now let's explore something that can really amplify your agency's impact in specific markets - regional or local collaborations. This is all about the power of "boots on the ground" partnerships, and let me tell you, it's a gem when it comes to breaking into new markets authentically.

You know how every city, every region has its own unique vibe, its own way of doing things? That's exactly why these partnerships are so valuable. It's like having a local guide who knows all the hidden gems in a city you're visiting. They understand the culture, they know the players, and most importantly, they get what makes that market tick.

**Let me share a real example that illustrates this perfectly.**

A national PR agency wanted to expand their reach into several key regional markets. Instead of trying to fake that local expertise, they did something brilliant - they partnered with local content marketing agencies in each region. The national agency brought their high-level PR strategies and media connections, while the local agencies brought their deep understanding of regional stories and community connections.

The results were incredible. Instead of campaigns that felt like they were parachuted in, they were creating content that really resonated with local audiences. The local agencies knew exactly which stories would hit home, which influencers had real credibility, and which angles would get the most traction in their communities.

Here's another example that shows the power of local partnerships - a global advertising agency was struggling to get traction in smaller, but highly profitable markets. They started partnering with boutique agencies in these regions, and something amazing happened. The boutique agencies weren't just executing campaigns - they were helping adapt global strategies to fit local nuances. A campaign that works great in New York might need a completely different approach in Austin or Minneapolis, and these local partners knew exactly how to make those adjustments.

**Key Benefit:** These partnerships do something really special - they give you instant credibility in new markets. You're not just another outside agency trying to break in; you're working with trusted local partners who already have deep roots in the community. And here's what I love most about this approach - it's a win-win for everyone involved. The larger agency gets authentic local presence and insights, while the local agency gets access to bigger clients and broader resources. Together, you're able to create campaigns that feel deeply authentic to each region while maintaining the high-quality standards of a national brand.

Ok, Let's talk about one of my favorite types of partnerships that often gets overlooked - knowledge-sharing partnerships. Now, this isn't about directly winning clients or expanding services. Instead, it's about something equally valuable - becoming a stronger, smarter, more innovative agency.

Think of it like having a mastermind group - but here's the best part - Agency Together provides this collaborative environment without those hefty mastermind price tags that can run into tens of thousands of dollars. We're talking about agencies who are genuinely willing to open their playbooks and share what's really working behind the scenes. It's not just surface-level networking - we're building a community where agencies come together to share their wins, their failures, their processes, and their strategies openly and honestly.

**Let me share what this looks like in practice.** Just recently in Agency Together, we had this incredible knowledge-sharing session all about proposals that convert. Agency owners brought their winning proposals to the table - we're talking about real documents that landed them five and six-figure contracts. They walked through everything: their pricing strategies, how they structure their deliverables, even the exact language that gets clients excited to sign. One agency owner revealed how they increased their close rate by 40% just by restructuring their proposal format. Another shared their follow-up

system that turned "maybe" responses into enthusiastic "yes" decisions. It's like getting a backstage pass to each agency's winning strategies.

But it gets even better. I've seen agencies take this to the next level by conducting joint project reviews. Imagine having a trusted partner agency look at your work with fresh eyes, offering perspectives you might have missed. For example, a web development agency and a UX design agency regularly review each other's projects. They're not competing - they're actively helping each other spot opportunities for improvement and innovation.

**Key Benefit:** Here's why these partnerships are pure gold - they help you grow faster and smarter by learning from others' experiences. Instead of figuring everything out through trial and error, you get to learn from agencies who've already solved the problems you're facing. Plus, when you regularly engage in these knowledge-sharing sessions, you stay ahead of industry trends and continuously bring fresh ideas to your clients.

The best part? These partnerships often lead to innovation you never expected. When different agencies put their minds together, sharing their unique perspectives and experiences, they often create solutions that transform how they all do business. It's like having a research and development team made up of other successful agency owners.

Let's dive into a partnership strategy that's all about being there for your clients at every stage of their journey - client lifecycle partnerships. Think of it like a relay race, where each agency passes the baton at exactly the right moment, ensuring your clients get expert support at every step.

In *Agency Together*, I've seen these partnerships transform how agencies serve their clients. Instead of saying "Sorry, we don't handle that phase," you can confidently say, "I know exactly who can help you with that, and they're amazing at what they do."

Let me share a real example that shows the power of these partnerships. One of our agency members runs a video production agency - they're fantastic at helping clients tell their stories through compelling video content. They noticed their clients have an interest in public speaking and speaking engagements, but they weren't sure how to take that next step. That's when they started to get into conversations with an agency that specializes in speaker development and booking. But here's where it gets interesting - the opportunities are more than a potential referral system. Both agencies win because they're creating opportunities that wouldn't exist if they worked in isolation.

Here's another great example I've seen - a PR agency that focuses on building brand awareness partnered with a crisis management firm. Instead of waiting for a crisis to happen and scrambling to find help, their clients know they have access to expert support if things go sideways. The crisis management team even helps review the PR

agency's campaigns through a risk management lens, adding an extra layer of value to their services.

These partnerships encourage you to think creatively about potential partners—don't just stick to the obvious ones. Think about agencies that can tackle challenges your clients face but fall outside your typical scope. By teaming up with the right partners, you're able to cover more stages of the customer journey, offering seamless, integrated solutions that clients love. This isn't just about making clients happy—it's about opening doors to new opportunities. When you work together, you both attract more clients and showcase the power of a well-connected, comprehensive approach.

**Key Benefit:** What makes these partnerships so valuable is how they change the way clients see you. You're no longer just the agency they hire for a specific task - you become their trusted advisor who can guide them through every stage of their journey. Plus, it opens up incredible opportunities for both agencies. When you can confidently guide clients through their entire journey, they stay with you longer, spend more, and become amazing referral sources themselves.

Let's talk about a fun type of partnership - industry event and content collaborations. These are absolute game-changers when it comes to getting your agency noticed and building meaningful connections.

Think about it - instead of just showing up at events, you're actually creating valuable content and experiences with carefully chosen partners. It's like throwing the party instead of just attending it, and let me tell you, that changes everything about how potential clients see you.

What makes these partnerships special is that they're not just about splitting costs - though that's definitely a nice bonus! They're about combining your expertise and networks to create something truly valuable for your audience. When you partner up for events and content, you're not just reaching your usual crowd - you're tapping into each other's audiences too, and that's where the magic happens.

**Let me share some real examples that show just how powerful these collaborations can be. Picture this:**

You're a content marketing agency teaming up with a marketing automation platform to host a virtual summit on "The Future of Content Distribution." You bring your real-world campaign expertise, they bring their technical insights, and suddenly you've got this incredible event that attracts both of your target audiences. The best part? Everyone walks away with actionable insights, and both partners are positioned as industry leaders. Let's talk about ongoing collaborative content too - I recently saw this work brilliantly when a social media agency teamed up with an email marketing agency. They created



this amazing series of blog posts featuring case studies that showcase both of their expertise. It's like hosting a virtual event that never ends! Each post highlighted a different campaign where social media and email marketing worked together seamlessly, and they promoted these across both their networks. What I love about this approach is that it's not just a one-and-done event - it's content that keeps working for you long after it's published.

**Key Benefit:** Here's what makes industry event and content collaborations so powerful - they do triple duty for your agency. First, they skyrocket your visibility in the industry. When you're up there on stage or hosting that virtual summit, you're not just another agency anymore - you're a thought leader bringing valuable insights to your community. Second, you're building relationships in real-time, which we all know is way more effective than cold outreach. And finally - and this is the part I love most - you're generating leads who are already warmed up to your expertise because they've experienced it firsthand through your events and content.

The real secret sauce here is that these collaborations create natural opportunities for follow-up conversations. When potential clients have just spent time learning from you and engaging with your content, reaching out to continue the conversation feels natural and genuine. It's like you've already started building that relationship before you've even had your first official meeting.

Now, let's dive into technology and tools partnerships. This is the type of partnership that easily gets forgotten but it's where the magic of modern solutions meets good old-fashioned service delivery. We're talking about joining forces with tech companies that can take your agency's capabilities from "pretty good" to "absolutely wow."

Think about it - in today's fast-paced digital world, clients aren't just looking for services anymore. They want solutions that make their lives easier, and that's exactly what these partnerships deliver. It's like giving your agency a superpower boost through technology.

**Here's another real-world example that I love:**

Recently, I saw a project management software company team up with an agency to create custom workflow solutions. They didn't just give clients access to the software - they developed specialized training resources that showed exactly how to use these tools for maximum efficiency. It's like having a master chef not only give you their secret recipes but also teach you their techniques.

Or consider this scenario: A CRM software provider partners with a marketing agency. Together, they're not just managing customer relationships - they're creating this seamless ecosystem where marketing efforts automatically feed into customer data, making every interaction smarter and more targeted. It's like having a crystal ball that tells you exactly what your customers need before they even ask.

The real beauty of these partnerships is how they help you stay ahead of the curve. We all know how fast technology changes - it's like trying to hit a moving target sometimes. But when you have strong tech partnerships, you're not just keeping up with changes - you're helping shape them. You get early access to new features, you can influence product development, and most importantly, you can create solutions that are perfectly tailored to your clients' needs.

Key Benefit: Here's why this matters so much - when you bundle technology with your services, you're not just another agency anymore. You become this innovative problem-solver who brings powerful tools and expertise to the table. Clients love it because they get everything they need in one place - no more juggling multiple vendors or trying to piece together different solutions. Plus, it gives you this amazing competitive edge. When prospects are choosing between agencies, having these tech partnerships can be the factor that tips the scales in your favor.

And let's be honest - in a world where everyone claims to be "data-driven" or "tech-savvy," having actual partnerships with leading tech providers gives you the credentials to back up those claims. It's like having a backstage pass to the future of your industry.

For our final partnership type, I want to talk about something that's rarely discussed in the agency space but has been an undercover opportunity for many agencies - access to talent partnerships. This is one of those partnership strategies that doesn't get enough attention in our industry, but it transforms how smart agencies operate. Now, I know what you might be thinking - isn't this just outsourcing? But trust me, it's so much more than that. This is about creating deep, meaningful collaborations that help both agencies thrive, especially when the market gets a little... well, unpredictable.

### **Let me share a real scenario that happens all the time in our industry.**

For example: You land this amazing project - you know, the kind that makes you do a happy dance in your office. But then reality sets in: you need three more designers yesterday, and your current team is already maxed out. This is where talent partnerships shine. Instead of panicking or turning down the project, you can tap into your partner agency's design team. They know their stuff, they're reliable, and they're ready to jump in. It's like having a trusted backup band ready to play when your show gets bigger than expected.

Here's another situation I've seen work beautifully: imagine you're a creative agency with an incredible copywriting team. During your slower seasons, instead of watching your talented writers twiddle their thumbs, you can share them with partner agencies who are swamped with work. Your team stays busy and engaged, your partner gets top-notch copy, and everyone wins. It's like having a garden where you share your extra tomatoes with neighbors who give you their spare herbs - everybody eats better!

One of my favorite examples is when a small digital marketing agency I know partnered with a larger agency to access their data analysis team. They had this massive client presentation coming up and needed to really knock it out of the park with their reporting. Thanks to this partnership, they delivered insights that absolutely wowed their client - the kind of deep analysis they couldn't have done alone. It's like suddenly having access to a professional kitchen when you've been cooking with a camping stove.

But here's what makes these partnerships truly special - it's not just about filling gaps or meeting deadlines. They're about creating this amazing network of trusted collaborators who have your back when you need them most. It's like having an extended family in the agency world. You get to take on bigger, more exciting projects because you know you have reliable partners who can jump in when needed.

**Key Benefit:** The beauty of talent partnerships is that they give you this incredible flexibility to scale up or down as needed, without the stress of permanent hires or the risk of overextending your resources. Think of it as having an elastic waistband for your agency - you can expand when you need to and contract when you don't, all while maintaining the high quality your clients expect.

Plus - and this is something I've experienced firsthand - these partnerships often lead to innovation you never expected. When different talented teams work together, they bring fresh perspectives and new ways of doing things. Sometimes the best ideas come from these collaborative moments.

And there you have it, agency owners - all nine ways to leverage strategic partnerships for your business! Let me tell you something I've seen time and time again in Agency Together: the agencies that really lean into these different partnership strategies are the ones that consistently pull ahead of their competition.

Think about it - when you're leveraging multiple types of partnerships, you're not just creating one pathway to growth, you're building an entire network of opportunities. It's like having multiple engines powering your agency's growth all at once. I've watched agencies transform their businesses by mastering these strategies, turning partnerships into reliable growth engines that bring in high-quality clients month after month.

Now, you might be thinking - "Audrey, this sounds great, but where do I start?" Let me break it down into some simple, actionable steps:

First, take a good look at your current partnerships. Which of these nine types are you already using? Where are the gaps? Be honest with yourself - most agencies I talk to realize they're only scratching the surface of what's possible.

Second, look for opportunities to diversify. If you're only doing service-based partnerships, maybe it's time to explore knowledge-sharing or regional collaborations. Remember, each type of partnership brings its own unique benefits to your agency.

Third, start small and experiment. You don't need to implement all nine types at once. Maybe begin with a knowledge-sharing partnership or join forces with another agency for a virtual event. Test the waters, see what works best for your agency.

Finally, set clear goals for each partnership. Whether you're looking for more referrals, deeper industry insights, or operational efficiency, having clear objectives will help you measure success and adjust your approach as needed.

Here's what I really want you to take away from today's episode: strategic partnerships aren't one-size-fits-all. By viewing partnerships through all nine of these lenses, you're opening doors to opportunities you might never have considered before.

And if you're excited about putting these ideas into action, I've got something special for you. Join us at our upcoming Strategic Partnership Mixer, where you'll meet other agency owners who are ready to collaborate and grow together. Head over to [agencytogether.com/mixer-event](https://agencytogether.com/mixer-event) to save your spot. The link will be in the show notes.

Thanks for being here - and remember the most successful agencies aren't building alone, they're building together. See you at the mixer!

**Audrey Joy Kwan:**

Hey, thanks for hanging out with me at the Small but Mighty Agency Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean the world to me if you hit the follow or subscribe button in your podcast app and share it with a friend. I'll see you on the next one.