

How Can Sales and Marketing Work Closer Together

Customers and the market place demand that sales people and marketing work close together. However, in many firms, large and small, turf battles reflecting cultural and economic budget issues prevent this from happening. In many firms sales and marketing work independently of each other resulting in a disconnect from each other. There is confusion and competition to determine whether we have a sales or marketing driven organization. Often the poor relationship between sales and marketing results in under-communication, under-performance and over-complaining.

Even peaceful coexistence is not enough. The goal is to work together to create value for their company and their customers. A lack of alignment between sales and marketing hurts corporate performance and wastes valuable resources. Sales and marketing people must work together to create and fulfill demand.

For example, marketing people must monitor actual sales against advertising dollars. What was spent? What was the return? As another example, marketing must time new product/service announcements to the sales people preparedness to sell them.

Marketing needs to identify target markets and customers/prospects for salespeople along with collecting information on these markets and the customers. This requires good communication, a meaningful dialogue between the two functions. For example, what are the competitive issues by which these customers choose one vendor over another in this market? Which of these competitive issues are real differentiators and which are table stakes? Which of these competitive issues are your firm's competitive advantages? This requires the marketing person or persons to review market research data and conduct customer and sales person interviews.

Marketing must also work with sales to develop collateral material or sales aids. They must work with sales on creating demand, generating leads through advertising, promotion, direct mail, telemarketing, and trade shows.

The relationship between sales and marketing can be improved by:

1. Marketing people riding with sales people and making joint calls on target customers/prospects. This allows marketing to be more involved with sales in defining and executing sales strategies for specific major accounts.
2. Including both sales and marketing people on various marketing, advertising and new product committees.
3. Assigning a higher level executive with responsibility for dispute resolution and conflict management between sales and marketing. Conflicts may arise because marketing sets prices and sales must sell that price. High level conflicts may arise whether to allocate more dollars to advertising and promotion or to recruiting more field sales people.
4. Appointing a specific person in the marketing department responsible for the efficient transfer of information between sales and marketing. For example, marketing needs market, customer, competitor, and product intelligence from the field salespeople. The firm needs an efficient,

consistent and timely means for sales people to collect, share and transfer this information to marketing.

5. Using common metrics to measure both sales and marketing success and then using these common metrics for performance pay and performance evaluations. The metrics might include revenue or gross margin growth, market share increase, new accounts or closing ratios.
6. Marketing and sales agreeing on the steps in the sales and marketing funnels, the steps between customer search and purchase and who is responsible for each step. This develops a common language.
7. Marketing representatives participating in sales meetings.
8. Marketing and sales working together on each territory's sales forecast and sales plans.

Marketing and sales duties often become confused because each function takes on tasks it believes the other function should be doing but isn't. For example, salespeople start to do their own market research because the marketing department is busy with advertising or some other function. For example, marketing people start to call directly on customers and prospects with new product ideas because salespeople are busy trying to make quota. Not having clearly defined roles can create confusion and waste. The question is how to properly allocate tasks between sales and marketing.

In a small firm where people have good informal relationships there is less of a need for clearly defined roles between sales and marketing. In these situations marketing acts as a sales support function. However, the roles need to be more clearly defined if conflicts or disruption of tasks occurs or if certain tasks are neglected.

The relationships between sales and marketing vary depending on the type of customer and product/service. New systems and new product sales, first time or one time sales, especially sales where the product/service must be customized, require more marketing involvement and therefore more clearly defined roles and processes for marketing and sales. Existing systems sales, modified re-buys, where the salesperson re-visits a customer every week or every month generally require less marketing involvement. The same holds for commodity sales.

Shorter product life cycles and/or longer sales cycles also require more marketing involvement and clearly defined tasks and processes between sales and marketing. However, even clearly defined tasks and processes require some room for flexibility. In larger organizations with more complex products and longer sales cycles, aligning and integrating sales and marketing allows marketing to become more deeply involved in helping to sell/manage key accounts.

Be realistic about the conflicts and disconnects between sales and marketing. Try some of the ideas in this article to eliminate the turf battles and better serve the customer.