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Avoiding a Lethal Disconnect

The Sales vs. Marketing Solution

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A Lethal Disconnect

The relationship between Marketing and Sales is critical. We've said this before, but in the course of our marketing planning for clients, we continue to experience a potentially lethal disconnect between these two teams.

When a company has Sales and Marketing aligned, and both teams have open channels of communication, the power – the leverage – that becomes available, is formidable. The company connects directly to the heart of their target audience. Internal communications are in line with company goals and the drive to be territorial is completely eclipsed by a substantial increase in revenues – and new business.

Most companies spend their budget on a variety of marketing initiatives, such as creating or increasing awareness, lead generation and sales enablement. Within these categories are multiple tactics like advertising, promotions, direct marketing, web sites/eMarketing, POS, and sales support materials. The lethal disconnect is when Sales and Marketing have a lack of agreement on focus with regard to deliverables or benchmarks for these programs.

The Problem

Marketing develops and executes these different initiatives, integrated or not. When a particular campaign is successful, a significant level of inquiries and leads can be generated. The leads are passed on to the Sales team, but Marketing has no idea what Sales intends to do with them nor have they provided guidance -- consistent with the marketing strategy -- on how to do follow-up. The result? Sales is left holding the bag and everyone points fingers at Marketing.

The problem is then compounded because Sales is focused on getting the business in for the running quarter. If the information coming from Marketing isn't complete, there is little value to the leads. If they do accept the leads, Sales will often procrastinate on follow-up because they are "too busy." The leads end up getting older and colder, and so does the relationship between Marketing and Sales.

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Unfortunately, the ultimate loser in this "weakest link" process is the potential customer. They have taken the time and made the effort to respond to the marketing activity – in some cases investing valuable time to attend a seminar or exhibition – and then they are left behind. The chances are that this potential customer will not make this effort again – no matter how compelling the value proposition!

The Result

When the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing, the result is often a *dis*-investment by management of both Sales and Marketing. The marketing budget is not realizing an acceptable ROI. Next thing you know, the marketing budget is slashed (isn't that what most companies do when times are tough?).

In the worst-case scenario, an impassioned decision is made -- to just stop marketing! This decision does double harm to the company. It destroys credibility and makes it that much harder for Sales and Marketing to do their job. At the end of the day, the two teams have no one to blame but themselves.

Let's be clear – we know Sales and Marketing people have an ongoing dialog concerning goals, initiatives and success. What we are talking about is rigorous discussion, with clear-cut strategic planning and a mutual focus on results.

Following are a couple of proven solutions that will help prevent this disconnection:

- 1. Establishing an institutionalized communication process between Marketing and Sales***
- 2. Initiating a comprehensive and flexible working relationship between the two departments, called "The Cartridge Marketing Model"***

Solution #1

Communication Process

Designing and institutionalizing an ongoing communication process between Sales and Marketing will bring rigor to the conversation and clarify mutual expectations.

First, get Sales and Marketing out of their ivory towers and on to the same playing field. Second, we urge you to include your outside marketing/advertising/PR partner as part of your team. Involve them with your core values, your company vision and your sales and marketing goals – from start to finish. The power in this collaboration is especially potent when your marketing/advertising partners are seen as an integral element of your marketing department.

Your advantage in doing this is that you'll have an objective voice in the conversation. Your marketing/advertising partner will help you focus on your mutual goals. They will be listening intently from a deeply experienced marketing perspective, and will be solely dedicated to growing your business. When you win, they win. Their grounded, objective and professional viewpoint will keep the conversation focused – on growing your brand, making more sales and generating more profit. The internal dialog shifts from politics, departmental differences and private agendas, to one of cohesion and consistency.

The Process

Essential is a (minimum) one-day, closed-door, head-to-head meeting with Sales and Marketing (and ideally, your marketing/advertising/PR partner). Minimum is once per quarter. To eliminate interruptions, the meeting should be off-campus. To ensure no biases, an outsourced, skilled facilitator should manage the conversation (this could be someone from your marketing/advertising/PR team). Keep on track and focus on providing solutions that support the goals of both Marketing and Sales. An effective guideline for managing conversations is "every complaint must include a request."

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As a result of this brainstorming session, a strategy can be developed offline by a designated management group and presented back to the teams. Once the teams agree on the strategy, a tactical plan and budget guidelines will follow. With sequential buy-in from all parties throughout the process, the tactics can be successfully launched, with specific benchmarks and a clear picture of ROI.

(Would you rather spend time brainstorming – or “blamestorming”?)

Here’s the clincher. Consistency is the key to effectiveness and longevity for your marketing communications. Everyone has to speak the same language – to each other, to your customers and to your prospects. That means that the same team that meets to take part in the process above needs to be the team that continues to manage your successful return on investment.

Solution #2

Cartridge Marketing Model

The Cartridge Marketing Model is based on the age-old principle that there is a market and from that market you want to get customers. Sounds simple, and it is. Now, what there is to do is get active; to initiate whatever it takes to attract customers and make your company a success. But before you start making noise, you need to define what you want to do and how you want to do it.

Basically, the Cartridge Marketing Model accomplishes the following:

1. Defining the product and services portfolio of Marketing
2. Bringing Sales and Marketing together in the planning process
3. Ensuring that Marketing is delivering on Sales’ expectations

Marketing, in essence, needs to be a service organization in support of the sales force. If Marketing really wants to claim this strategic position within an organization it needs to define what, where and how they deliver to their customer – Sales.

The Cartridge Marketing Model is based on determining the appropriate services that Marketing is delivering to the sales force, and is grouped under different areas into what we call “Marketing Cartridges,” for example: Market Intelligence, Product Marketing, Awareness, Alliances, Sales Tools, Follow Up and Fulfillment, and Customer Marketing.

Each Cartridge is a predefined activity or group of activities that follows the flow from market to customer. Each Cartridge is unique, and is linked into the next Cartridge. How these Cartridges are combined and utilized depends on your budget and your resources, which will also determine your “reach” into the market.

Read more about The Cartridge Marketing Model solution in our book: Marketing Sucks (And Sales Sucks, Too!) Click on the book below:

