



Integrating Sales and Marketing

When presenting sales executives of companies with offerings to improve enterprise productivity, I often ask: “What contribution does marketing make to enable your salespeople to have business conversations with decision makers?”

The most common answers? “Marketing is irrelevant!” or “They give us PowerPoint presentations.” When asked for their reaction, marketing executives typically counter with: “Salespeople aren’t using our collateral! In fact, they’re making their own!” Or, “We send tons of qualified leads over to sales, and they fall into a black hole!”

Acknowledge the Problem

In many companies, the CEO is a reluctant referee between sales and marketing. Many CEOs don’t understand how to address the problem, so they just try to manage the relationship between their sales and marketing executives. There is no defined working relationship between these two functions, despite the fact that their common goal is to drive top line revenue – sales and market share – and their common mission is to help customers buy their products and services.

The key to tying separate silos together is process, not personality management. Most people want to work together, but they just don’t know how. If you help both parties have a meeting of the minds, they can agree on what their sales people and customers really need.

Marketing wants and needs to be relevant. Marketing people want their collateral to be used. Sales wants qualified leads so they can close more business. The motivation exists. The missing component is a way to codify the sales process, a prerequisite to defining and supplying sellers with the messaging they need to have business conversations with prospects.

Reframe Your Concept of Selling

Traditional selling techniques offend most buyers. When we ask sales people

what they mean by “selling,” they respond: “persuading,” “convincing,” “getting someone else to do what you want,” “overcoming resistance,” “handling objections,” and “close, close, close!” But too many buyers think of salespeople as being aggressive, pushy, manipulative, untrustworthy, lying and overly familiar. What kind of customer experience do salespeople like that create?

To make your customer’s experience one of your competitive advantages, your salespeople must be able to ask questions that will allow their buyers to visualize using their offerings to achieve a goal, solve a problem or satisfy a need.

Codify Your Sales Process

The top 10 percent of sales people are consistently over quota. They sell intuitively and therefore struggle to explain how they do it. The other 90 percent need a structure to follow and messaging to enable them to ask questions that will allow their buyers to visualize using their offerings to achieve a goal, solve a problem or satisfy a need. “Sales-ready” messaging entails constructing how conversations between salespeople and decision-makers should go. For marketing to be relevant, we have to teach marketers how to help sellers make effective sales calls on decision-makers. But that’s impossible without a defined sales process. Marketing wants to support sales. But first, sales must codify its best practices. The problem here is that sales doesn’t know how, because its top salespeople – and the sales managers who were top salespeople before them – come from the intuitive 10 percent.

Sales-Ready Messaging

Ask yourself: What predictable conversations do your salespeople need to have to sell, fund and implement your product or service? Then start planning how to steer those conversations with usage scenarios.

We help our clients to develop four detailed usage scenarios like this for each business goal for each title their sales force

calls on. We also encourage them to link it to a substantiated success with another customer with the same title as proof. All of a sudden, your salesperson has content that can make a decision-maker sit up and listen.

Product Usage Marketing

Adopting a more customer-centric model isn’t a quick process. It will likely mean reframing your customer’s experience and therefore your company’s approach to sales and marketing. The usage scenario questions used above work well during one-on-one meetings with executives, where you can listen for their goals and tailor your message specifically for them. But what about advertising, direct mail or the Web, which, by nature, will have to be more generic?

After generating your usage scenarios for different job titles, marketing can use the same goals, problems and needs in its demand creation efforts. The customer usage approach can be used for any type of lead-generating system: direct mail, e-mail, advertising or your Web site. So how would you create an advertising campaign to reach, say, CFOs who are likely prospects for your offering? With the help of this approach, you could run an ad in a magazine for CFOs that goes something like this:

“The top three issues we’re hearing from CFOs are these...” and then list them. “If you want to hear how we helped our clients deal with these issues, come to www.iamcurious.com.” If you’re fishing for curiosity and they’re curious enough, you lead them to your Web site.

We find that once marketing people get the concept of customer usage marketing, they become part of the beginning of the sales process rather than the end of product development! ★

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