

QUARTERLY FEATURE

Sales and Marketing: Can't We All Get Along?

It's supposed to be simple and straight-forward: marketing develops the message that appeals to customers' and prospects' needs for products and services; salespeople then focus on motivating people to buy based on those needs. Yet, marketing questions the quality of the sales department's efforts; the sales department criticizes the marketing group's concept as a less than adequate tool with minimal relevance in the selling environment. What we have here is the worst possible scenario for any corporation: two departments working in a vacuum with a significant failure to communicate.

Why the Disconnect?

The lack of collaboration is startling, considering that sales and marketing, which rely so heavily on communication skills, seemingly abandon them when dealing with each other. "They don't communicate as well as they think they do," says Terry Corbell, a business performance consultant, who believes that "plain old-fashioned office politics" get in the way. "Sales and marketing folks tend to have turf battles and in this (recession), those may be exacerbated because sales are harder to come by," he says.

In addition, some of the turf battles may be connected to the unique perspective, orientation and expertise each department has. Marketing and sales are different, and each rarely considers learning about the other's skill set. If there is a fundamental reason for these differences, it's probably in each department's understanding of responsibilities. Sales departments typically operate on a tactical plane with its metrics based on monthly or quarterly quotas and goals. Marketing, on the other hand, is more strategic in nature with its only metric the success or failure of a campaign. That may be the reason why both sides suffer from tunnel vision.

Skill Sets Create Differences

The skill sets for sales and marketing, which are so important for any successful enterprise, also contribute to their unwillingness to collaborate. Marketing professionals are often more creative and visionary. In their focus to anticipate the needs of the marketplace, marketing first relies on research and then tests products, services and messages to create the nirvana of a unique selling proposition. It is in this product or service development phase that there is

IN THIS ISSUE

- Feature Article
- TPSst Marketing Tip
- Recommended Reading
- Business Resources
- Quarterly Quote -
"I Wish I Said That"

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often one critical omission: the sales department. Marketing people simply assume that the grand scheme is beyond the expertise of the sales team - an inaccurate assumption.

The exclusion tends to ruffle the feathers of salespeople who find marketing's vision relatively meaningless, especially when sales feels that it has been given relatively weak leads hampering their ability to meet goals. The sales team argues that it's difficult enough to contend with today's downward spiraling economy without having the right tools — the inference being that marketing has failed to supply them. Yet how often does anyone from sales push for inclusion in the developmental process to offer a perspective? It makes no sense for sales to wait until marketing has completed its concept before questioning the wisdom behind it.

Achieving a Collaborative Environment

What is needed is nothing less than a corporate cultural change. That initiative has to start with management. Only leadership can set the priority for communication between marketing and sales during and after the development process. This is not to suggest that salespeople need to get thoroughly involved in the marketing process and all its complexities. Rather, it is meant to give sales personnel some idea of the strategy behind marketing's plans so both depart-

ments can clarify whether the game plan is workable in the field. What the two sides can do for their mutual benefit is to cross-train in both disciplines, but only to the extent that both understand the impact of their decisions. Roy Chitwood, president of Max Sacks International, a sales training and consulting firm, says there is no need for sales to become totally immersed in the marketing process or, for that matter, completely understand it, but he argues that marketing "has to be much more accountable for their contribution to revenue."

In reality, the severity of the current recession makes it essential for both departments to work more closely. With the impending price increases

facilitate ongoing contact through a common language that sales and marketing easily understand.

Alignment of Sales and Marketing

To allow marketing and sales departments to continue to operate in their private spheres without regular communication and input from both is to limit a company's growth potential. As such, the onus is on management to require the setting of mutual goals, testing and refining of strategies and status reporting to track progress. Goals, initiatives and promotions are interrelated, so it makes sense that all responsible parties collaborate on a regular basis to successfully implement them.

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that many companies are forecasting, sales and marketing really need to hone in on the role value plays in the customers' mind.

Another challenge may be a communications barrier that neither sales nor marketing recognize due to their different skill sets in the area of accountability. Two simple steps can help both departments work together: establish benchmarks that put both groups on the same page and implement a reporting process that aligns the two in developing sales leads. Those metrics can fa-

The fact is that sales and marketing can only help one another (and their company, of course) by understanding each other. The best approach is to relieve behavioral bottlenecks, something that every manager should be capable of doing. There is no reason why the same psychology that both departments employ successfully in the marketplace cannot be applied to get marketing and sales to cooperate with one another.



TPS_{ST} MARKETING TIP:

According to research conducted by McGraw-Hill during recessions and economic slowdowns, companies that cut back on sales, marketing and advertising during these times experienced a 19% increase in revenue. However, those that were aggressive in sales and marketing experienced revenue growth of 275% during the first full year of the next recovery. Here are some ideas to keep both sales and marketing departments afloat during these uncertain economic times.

- Research customer habits to understand how they are changing based on the current economic conditions.
- Invest in growing market segments, including new segments or ones previously not targeted and reduce time spent in segments most likely to be affected by the economy.
- Amend pricing tactics as customers are shopping around for the best deals.
- Take extra care of existing clients by staying in touch with them regularly and showing appreciation for their business.
- Increase the level of customer service as satisfied customers are more likely to bring in new customers.
- Retain current customers by providing them with more value, such as on site service, telephone support or additional warranty on products and services.

RECOMMENDED READING:

The number of books on marketing and sales is staggering. Here are a few recommendations:

1. *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant*, W. Chan Kim
2. *Little Red Book of Selling: The 12.5 Principles of Sales Greatness: How to Make Sales Forever*, Jeffrey Gitomer
3. *World Wide Rave: Creating Triggers that Get Millions of People to Spread Your Ideas and Share Your Stories*, David Meerman Scott
4. *The Ultimate Sales Machine: Turbocharge Your Business with Relentless Focus on 12 Key Strategies*, Chet Holmes, Michael Gerber, and Jay Conrad

QUARTERLY QUOTE:

I Wish I Said That

“No matter what your product is, you are ultimately in the education business. Your customers need to be constantly educated about the many advantages of doing business with you, trained to use your products more effectively, and taught how to make never-ending improvement in their lives.”

—Robert G. Allen

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