

Sales Operations Forum

Field Communications – Thankless Task or Strategic Initiative?

Does your sales team receive succinct, timed communications that support your senior sales executives' quarterly strategy? Is your sales operations team able to manage the flow of communications to your sales team and ensure relevancy? Is your senior management team supporting field communications as a strategic initiative? The discussion at the recent Sales Operations suggests that these are the critical best practices for field communication.

The Fight For Sales Bandwidth

Joe Galvin, SiriusDecisions analyst and panel moderator writes, "Network bandwidth and hard drive space are pretty easily measured, and in both cases if you need more, you can just go buy it. When discussing a salesperson's capacity to gather and retain knowledge, however, things are now where near as easy." That is why optimizing your communication to the field is so critical. Joe introduces the concept of "sales capacity" and proposes that sales teams will default to what they know—especially when they are overwhelmed. They will naturally filter the information – not necessarily focusing on the information supporting your sales strategy. That is why strategically managed field communication is a critical component of a field knowledge management strategy.

The Field will Create their Own Filters

Sales teams are already at a breaking point, challenged by the need to know more products, services and solutions, and navigate complex buying processes. In many companies, headquarters' organizations end up fighting for sales bandwidth and attention as they provide a higher volume of communications to the field with the goal of educating the field.

When communications to the field is uncontrolled, sales can be bombarded with so much information that they need to filter out that information they don't feel is relevant. Rather than receive information aligned with sales strategy and prioritized by senior sales management, Sales receives unfiltered information. They will self-select and in many cases, default to what they know.

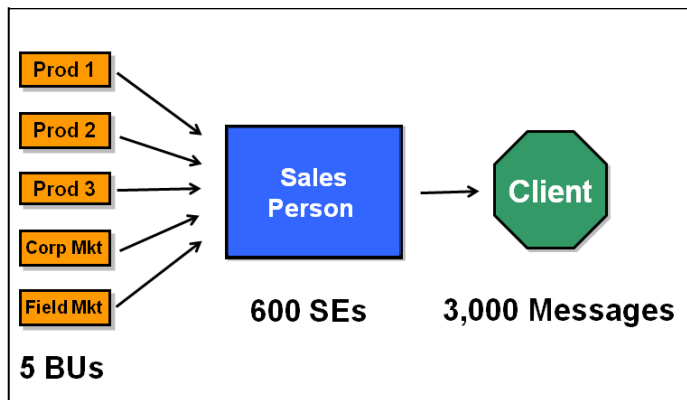
Strategies that Work Require Control

The panel included Mary Linda Thomas, Director Field Communications at BEA and Yasmin Adams, Sales Operations analyst at VeriSign. In their discussion of best practices, both mentioned that gaining control of all field communications was critical. Because all organizations accustomed to direct field access will fight passionately, so executive sponsorship is critical. Once they gained control, these two organizations were able to implement the following best practices.

Process

- Implement a "black out times" and during crunch times and use senior management to communicate only critical information.
- Set priorities for communications and align messages to those priorities. Gain feedback from the field on the communication tools – ranking tools and documents goes a long way to raise quality.

The problem with uncontrolled information



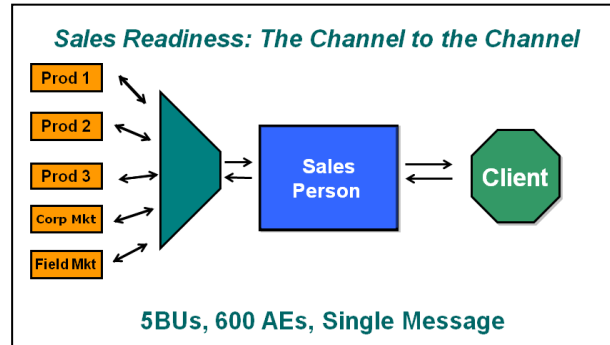
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- Set a new product launch process that includes well vetted tools and communications to the field. Make this a repeatable process, a standard for every product launch.
- Centralize management of the communication tools and infrastructure.

Content

- Use sales executives to deliver important messages. Not only are they most likely highly respected, but they will naturally deliver the message in "sales speak."



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- Use the weekly pipeline call to set the agenda for the week and reinforce critical messages.
- Use SE's to deliver product information to the field. They are well respected and can filter the information in an effective way.
- Edit, edit, edit. Don't allow content to be "thrown over the fence" by marketing or other organizations.
- Align published content to sales priorities. Sales teams will either get distracted by the other information or ignore it. Either way it is a waste of time.

Delivery

Consider some of the new tools that are listed below. Some creative ideas for communicating with Sales teams that were presented at the Forum include:

- Automated delivery of a short message from a sales executive to cell phones (be aware of time zones.)
- Podcasts
- Wikis

Tools for Managing Field Communications

Problems with communicating to field teams have not changed greatly over time. Sales people still have a short attention span, their time to focus on training is limited (even if you do get their attention) -- your content better be timely and relevant.

However there are several new tools that were mentioned by the audience as "must haves" for field communication.

- SAVO Group - An on-demand collaboration and knowledge management application.
- Kadient – Centralized access to documents, related sales materials, and coaching.
- Brainshark - Empowers any business person to easily create, deliver and track

high-impact voice-enriched presentations – available on demand.

- PlumTree - A Corporate Portal solution that allows organizations to deploy a sophisticated internal sales portal.
- Goldwave – A professional digital audio editor for executive messages.

- Avitage - A process and services helping marketing and sales create, manage and deliver multimedia communications.

About the Sales Operations Forum

The Forum provides Sales Operations executives an opportunity to network, exchange ideas and share best practices. Quarterly meetings focus on topic such as sales effectiveness, sales methodologies, compensation, and CRM. There is no cost to join the Forum contact Alison Chandless at 650-315-7501 if you are interested.

Field Communications Panel Discussion

Sirius Decisions – Joe Galvin is an industry thought leader with more than 24 years of experience in b-to-b field sales, sales management, sales operations and sales technologies. Prior to joining SiriusDecisions, Joe spent 17 years with Gartner.

Price Burlington – Director Sales Operations, SAP

Price is an accomplished sales professional with twenty years resulting in successful process improvements and business development. His background includes sales operations, alliance management, territory and sales management, and strategic account planning.

Alison Chandless, Regional Sales Manager, Centive

Companies use Centive Compel, hailed by CIO Magazine as the "most widely used choice for sales compensation management," to accurately model and forecast commission costs, calculate commission and bonus earnings and gain real-time visibility into sales performance metrics.