

Marketing's Role as Sales Enabler

By Mary Sullivan

Unless your organization is purely an ecommerce play, you probably have both marketing and sales people in the company. Each of them has its own function, to be sure, and often each has its own objectives and accompanying incentives. Marketing is measured on some "return" on investment, often stated in terms of leads generated. Sales is measured on actual revenue generated and/or units sold (which translates into market share).

But if Marketing's job was to enable Sales, they both would have common objectives, shared metrics, and ultimately greater success. We'll leave the objectives and incentives for alignment of marketing and sales for other articles. But let us consider here what *enabling sales* means.

What is sales enablement, and who are the enablers?

[Scott Santucci of Forrester](#) says, "Forrester views sales enablement as the key linchpin required to help a B2B company bridge the gap between their business strategies and how they execute in the field." Clearly the sales team is key to execution in the field, but in order to make the best use of their time, they need support from "enablers" in the organization: sales support, sales training, and sales operations provide support for Sales. A good marketing team supplements them by providing numerous additional touch points with prospective customers. They help contribute to Sales' productivity by making it "easy" for them to make the sale. Merriam Webster Online dictionary online defines *enable* as "to make possible, practical, or easy."

A sales enablement example

In 1999, in the run-up to Y2K, tech companies made a huge push to sell new products and/or upgrades so customers would not have technical problems when the digital calendars rolled over to 2000. Everyone predicted that after that whopping sales year, sales would be a bust for a few years afterward.

But a large B2B tech company had new features and software releases slated for delivery in 2000. How were they going to get customers to buy? Not all of the new capabilities made sense for every customer. So they developed tools to demonstrate which customers could achieve savings or greater productivity with each of these new capabilities.

The various product teams joined together in the company's first "joint launch." Rather than each release rolling out on its own schedule, they were synchronized to launch together. A **cross-functional** team worked together and developed sales tools that helped customers understand which of the new capabilities would be beneficial for them, and they rolled out all the new products and releases to the sales channels in one big national sales kickoff. There, in a fun environment, the sales teams learned about the new, smart sales tools, including a brand new sales playbook that demonstrated clearly how and when in the sales cycle to use each of them.

Result: ***They defied the analysts***. Their sales did not decline that year; they increased! Key to the success of this program was the cross-functional team that included people from direct and channel sales working together with marketing almost daily for several months to produce the assets and the kickoff that enabled the sales teams to be successful despite the odds.

Making it work today

Sales enablement is not just a function of the marketing organization, although it plays a large part in it. Sales enablement also includes sales support, sales training and sales operations. The sales process is also key to sales enablement (see [Janet Gregory's article](#) in this issue).

Increasingly, marketing's multiple touches with prospects are part of the "sales conversation." It is essential that Marketing and Sales collaborate so that marketing deliverables contribute toward closing a sale. Most marketing assets these days reach prospects in digital form, and with many B2B companies engaging in and monitoring social media, the digital conversations become woven into the sales process.

Communications deliverables	Analog or in-person	Digital or virtual
Positioning and messaging	✓	✓
Sales tools	✓	✓
Collateral and sales presentations	✓	
Video		✓
Web content		✓
Conversations (including social media)	✓	✓
Events and webcasts	✓	✓
Demand creation programs	✓	✓

Marketing's multi-touch communications with prospects

This does not mean that the sales organization is less relevant than in the past. It means Sales can be more productive, with Marketing helping develop the prospect dialog. Buyers today do their own research well before they choose which vendors to engage. When marketing [maps sales tools to the sales cycle](#), they "prime the pump" so prospects are ready to move forward when they engage with a sales person.

About the Author

Mary Sullivan, co-founder of KickStart Alliance, delivers customer-focused product marketing to clients in a variety of technology sectors, including clean tech. As a former salesperson and a current marketer, she appreciates the value of sales enablement and knows how to make sales tools that work for customers as well as for sales. Mary is also a content strategist and understands how to draw the interest of new prospects. Want help with sales enablement? [Contact Mary.](#)

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