

Marketing — Helping Sales Sell

By Mary Sullivan

As a person who went into Marketing from Sales, I have always believed one of Marketing's most important roles is to help Sales sell. No, marketers don't need to go out on calls and close deals. Sales people have the right skills to own the customer relationships. But marketers need to be active supporters of the sales process and help reps prepare for those one-on-ones with customers.

A recent and widely-read report caught my attention when it said that B2B sales reps are spending less time in front of customers now than they did five years. This comes from a [Harvard Business Review Blog post](#) written by sales productivity and performance specialists and says,

"...time spent on non-sales (i.e., admin) work is up a whopping 21%. And all of this has come at the expense of actual selling time in front of the customer, which is down a full 26%."

According to the report, top sales people are spending more administrative time planning, vetting prospects, and preparing before making sales presentations. This, the post advises, is a good thing.

"What these data suggest is that being a successful salesperson today is about much more than being a persuasive presenter: it's about the hard work that happens before and after that presentation."

The writers equate face time with customers to time giving presentations, and they explain that currently, non-face time is spent understanding the customer's concerns. They see this as important because Sales now needs to be selling solutions, because customers have changed the way they buy.

I respectfully beg to differ. Yes, customers *have* changed the way they buy. The volume of, and access to, information available online enables prospects to research product options and the market well before they ever talk with any sales reps. But solutions selling is not new. It has been around for a long time, and it involves learning about the problems the customer needs to solve. That learning can take place in front of the customer, too, and in the course of discovering the customer's concerns, the sales rep builds a relationship.

The *Sales Process Trends* report on which the post was based identifies the following deal-related but non-customer facing activities (among others) on which sales reps are spending their time:

1. Identifying prospect/opportunities
2. Researching competitors
3. Creating presentation materials

Having worn both the sales' hat and the marketer's hat, I know that Sales needs to consider these points from a strategic perspective, but I'm confident that developing the information

is work where Marketing should share the load. If marketers believe that their role involves helping Sales to sell, they need to do these things, and not just once, but on a recurring basis:

1. Identify prime target accounts, and research the business trends for each.
2. Maintain an ongoing competitive analysis database not only on direct competitors, but also on producers of alternative products or services.
3. Develop presentation materials with optional slides for customization to address different customer concerns.

In addition, Marketing can and should:

- Provide clear sales messaging based on an established positioning statement (See Mike Gospe's article in this issue).
- Create sales tools, including demos, ROI tools, and objection-handling guides that help address customer questions and concerns.
- Develop proposal templates that enable Sales to tailor a proposal to the specific prospect while using consistent messages about company and product.

The best way for Marketing to determine what kinds of support Sales needs is to ask them. *Which tools will be most helpful in different stages of the sales cycle? Which marketing deliverables are working today and which are not? What else do you need?* Marketers, think of Sales as your customer, and yes, build a relationship with the sales organization. Get face-to-face with sales managers and reps to learn what you can do to free up more customer face-time for them and help them be more successful.

Additional articles by Mary Sullivan on how Marketing can help Sales sell:

[Marketing's Role as Sales Enabler](#)
[The Right Tool at the Right Time](#)
[Time for Marketing to Synchronize with Sales](#)

About the author:

Mary Sullivan, co-founder of KickStart Alliance, delivers customer-focused product marketing to B2B clients in a variety of technology sectors, including clean tech. As a former salesperson and a current marketer, she understands how marketing deliverables can contribute to sales productivity and shorten the sales cycle. [Contact Mary.](#)

February 2011