

## **A Lesson for Marketers about Sales Guides - *What marketers must do to align with sales***

*By Mike Gospe*

During my 25-year career, I found these to be the two most common problems with sales guides:

- 1) They are overflowing with marketing jargon and details which are irrelevant to the sales team, and/or
- 2) They are nothing more than a history lesson about the industry, their company, or their product line.

While marketers need to know the details and background driving the industry in which they serve, these elements are not useful to sales. Sales reps are solely focused on winning the next sale. Let's face it; their attention span is short. They want practical information and action-oriented advice that will help them establish professional credibility quickly and advance their sales cycle. When marketers approach their sales counterparts with a collection of marketing templates stapled together into a sales guide, they lose credibility. To succeed with sales and build a stronger partnership with them, marketers must write the sales guide from a sales' perspective.

I struggled with this concept for a long time. Truth be told, I produced some Herculean guides early in my career where I was driven to be complete, comprehensive, and detailed. But, "The 10 Step Sales Guide for Product X" was always too much, too verbose, and too difficult to understand, much less read. These tomes took nine months to produce and then sat gathering dust on a lonely shelf. Instead, the best sales guides produce information in short sound bites; they provide chunks of easily digestible action-oriented data that can be immediately referenced and directly applied.

The most effective, and most often used sales guides are always developed in partnership with sales, and they tend to follow this short table of contents:

1. Introduction (a description of the sales guide as a one-stop resource for sales)
2. Product Description (What are we selling?)
3. Target Customer Profile (Who is the target [persona](#) and why will they care?)
4. Market Trends (What are the trends, business drivers, and pain points they worry about?)

5. Product Details (What is our story – [Message Box](#) – that will engage prospects? What components make up our solution? What else can we sell these customers?)
6. Objection Handling & Silver Bullets (Value messages, customer stories, benefits summary, all presented in easily digestible sound bites)
7. Major Competitors (A table summarizing the nearest competitive alternatives and how we can win against them)
8. Links and resources to get more detailed information

This type of sales guide is produced to be a snappy booklet that could be easily referenced. Even so, if we throw the book over the proverbial wall to sales, it will have gone unread. Look for ways to bring the guide to life. As an example, my team launched a new product at the annual Sales Kickoff event and led a hands-on breakout session on how to use the guide to quickly qualify customers and prospects. To do that, we created two scenarios:

- 1) How to use the guide to qualify a current customer and sell more products/services to them
- 2) How to use the guide to qualify a new prospect who had never heard of us and engage them in a dialog that mapped directly to their buying process

We had a lot of fun running these scenarios. They were playful, but poignant. When we paired up the sales reps (one acting as the customer, the other as the sales rep), the room came alive with energy and discussion.

In the final evaluation of the sales kickoff, one of the highlights was our guide and the breakout session because each was developed from a sales perspective, and they didn't feel that marketing was force-feeding them academic information. This quickly became a recognized best-practice -- often referenced internally by both marketing and sales folks -- on how to use sales guides to engage the sales team.

**About the Author:** [Mike Gospe](#) is a marketing strategist, co-founder of KickStart Alliance, and the author of [Marketing Campaign Development](#). His new book, [The Marketing High Ground](#), is a B2B marketer's playbook describing the best practices surrounding persona development, positioning statements, and messaging. The book is loaded with illustrations, figures, templates, and examples. Both books are now available on the Kindle.

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