



www.kickstartall.com

10 Years with KickStart Alliance

by Mary Sullivan

If it weren't for the early-1980s recession, I'd probably be a wonk — one of those economists who crunches numbers and analyzes how the economy is doing. Ironic, isn't it? I had recently received my BA in Economics and was in a PhD. program in Resource Economics at UC Berkeley when my husband was laid off, and I went out searching for (temporary, I thought) work. What I found was a sales job, selling telecommunications equipment in the newly deregulated telecom industry.

After eight years in sales, I shifted over to product marketing during the 1990s recession, taking an inside-transfer-only opening at the voice messaging company where I was working. Time passed, and what was once a systems/platform industry shifted to being software-focused.

Ten years later, the dot-com bust took place, and I was the one who was laid off, so I started taking consulting jobs. With the networking one does to find work, I ran into like-minded friends and colleagues who were also consulting, and we decided we could be more effective as a collaboration than as free-lancers. That's when KickStart Alliance was formed — 10 years ago!

When we started our newsletter, KickStart Accelerator, in 2003, I wrote the first article — [TOGETHER – Sales and Marketing](#). And while it was advice to our network of readers on aligning their sales and marketing departments for greater effectiveness, it was true of us at KickStart as well. We all had both sales and marketing in our backgrounds, and “together” we were offering the best advice to both departments in our clients' organizations, urging them to communicate with each other and align to produce optimal enterprise-wide results.

Call me an opportunist, but it seems like economic recessions were the times when I advanced the most, making lemons out of lemonade. I hung with KickStart when the latest recession came, although I did move out of the Bay Area to Portland, Oregon, with the plan to expand KickStart in the Northwest. At the time we had another member located in Oregon. It seemed logical I should be there.

During these years with KickStart, I worked with many clients, doing many marketing-related projects of different types. It didn't take long to learn that consulting provided the opportunity to choose to work with people I liked. And it offered much more variety than anything I could have done as a corporate employee. I developed marketing plans and competitive analyses, handled marketing operations, managed launches, created sales tools, produced videos, and much more for companies in a range of technology industries. At times I have been part of a KickStart team working with a client, and at others, working solo.

Marketing from 2002 to 2012

Over these years, the practice of marketing has changed enormously. Ten years ago, outbound marketing was principally advertising, brochures, direct mail and, in “enlightened” organizations, telemarketing. Marketing departments churned out separate campaigns that more often than not were product-focused rather than customer-focused. Sales people doubted the value of marketing-generated leads, and executives were skeptical of the value of marketing budgets.

Email marketing was in its infancy, and the concept of inbound marketing didn’t exist (other than the then-new idea of “viral” marketing). Social media was just emerging with the launch of LinkedIn in late 2002 and Blogger in 2003. Facebook wasn’t yet a glimmer in Mark Zuckerberg’s eye. “YouTube? Twitter? What are you talking about?”

It’s impressive how marketing has evolved in ten years. Marketers are integrating marketing initiatives, and campaigns are customer-focused. Buyers are proactively and privately starting the buying cycle themselves, searching online to learn about options before talking with vendors. Lead generation is no longer dependent on outbound marketing. Online, searchable content — case studies, white papers, demos and videos — are there as resources at a buyer’s disposal. Marketing has become inbound, too, and marketers use the whole array of social media options, from blogs to Twitter, to call attention to content that informs prospects.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are now available to manage prospect databases, and marketers reach out to those who have expressed interest in their offerings, nurturing them until they’re ready to buy with new information relevant to their place in the buying cycle and their expressed interests. As a result sales leads are more qualified than ever. Marketers are analyzing information about website visitors, data from their CRM systems, and are comparing that to sales data to demonstrate their ROI to their executives. In these ten years, technology has transformed the world of marketing!

My next thing

But now it’s time for me to say goodbye, at least professionally, to KickStart. We’re calling it “retirement,” but I’m continuing to consult for clean technology startups in the Pacific Northwest, and I’ll be exploring advocacy roles, new for me. I hope to use my messaging and communications experience to improve the way environmental and renewable energy initiatives address what are increasingly pressing resource and climate issues here and globally.

These 10 years have been grand! Thank you!

About the author:

Mary Sullivan was one of the original founders of KickStart Alliance, and has led the Product Marketing and Clean Technology practices for KickStart. She can be reached at "[mary at customerseye.com](mailto:mary@customerseye.com)".