

Building a Robust Sales Pipeline

Aligning Sales and Marketing for a Powerful Demand Generation Engine

There once was a time, not long ago, when selling technology seemed to be on auto pilot. High-tech companies set, and easily attained, annual growth goals of 100% or more. Sales leaders breezed past their quotas. There were buyers and there were budgets.

Well-funded marketing organizations pursued the lofty goal of brand awareness, not the mundane task of lead generation. In fact, it hardly seemed to matter if marketing supported sales at all. There was little urgency to sync-up sales and marketing organizations, to target solutions to well-defined niches, to prove the ROI of marketing, or to create powerful lead-generation engines.

When money flowed freely, there was no apparent need to question or improve business processes. Everyone could claim to be an expert on sales.

The Primacy of Sales

With falling demand for technology and changing market dynamics, technology companies gained a newfound respect for the critical importance of sales. They learned that selling is a discipline, rigorous and difficult. And they could no longer hope to survive, let alone succeed, without a clear and focused sales process and go-to-market strategy.

Sales leaders face a barrage of challenges - market dynamics, internal inefficiencies, budget constraints - and rarely have the bandwidth to address them all without the right strategic partners.

This revelation could not have come at a worse time. Facing overwhelming budget pressures, technology companies were slashing marketing and sales teams to the bone. In many cases, marketing staffs disappeared altogether, leaving sales executives with little or no support.

The Need for Alignment

Ill-prepared for the new economic reality but reluctant or unable to invest in the talent and resources to improve revenue performance, many cash-starved technology companies are verging on a state of paralysis.

The weight of rescuing companies from this paralysis is falling on the shoulders of overburdened sales leaders. But sales cannot do it alone. Sales efforts must be tightly aligned with a marketing strategy that supports demand generation.

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Our Services



Sales

Our goal is to understand your specific sales needs. Whether it's hitting your quotas or engaging with your ideal prospect – we are here to keep you on track.



Marketing

Our specific demand generation and nurture programs are set in place to keep your buyer engaged at every point of the sales cycle. Stay in touch with your prospects via digital,



Research

Do you understand your target audience? What are the trends impacting them? Can you quantify the issues? Do you need hard data and answers to tough questions? We do that.



Technology

We specialize in Salesforce.com CRM and Pardot marketing automation consulting. If you need better contact or opportunity tracking, nurturing, scoring and analytics, we can show you how.

Even companies that feel they cannot afford marketing and have no marketing staff in place are nonetheless practicing marketing in some form. All technology companies need to generate demand by communicating a value proposition message to a target market. How they do that is the subject of this paper.

Creating Customer Value

Too often, marketing and sales have been separate and misaligned silos of activity. This has weakened the demand generation process and caused both organizations to lose credibility.

The primary responsibility of the sales leader is to drive sales and maintain a robust sales pipeline. The primary job of marketing is to support sales by driving demand generation and creating a more frictionless sales environment.

The intersection of sales and marketing is where the company creates customer value. In particular, both sales and marketing need to be aligned on three objectives:

1. Understanding the company's dominant customer value proposition (DCVP) vs. the competition's offerings
2. Identifying and understanding the target buyer(s)
3. Packaging the customer value proposition in a compelling way and delivering it to the market

In achieving these three objectives, which are described in further detail below, companies face unprecedented challenges. They may lack knowledge of efficient sales models, have bandwidth and budget limitations, or be unable to adapt their solutions or revenue models to the rapidly changing marketplace.

Market and financial pressures demand that companies focus like a laser on what they really do well and where they can win. The key concept is focus.

1. Customer Value Proposition

The company's sales and marketing teams should have a like-minded goal: Delivering the right message to the right audience in the right way. In this case, the right message is the company's dominant customer value proposition (DCVP).

Uncovering this DCVP and packaging it in a crisp, compelling manner is no trivial task. It must be rooted in a complete understanding of a company's differentiators as well as its strengths and weaknesses vs. the competition. The DCVP must be focused, precise, and aligned with a distinct community of funded buyers.

“Dont assume you know the sales cycle. I guarantee that it is different, very different, from two to three years ago.”



For example, what does your company provide that is a pure differentiator from your competitors? Will this differentiator be sustainable over time? Does it map precisely to customer or market needs? Will it generate substantial revenue without a high cost of sales?

To ensure successful implementation of a value proposition, there must be complete alignment among the sales force, marketing department, and customer service organizations. All these organizations must be able to articulate the DCVP clearly and consistently, as if speaking with a single voice. This alignment is crucial not only to sales closure, but also to customer satisfaction and, in turn, repeat business.

2. Targeting the Buyer

Rather than dissipating their efforts, skilled sales professionals will seek to closely align their solutions with economic buyers - decision makers with the business need, authority and budget to act. These economic buyers are key to building a robust sales pipeline filled with qualified opportunities - not merely sales leads. Names and phone numbers alone are of little value

Too often, however, technology companies focus on the target buyer the wrong way. Desperate to jumpstart sales and close deals, the traditional knee-jerk response is to expand the sales territory and target more customers.

In this simplistically mathematical view of the world, more sales leads, more cold calls, and more names and numbers in the contact database are thought to proportionately increase the odds of success. This doomed strategy inevitably results in sales leakage - sapping the effectiveness of the sales organization.

This “more is better” strategy is perhaps not surprising, since high-technology companies have historically defined their markets in this shotgun manner, seizing sales wins wherever an opportunity seemed to exist. This may be acceptable for a start-up company, but it cannot be the basis for a sustainable competitive advantage.

Although it may appear counterintuitive, the right approach is to focus sales efforts more narrowly and directly, even reducing the number of targeted market segments.

3. Delivering the Message

To maintain sales efficiency and strong positioning in the market, sales leaders must continuously assess the value proposition message and how the company's marketing effort packages and delivers that message to the market.

By creating visibility for the company's value proposition among a well-defined community of buyers, companies can create a more frictionless sales environment. This is not achieved by mindlessly escalating marketing budgets and staffs, but rather by focusing all marketing activities on a unique value proposition for a unique buyer. Marketing communications and PR activities - press placements, trade shows, speaking engagements, thought leadership programs - must zero in on that unique buyer.

“Agree as to what sales and marketing will do during this process. Where does Marketing end and Sales begin? This is the key to survival.”



Customer testimonials in particular are at the heart of a well-aligned sales and marketing machine. Case studies are the most effective way to illustrate and prove a company's value proposition in the form of an unbiased, third-party endorsement. They are the most powerful sales tools and the most meaningful way to build awareness, credibility and market share.

ROI metrics and milestones must also be in place for measuring and ensuring marketing success, as well as identifying areas for improvement. With each step of the process, the loop must be closed with feedback, customer follow-up and regular data updates between sales and marketing, both to track the progress of communications programs and to reinitiate contact with customers when necessary.

Sales and marketing processes are an everlasting work in progress and are never "finished." Feedback and results must be measured and incorporated at every step to fine-tune the demand generation machine.

Jumpstarting Results

For many technology companies, building and maintaining a successful sales organization is a daunting management task. Small to mid-size companies are especially hard-pressed to optimize sales processes. Lacking the financial resources and staying power of larger competitors, smaller companies need to be all the more focused on creating powerful demand generation engines and productive sales channels.

The classic high-tech company is the brainchild of engineers, not sales and marketing experts. Lacking the capital or track record to attract top sales and marketing strategists, the most innovative technology company may be unable to build the robust sales pipeline it will need to succeed. And it may be unable to identify the kind of talent it will need to address this critical issue.

One successful solution is to outsource to qualified sales and go-to-market partners, thereby freeing up internal resources for tasks such as product development and customer fulfillment. Proven professionals with a strong track record in sales and marketing can rapidly provide a powerful, just-in-time solution to repair a leaky or nonexistent sales pipeline. Experienced partners can establish a structured sales process to identify and fine tune value propositions, explore new market opportunities, create channel programs, assess internal skills and resources, and even close deals.

Perhaps most importantly, outside partners can break down the isolated silos of sales and marketing activities, and align both activities toward a common goal - creating and communicating customer value.

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