

Aligning Sales and Marketing for Dynamic Growth

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One of the most intriguing issues that surfaces when working in organizations is the lack of effort to align sales and marketing. At the macro level of corporations, there are numerous companies that have sales and marketing groups that refuse to even talk or dialogue with each other. It is equally amusing that the leaders of these companies do not understand why their sales results are below expectations. There is a simple solution – align the sales and marketing teams.

At the micro levels of individuals within the sales group, the lack of understanding about the role of marketing leads to commodity building practices and price cutting activities. Individual sales people create their own issues and challenges by doing things like: Selling to a non-buyer; selling to the wrong type of customer; and not understanding what the customer is willing to buy. Marketing people understand the principle of niche marketing, yet, seldom educate sales people of what problems their products solve. Therefore, opportunities are missed as sales people chase the sale rather than the account.

When both sales and marketing are aligned you get a more focused sales process that is aligned with the buyer's buying cycle and success is created. In fact, companies and individuals that have aligned their sales and marketing practices have experienced significant growth – both in sales and margins.

An example of one individual who has aligned both sales and marketing is Stanley Mills of Crye-Leike Real Estate. Back in the late 80's Stan discovered computers and customer databases. Not only did he discover these instruments of increased productivity, he embraced them as a tool to develop relationships with his growing customer list. Using birthdays and anniversaries and holidays and anything else that would create a customer contact or touch – he made certain that his customers remembered him. Most importantly, the consistent contact created a top of mind awareness – Real Estate equaled Stanley Mills. His referral business grew to the point that he hired people to do his administrative work (on his payroll) so he could sell real estate.

There are four keys for aligning marketing and sales:

First, recognize that a customer database is one of your greatest assets. If used properly, it will provide you with on-going business, trend analysis, an ideal customer profile and a never-ending supply of referrals. You must understand that a true customer database is not a Rolodex file. The difference is a Rolodex file is a contact lookup file. A customer database is an interactive source of new business, trends analysis, customer opinion source, credibility machine and most importantly – repeat business.

A good customer database cultivates both prospects and existing customers. It can be used to automate the contacts of a prospect or customer – using different channels of communication. Phone calls, emails, newsletters, faxes, case studies, testimonials, catalogs, give-aways and anything else you can create, can be delivered to your customers or prospects on a regular cycle. This creates a top of mind awareness for you. Your customer or prospect's mind is a special link for you to nurture.

Second, the “Good ole Days are Gone!” You need a process that can create credibility for you and a business relationship for finding and developing new business. In the “Good ole Days” you could walk into a business office and see a buyer or decision maker and make a sale. At a minimum you could call someone and actually talk to them on the spot. You could qualify a prospect, get an appointment, and set up a presentation or showing, or get a sale on a phone call. Today, you cannot get within a hundred yards of the corporate building due to fences, gates and guards. And worst, you cannot call anyone without the dreaded voice mail.

People who have aligned their sales and marketing efforts have learned how to leave effective messages on voice mails that actually get returned. Additionally, marketing savvy sales people have learned to leave different messages using customer specific issues to drive a return phone call. Then there is also the email issue. Email boxes are now protected by “Spam Blockers” that are designed to keep you away from your clients. You must learn the words that don’t work in the subject lines for spam filters and the ones that create a positive count helping get your email into the customer’s inbox.

Third, aligning sales and marketing requires more sophistication from the sales person. Because the alignment process is simple but not necessarily easy, it requires effort. This effort comes in the form of studying four areas. The first area is studying your profession. As a professional it is a given to study sales if you are in sales; study management if you are a manager; study marketing if your job is marketing. Learn what is new and what trends are “in play” in your profession.

The second area of study is learning about your industry. You must know the language; how things work; and what new trends are driving the market. Look to your trade associations and use the Internet to research the latest news. The third area to study is business. How do your clients or customers make money? What business terms are important to you, your boss or the customer? Business acumen is the term that savvy business people are using to describe this knowledge base and how to use it in the field. This is a primary issue for people who are considered “consultative sales people.”

And the fourth area of study is your customer. Superior sales people know more about their customer than the customer knows about himself or herself. There are several methods to learn about the customer. The most important method is simply asking questions and listening to the customer’s answers. Simple is not easy for most sales people relative to asking questions. Why? Because they are too busy talking and telling the customer what they need rather than asking good questions and have the customer participate in the solution.

Finally, the Fourth key to aligning sales and marketing is “To Become a Business Person that Sells.” You can make a major difference in your sales success when you have the confidence to be a business person that sells. Business people adopt the YOU concept by becoming Youthful, seeing the Opportunities that present themselves to you, and knowing that Understanding is the connection piece of the puzzle.

Make yourself or your company into a revenue growth machine. It is simple. Align the sales and marketing efforts and watch your results grow and grow and grow.

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