marketmakers

B2B Sales & Marketing Alignment

Forget the history. Now's the time to pull together...

"80%

of B2B purchasing cycles are completed before the buyer considers contracting the vendor" - Forbes

B2B buyers and decision-makers are highly educated on the products and services they require, and they are hungry for information. Their desire for product/service information doesn't just happen during 'office hours' either. They will consume as much information as they can, whenever and wherever they can.

B2B buyers are firmly in control, and if you want to get their attention, nurture them and secure their business, then you need to be willing to put the work in – there's no shortcuts here.

To differentiate yourself from your competitors, you need to be maintaining the position of thought leader from the beginning to the end of the sales process. To do this, sales and marketing need to form a united front both in terms of knowledge and understanding when engaging, nurturing, and interacting with potential buyers.

With more competition and tighter budgets than ever before, your business needs to:

1 Identify your ideal customer

2 Define a sales-qualified lead and the marketing processes to nurture them

3 Develop the most appropriate messaging and execute a highly targeted multi-channel marketing strategy

4 Create engaging content to attract and nurture

5 Connect with prospects where they spend their precious time

6 Utilise telenurturing and telemarketing for lead follow-up and qualification

7 Pass the lead to sales

8 Close the loop, measure, refine and report to the senior management team

Identify your ideal customer

When your ongoing relationship with a B2B buyer means so much to the success of your business, it's only right that you get to know them. You need to know as much as you possibly can about your prospects in order to create a knowledge sharing relationship and differentiate yourself from your competitors.

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The outcome of getting to know your prospects should be a 2-page profile of each of your decision-makers and influencers (a persona document). It will give your organisation a clearer picture of your prospects and help you to visualise the people you are trying to reach.

The key features you need to discover are:

•Business demographics
•What are their challenges?
•What is their media consumption?
•Where do they spend time online and offline?
•Where do they look for information?

- This information above can be captured through online surveys, speaking to prospects at events and telephone research. The sales team can also play a vital role in this research stage by reviewing the behavioural patterns of current clients when they were in the prospect stage. By reviewing the path current clients took while travelling through the sales process, it is possible to identify behavioural patterns which indicated a readiness to buy.
- This research and creation of persona documents has a major benefit to your sales and marketing teams - they can now see the product/service through the eyes of the prospect. By having a deep understanding of prospects, their pain points, their challenges etc, sales and marketing can now provide thought leadership information and a real demonstration of the prospect's issues.

'A buyer persona gives you the chance to truly understand your target prospect. It also allows you to see what might appeal to them and help their decision making process'

Define a sales-qualified and the marketing process to nurture them

Now that you understand your prospects, you're going to start targeting them with marketing material to try to generate leads. But, there's another question to ask yourself first – what does a lead 'look' like?

Having done so much research to create the persona documents, you may be thinking 'do we really have to do more investigating?' And, the answer is yes. What is the point of generating leads, if you don't know what your sales team consider to be a qualified lead?

Round-up marketing, sales and telemarketing and hammer out 'what is a lead?' and when it should be passed to sales. In order for marketing and telemarketing to provide sales with the highest quality selling opportunities, they need to know exactly what a qualified lead is. Sales will most likely provide requirements such as geographical location, budget, and whether the lead is the confirmed decision-maker.

One thing is for sure though, it's imperative that everyone knows what a qualified lead should look like, because an unqualified lead can cost sales time and resources (and they won't be happy). As the lead generation process continues, sales should be constantly reviewing/benchmarking their criteria for a qualified lead. If they find that the criteria need to be amended, then they need to inform marketing and telemarketing immediately.

Develop the most appropriate messaging and multi-channel marketing Strategy

Having obtained an in-depth understanding of your prospects and worked out what a lead looks like, it's time for marketing to do their thing – developing key messaging and unique selling points (USPs).

Because of the amount of research that went into creating prospect personas and the knowledge that was gained regarding their pain points and concerns, the messaging should be rather obvious. You ideally want to find the point where your knowledge and experience perfectly matches the needs of your prospects.

Once the messaging is defined, the next step for marketing is to develop the activity they will use to reach the prospects. They must make an informed decision using the information in the persona documents to determine the marketing channels which are most likely to achieve engagement. The channels to consider combining are:

- **Outbound marketing (emails, direct mail, telemarketing)**
- **Inbound/Content marketing (blogging, ebooks, white papers, webinars)**
- **Social media (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook)**
- **Any above the line or public relations**
- **Events/exhibitions**

Once the messaging and content have been created, sales need to be given access and be constantly kept up-to-date. As we discussed earlier, sales and marketing need to show a united front, and therefore need to be 'singing from the same hymn sheet'.

Another benefit to this relationship between sales and marketing is that when sales speak to leads, if they find that the content is not 'working', they can feed the information back to marketing. The direct result of this is that the messaging being used by marketing is always finely tuned to achieve the best results. For sales and marketing to achieve both their individual objectives, and those of the business, there needs to be an active two-way dialogue throughout the lead generation and sales process.

As leads move through the sales funnel and become more educated, their content requirements change.

For this reason, pre-planned campaigns are worthless. You need to provide content how, when and where the lead wants it.

Create engaging content to attract and nurture

As prospects now keep your company at arm's-length until the last minute of the buying process, they are consuming huge amounts of content before they ever make contact with you. For this reason, not only do you need to be creating a library of thought leadership content pieces, but it needs to be highly relevant to the prospect's needs.

Key practices for content creation include:

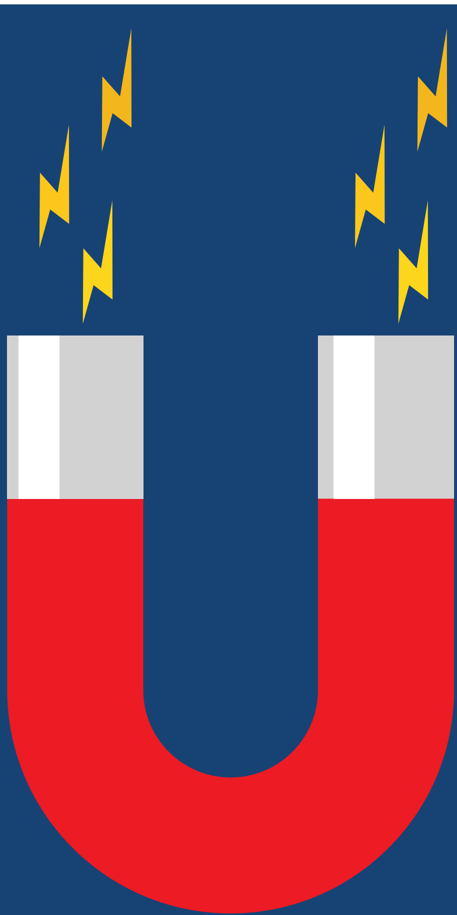
- **Finding someone in your organisation to drive content marketing. Someone who is passionate about teaching, training and improving the company's understanding of the buyer**

- **Giving your employees the chance to get involved. There's a lot of writing talent and knowledge out there that you may not have tapped into yet**

- **Constantly increasing your knowledge of the market by keeping your ears to the ground. Spend time in forums and on social media and find out what prospects are really talking about**

Once you have your library of remarkable content, make sure sales has an in-depth knowledge and access to the content. The main benefit to this is that if sales are speaking to a lead that is specifically referencing a particular pain point, then they can direct them to/provide your company's thought leadership content on that topic - again, showing a true understanding of the lead's issues and a possible solution.

When marketing are broadcasting lead generation and lead nurturing emails, they should be signing them with the relevant sales rep's name. Why? Because subconsciously prospects will start to imagine the sales rep and be more open to a telephone call. And, it also helps them to understand and appreciate that they may need to meet the rep face-to-face if that is the objective/call to action of the email.



Connect with prospects where they spend their precious time

"Nearly one-half (46%) of decision makers say they now maintain a profile on a social networking site and visit those sites at least once a week for business purposes" - Forrester survey of business technology buyers

The persona documents drafted in the research stage will have uncovered the most popular online locations of your prospects (for example LinkedIn, Twitter, industry forums etc). And this is where your business needs to be too. By positioning yourself in these locations and participating and interacting, you can gain great insight into your prospects' pain points, issues and thoughts. And, once you've established yourself in these arenas, you can begin to offer your content – therefore proving you're a trusted resource.

One thing that is vitally important to remember is that this practice is not only for the marketing team, sales should be highly involved too. If the sales team are wary of joining the social network community, then choose one salesperson to spearhead the move. 'Train' them on the relevant social sites, the tools available and inform them about the valuable information they can gather.

In today's world, companies and individuals use social media sites to discuss topics and developments which are hugely beneficial to sales and marketing teams, so don't miss out. Make sure you are using social networks to their full potential:

- **Make sure you publish your content on all the sites that you have established as locations for your prospects**
- **Add social media sharing buttons to all of your content so prospects can easily share it with their friends/connections/followers etc**
- **Every time you send an email, include social media links so that the prospect can easily connect with you on their favourite sites**
- **When a prospect converts to a lead within your system, be sure to look them up on LinkedIn and Twitter etc so that both sales and marketing can see what their main issues are and what topics they have been discussing**

Use telemarketing and telenurturing for lead follow-ups and qualification

A key ingredient in the lead generation process is the telemarketing (increasingly being referred to as ‘inside sales’) team. This valuable asset is vitally important in verifying whether a marketing-qualified lead (MQL) is sales-ready and meets the ‘qualified lead’ criteria set by sales (discussed earlier). The information they need to gather during a telephone call include:

•Business demographics – do they meet the company size and turnover requirements?

•Challenges – what are their main business issues and objectives?

•Problem solving techniques – how have they dealt with these pain points in the past?

•Stage of the buying process – are they carrying out research or are they ready to buy?

•Contract renewal period – are they approaching the end of a current contract period?

•Budget – do they have the budget in place? If not, when will it be available?

•Timescales – is the deal or project time sensitive and if so, why?

•Decision-maker – who is involved in the decision-making process? How much influence do they have? Who is approving the expenditure?

Having made this call, the telemarketer will be able to place the lead into one of three categories:

Qualified – The telemarketer should arrange a call/meeting between the lead and a salesperson.

Needs nurturing – The lead is a potential opportunity but is not ready to talk to sales. This lead needs to be entered into a nurturing programme by the marketing team who will continue to provide thought leadership content until they are ready to buy. If the lead could potentially be a large deal, then further follow-up calls by a telemarketer would be beneficial.

Unqualified – the lead does not meet the requirements at this point.

As mentioned before, it’s important that telemarketers and sales have access to the content produced by marketing. During these calls, the telemarketer can reference the information in the content pieces in order to help educate and nurture the lead.

Pass the lead to sales

Once telemarketers have identified a sales-qualified lead, the lead then needs to be passed to sales. This process of ‘handing over the lead’ will be done by marketing, and they need to provide as much information as possible. This is a very important stage of the new business generation process, and the more information marketing can provide to sales, the better. For that reason, the handover documentation should be considered more like a ‘pack’.

Within this pack, marketing need to provide information on...

•The lead’s situation, needs and intentions

•The lead’s online behavior

•Number of downloads around a particular topic

•The sequence of downloads

•How recently they visited the website

•The time they are spending on the website

•The web pages they visited

•Any more indications of their plans

•Telephone call recordings (if applicable)

•The lead’s entire journey from first contact to the telemarketing call

•If sales haven’t already done so, now is the time to connect with the lead on social media sites and really make their presence known. With this ‘pack’, sales will now be in the strongest possible position to provide the lead with a solution to their pain points and secure a conversion to sale.

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Close the loop, measure, refine ar… report to the senior management team

Once sales have started converting leads into new business, it's time to gather feedback, close the loop and optimise the lead generation process for the future. The reason for this investigation is that by reviewing the sales journey for successfully converted leads, you can improve the process and provide a more targeted approach for future prospects.

Key measurements which should be reviewed are:

- Engagement rate: the number of prospects that engaged with your marketing activity
- Lead rate: the number of prospects that converted to a lead
- Conversion rate: the number of leads that converted to a sale
- Closed business: the total revenue generated
- Pipeline: the number of leads that end up on the forecast
- ROI: what was the return on investment for the lead generation activities

79%

of B2B marketers have not established lead scoring - Source: MarketingSherpa

By using a marketing automation tool or a CRM system, the lifecycle stages and conversion points of each lead should be stored and easier to review. This streamlined approach to closed loop analysis means you can make amendments to your sales and marketing activities much quicker and convert leads to new business much sooner.

Another benefit to marketing automation is the lead scoring capabilities. The tool will award a set number of points to a lead based on their actions (such as a website visit or a download of a piece of content). When the lead achieves a points target (set by you), the system will automatically pass the lead to your telemarketing or sales team for a follow-up telephone call.

To further cement the relationship between sales and marketing, the two-way dialogue must continue through to the measurement stage. Using the analysis mentioned above, marketing needs to provide sales with a lead-quality report which will show how they are consistently generating high-quality leads. And in return, sales needs to report to marketing on their leads, appointments, quotes, sales and pipelines.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the opening page, the unification of sales and marketing is the key to a successful business. By getting these two teams to work together in harmony, your organisation can increase its potential to generate leads, sales and revenue.

Technological advances such as marketing automation and advanced CRM systems means that the once colossal divide between sales and marketing is slowly being reduced, and both sides are seeing the benefits.

Their newfound relationship is based on the principles of information sharing, team work and a common goal. By working together from the very start of the lead generation process, both sales and marketing can maintain a unified understanding of the prospects they are targeting – keeping their eyes on the prize.

One thing that has become apparent in modern marketing though, is that the relationship between sales and marketing now plays second fiddle to their relationship with prospects. Hugely educated prospective B2B buyers now require greater research (persona documents) and relevant, thought leadership-based engagement (content-based and multi-channel marketing) in order to secure a conversion to sale.

So perhaps the talk from now on will not be about aligning sales and marketing, but aligning them with the needs of their prospects.

B2B Sales & Marketing

Alignment Takeaways

- According to Peppers & Rogers Group, 81% of companies with strong customer experience competencies outperform their competition.

- The time has come not just for sales and marketing to resolve their differences, but for both of them to resolve their differences with the buyer too.

- 80% of B2B purchasing cycles are completed before the buyer considers contacts the vendor - Forbes.

- A buyer persona gives you the chance to truly understand your target prospect. It also allows you to see what might appeal to them and help their decision-making process.

- As leads move through move through the sales funnel and become more educated, their content requirements change. For this reason, pre-planned campaigns are worthless. You need to provide content how, when and where the lead wants it.

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Don’t underestimate the power of a timely telemarketing call in engaging prospects who prefer a conversation with a real, live human.

Looking for business growth?

If you're interesting in improving your lead generation performance and results, get in touch to
arrange a meeting.

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