

Sales are from Mars

Marketing are from Venus

Synopsis

Sales and marketing should be working closely together but in many IT and technology organisations but there appears to be a high level of antipathy between the two groups. This article suggests a few reasons for the problem, and provides seven ideas on how marketing (or sales) can improve the situation.

Introduction

From both first hand experience and anecdotal evidence, it appears that the relationship between Sales and Marketing in IT and technology B2B organisations is not a happy one. It's a common complaint that marketing are wasting money, or sales are not selling the benefits.

I've heard sales directors suggest that they should invite some marketers to their sales conference to "hand round the sandwiches" and marketing people suggest that salespeople don't use important product information because "they can't read".



Isn't this strange when you would expect their objectives to be highly aligned?

Mars and Venus

Part of the reason for the antipathy might be the different backgrounds of marketing and salespeople.

- Relatively few marketers have worked in sales roles. Those who have often get a greater insight into the sales process, know the pressures, and understand how marketing can support sales.
- Some marketers are from product or creative roles, with little formal training in marketing, and limited project management skills.
- Some sales people may claim to understand marketing but don't have the skills to put together a proposition or plan a campaign.
- The motivations of the two groups differ markedly, with sales focused on achievement and rewards, marketers focused on ideas and creativity.

Even in companies where long sales cycles are the norm, salespeople are used to reacting to customers and meeting quarterly targets. They expect targets to be met. Marketers work on continuous or long-term programmes, where timescales can, or are allowed to, slip.

A few ideas

So is there anything that we can do to improve the relationships and make it supportive and productive?

Communication is obviously important. Taking every opportunity to discuss customer needs and the sales process is a good approach, not circulating more emails or adding long presentations to the intranet.

Marketing needs to demonstrate an understanding of sales pressures and not send out emails requesting additional information about sales forecasts on the 30th of the month.

There are also several specific activities and changes of approach, described below, which marketing can initiate that have been proved to work. You will notice that we have not addressed the contentious issue of lead generation, as this requires a separate article.

3 more Ps

Marketing is usually defined as covering Product, Price, Place and Promotion, (we shall ignore the 7Ps approach for brevity) but marketing groups are often only tasked with Promotion. It is not surprising that marketing is held in low regard if three key levers are controlled elsewhere: Product in the product divisions, Price in finance, and Place, or channel strategy, in Sales (or sometimes nowhere).

Product, Price and Place can obviously have a major impact on sales revenues and company success. For example, under-pricing can significantly impact profitability. Focusing solely on promotion, where success is hard to measure, makes it more difficult to get engagement and respect from sales.

Align objectives

If the corporate, sales and marketing objectives do not align there is bound to be some friction. Aligning the objectives may be as simple as aligning campaigns to sales objectives or it may require changes to strategy. A simple example is where the corporate strategy is to support indirect channels and the marketing spend is directed towards channel support, but the direct sales teams are not incentivised on channel sales.

Customer engagement

Marketing can work with sales to improve their engagement with major customers. For example, providing briefings on industry trends, customer positioning, and understanding the dynamics of *their* (the customer's) market. Short, focused briefings, not downloaded reports!

Marketing can present these in customer meetings or round table sessions. These forums can be used to test assumptions about the customer's needs and preferred solutions, and can be used to extend the customer relationship by inviting customer contacts in marketing and finance.

Account planning

Marketing can participate in account planning sessions. This will allow them to understand the sales team's issues and views of the customer requirements. Marketing can put the issues in a wider industry context, helping sales to identify alternative tactics such as different products or solutions, or valuable reference customers.

This may also be where the objectives of future campaigns can be aligned to real customers, and any messaging or timing issues highlighted. For example, running a new product campaign soon after a major sales win for an older product may require some special customer response, or provide an opportunity to secure a valuable pilot customer.

Planned campaigns

It's not the number of campaigns that marketing runs that is important...

Limit the number of promotional campaigns and plan them well in advance. Ensure that all functions, including sales and product divisions are involved in the planning. Focus initially on the objectives, target market segments, timing, etc not on the creative side (which will always be contentious).

Product Management and Product Marketing

Some companies grow and build a product portfolio but under-invest in product management and product marketing. A gap can develop between products,



solutions and markets which other marketing functions try to fill, resulting in poor propositions and weak messaging.

The product groups should be tasked with managing product roadmaps and propositions. The customer marketing group focusing on getting close to the market, supporting sales and executing well-planned, coordinated, campaigns. Both need to ensure that the solutions can be communicated at a business, not technical, level.

Not brochures

Marketing can be characterised as the “*people who do the brochures*”. The solution is to stop doing brochures, pens, etc. Create a generic plan for materials (collateral) which defines the hierarchy of documents to be produced for each product/solution/vertical and just produce the minimum. Ensure that each entity is well defined, with clear objectives, audience and content. Then get on with the real marketing.

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