

marketmakers

white paper

Bridging the gap between sales and marketing

Are your sales and marketing organisations perfectly aligned or poles apart? The truth is, very few companies see the two as collaborative functions. Some have business processes that are very sales-driven, whereas marketing is the dominant force in others. With no clear universal definition of what marketing and selling involve, it's often hard to know where one role ends and the other begins.

This ambiguity and lack of integration creates a fundamental problem – overall business performance is almost always negatively affected. Misunderstandings and mismanaged expectations can cause friction. No wonder so many sales and marketing departments behave more like adversaries than comrades in pursuit of a common goal. And the bottom line inevitably suffers due to inconsistencies and missed opportunities.

How can companies bring about greater cohesion between the two functions, maximise their return on sales and marketing assets, and increase conversions? This paper explores how to effectively bridge the gap between sales and marketing without the cost or upheaval of reorganisation.

Chaos, confusion and conflict

In theory, sales and marketing are united in a shared vision: to find new customers and to keep, and sell more to, existing ones. In practice, their respective business processes are often based on their company's historical traditions. Of course, some activities and responsibilities fall clearly on marketing shoulders: branding and the production of marketing collateral are obvious examples. Others are firmly within the sales camp, such as face-to-face appointments, demonstrations and closing deals.

But there are some vital functions where the boundaries are blurred: defining a segmentation strategy, database acquisition, communicating with existing customers, new business generation, lead scoring and lead nurturing. Responsibilities can vary wildly from company to company – and perceptions can even differ within the four walls of an organisation, depending on whose opinion is sought.

Who's doing what and when?

This "grey area" opens the door to both duplication and omission. At best, it results in overlapping, uncooperative efforts – which are less well tolerated in light of today's growing need to justify how budgets are spent and demonstrate tangible returns. At worst, it means key business processes are neglected because everyone assumes that someone else is (or should be) taking care of them. Take data management, for example. Is it marketing's job? Is it a sales function? Both? Neither? There's no right answer, but without formal assignment of accountability, something as critical as data governance can simply fall through the cracks altogether.

Case in point – aligning focus

A well-known office supplies provider was struggling to transition its business focus to larger, less price-sensitive accounts. Marketing tailored its collateral to the corporate market but sales, under pressure to hit targets and motivated by commission, continued to sell to SMEs within their comfort zone.

The company eventually enlisted the support of telemarketing to develop a profile of 'dream' prospects, gather intelligence and nurture leads. With a calendar of appointments already set for them, sales were more readily convinced that the major account strategy was generating the right kind of opportunities.

Lukewarm about cold-calling

Lead generation is more of a hard-and-fast issue. In many companies, the division of labour is such that marketing runs the creative dog-and-pony show and sales work the phones to fill up their appointment diaries with prospect visits. The main downfall in this scenario is an economic one. A good field sales representative typically comes with a steep price tag, especially when you consider the company car and benefits package required to attract and retain experienced, high-calibre personnel. Devoting sales time and effort to cold-calling simply isn't cost-effective.

On a secondary level, the skills and temperament suited to face-to-face negotiations don't necessarily match the specialist mindset required to succeed at cold calling. Asking someone who enjoys being out on the road and closing deals in person to drum up business on the phone can result in them becoming demoralised or frustrated. They may leave the company for an employer that allows them to concentrate on what they prefer and do best.

For KPIs' sake, what is a lead?

Another potential cause of conflict is the inability to agree on something as fundamental as what constitutes a lead. A disconnect between marketing and sales often manifests itself in poor conversion rates. Sales may blame marketing for insufficient quantity or quality of leads handed off, while marketing may accuse sales of failing to follow up on what they consider to be an adequate number of leads promptly enough or indeed at all. This situation is often exacerbated by sales and marketing monitoring their respective activities against completely separate Key Performance Indicators and inadvertently motivating their teams to pull in opposite directions.

Tripping up the customer journey

Not only does the "blame game" drain internal morale, but the company's carefully-constructed image and reputation may also be tarnished if prospects receive an inconsistent or negative experience as they move along the pipeline, undoing much of the hard work put in by marketing to promote awareness and positive associations around the brand.

What's needed is an engine to link the functions of marketing and sales, that spans the function of qualifying, nurturing, scoring and converting marketing outputs into compatible sales inputs. That engine is telemarketing.

Case in point – joining the dots

The marketing team of a major high street bank had created bespoke collateral for 20 'hot' segments. Sales had been fully trained on the segment-specific benefits and were raring to go, but their diaries were empty.

The bank engaged telemarketing to act as an engine by providing data acquisition, cleansing and enrichment and prospect qualification. Blanket direct mail was meanwhile suspended so the budget could be redistributed more intelligently. Qualified records were mailed, with follow-up a week later by telemarketing, resulting in a 16% conversion from record to appointment. Sales have the added benefit of being able to dial activity up or down in specific segments or geographies in order to balance schedules.

Telemarketing: the missing link

Whether internal or outsourced, telemarketing can provide a logical interface between sales and marketing that helps to unify efforts. Sales are chiefly driven by how many deals are closed and how much revenue is generated. Marketing, on the other hand, may be more interested in clicks or registrations. The integration of telemarketing provides a timely opportunity to formalise, align and document responsibilities, objectives and KPIs across the whole commercial organisation. Telemarketing uses clear numerical targets as both inputs and outputs, which can provide much-needed linkage between marketing deliverables and sales objectives.

Lead ripening

As buyers research potential purchases, the internet has made it harder to tell what is a true lead and what is merely an enquiry. The vast majority of people who register for a webinar or download a white paper are not ready to talk to a salesperson. The key is to understand what attributes make up a sales-ready lead before it enters the pipeline. Telemarketing provides a highly effective way of qualifying, nurturing and scoring leads to enable sales to prioritise their efforts and improve conversion.

Data enrichment

One often overlooked activity which sits squarely within telemarketing's remit is data enrichment. If bought-in or internally-generated data has missing or insufficient detail, it can be difficult for marketing to accurately identify key characteristics and behaviour patterns by which to reliably segment prospects and ultimately generate high quality leads. A good telemarketing agency should be able to provide both data- and dialogue-based enrichment in addition to ancillary services such as cleansing, to lay the best possible foundation for any campaign.

Appointment-setting

Using dedicated telemarketers to carry out cold-calling is infinitely more cost-effective than using multi-skilled sales representatives, who can now be liberated to get on with the business of selling. Agents will have a combination of temperament and training that instills in them the patience, persistence and persuasiveness required to get past gatekeepers and overcome objections. They won't feel as though their wings have been clipped by using the phone, rather than in-person meetings, to interact with prospects.

Case in point – playing to strengths

The marketing department of a fleet management company had direct mailed 25,000 prospects. However, the sales team was either too busy or didn't possess the skills to cold-call them, resulting in a response rate of just 0.5%.

The company decided to employ telemarketing to reverse the fortunes of the underperforming campaign. Data was prioritised so that only high value opportunities were followed up, increasing the response rate to 2%. With pre-set appointments, the sales team that had been demoralised by days spent in the office cold-calling could get back on the road and generate a positive return on campaign spend.

Two-way feedback

Astute telemarketers can often gain valuable feedback in the course of their prospect interactions. For example, a competitor's weakness in service delivery may be revealed by multiple respondents when questioned about their incumbent supplier. This intelligence can be fed back into marketing and used to refine or even refocus the campaign strategy part-way through to boost results.

Increased transparency

A further advantage is that, unlike sales calls, telemarketing conversations can be digitally recorded. The value isn't confined to quality control assurances – the audio can be shared with the sales teams as part of the lead handover process. This can accelerate the familiarisation process before a face-to-face meeting with the prospect and ensures all the key facts captured during the call are passed on faithfully to the account manager.

Closing the loop

A true closed-loop process requires that both marketing and sales track various pieces of data to help predict future customer needs and measure the impact of various marketing initiatives on sales. As marketing relies increasingly on online strategies, it can be relatively straightforward to determine which campaign or keywords brought a prospect to a website, or the number of white papers downloaded before becoming a lead. But offline initiatives are harder to quantify without being able to ask direct, searching questions. Sales, meanwhile, can share intelligence such as a prospect's progress along the pipeline and whether the opportunity was converted.

However, to complete the circuit, telemarketing can play a vital follow-up role by finding out why a deal failed to close, such as whether the prospect went to a competitor (and why) or was simply not ready to make a purchase. This insight can be crucial to the process of continually fine-tuning marketing activities and sales efforts and maximising return on investment.

It would be wrong to imply that telemarketing can provide an overnight resolution to the conflict between marketing and sales. And its role is certainly not one of peace-keeper or referee – the divide is reinforced by personality types, and a degree of cultural change is required to undo decades-old habits and perceptions. However, it pays to remember that marketing is about reaching and persuading prospects and sales should be about closing the deal and getting a signed contract. Telemarketing can form a cost-effective human bridge between the two disparate teams, helping to create a single commercial organisation united in a common purpose. And, perhaps most importantly, ensure that every prospect enjoys a consistent, uninterrupted journey from end to end.

Top 10 take-aways

1. Clarify responsibility for the entire marketing / sales cycle
2. Create KPIs and targets that promote win:win outcomes
3. Define what is classified as a lead within your organisation
4. If it doesn't meet the criteria for a lead, have a system in place to nurture it
5. Enrich your prospect base at every possible opportunity
6. Assess the sophistication of your lead generation team
7. Use your lead generation team for both long-term projects and tactical activities
8. Maximise transparency between marketing and sales wherever possible
9. Supplement marketing campaigns with telemarketing follow-up to boost results
10. Collect feedback on all lead generation activity

For more information on intelligence led telemarketing, please contact Market Makers

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About marketmakers

As a Multi award winning telemarketing agency, Market Makers build industry-leading, bespoke campaigns for appointment, sales and lead generation requirements.

With a fully results-orientated approach, Market Makers guarantee the highest quality, most targeted business opportunities, to support the long term strategic growth of our clients.

As an agency built with direct marketers at the heart, we believe that telemarketing is not a job that simply starts and finishes with someone talking on the phone.

High return telemarketing involves market analysis and target profiling, expert data sourcing, results-focused analysis and reporting and, most importantly, continual assessment and enhancing.