B2B Leaders

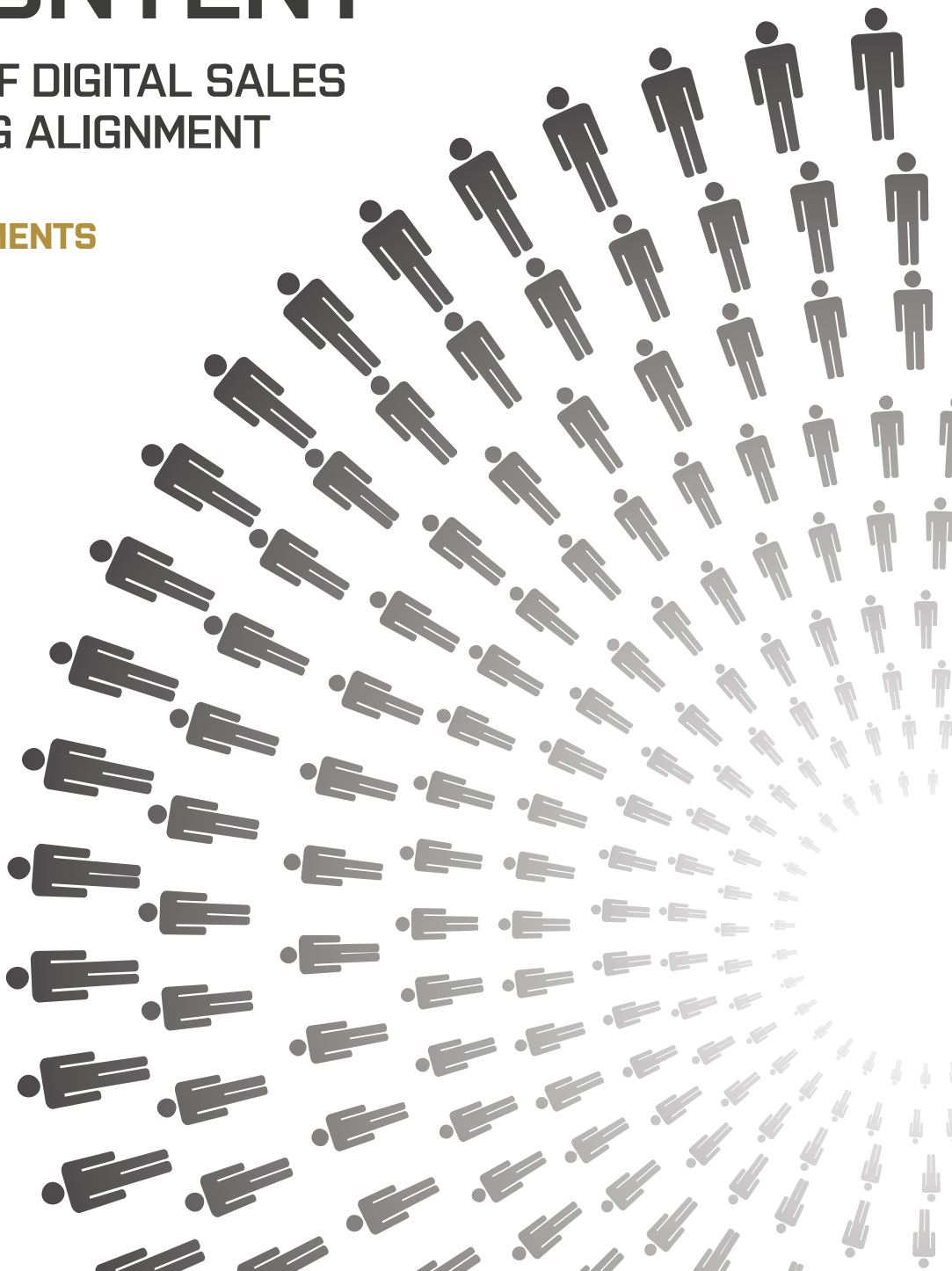
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ROUNDTABLE:

CO-OPERATION, COLLABORATION AND CONTENT

THE NEW ERA OF DIGITAL SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS



In association with

sitecore®

June 2014

Roundtable: Co-operation, collaboration and content – the new era of digital sales and marketing alignment

For any organisation to succeed, it's always been essential for sales and marketing to work effectively together. But the need for a harmonious relationship and purposeful collaboration has been escalated by recent changes in B2B buyer behaviour

Empowered by increasingly compelling forms of content, and emboldened by new opportunities for digital engagement, B2B buyers are now better-informed and savvier about how and when they engage with brands. As a result, both sales and marketing have to change with them, in order to maximise opportunities in the new environment. In particular, the handover point, where sales ends and marketing begins, is shifting, with content creating a means for marketing to become much more important much earlier in the process.

This roundtable sought to explore this issue, understand the extent to which preconceptions are true (or otherwise) and how practitioners were responding to it. Some key questions that it sought to address were:

- What are the factors that best contribute towards a harmonious relationship between sales and marketing?
- What role does sales play in content creation and refinement?
- How can and should sales leverage content as part of the conversion process?
- What does the future of content look like – from both a sales and marketing perspective?

The roundtable took place at the Hospital Club and was attended by B2B Leaders (senior client side marketers) from a range of different industries and sectors. Bearing in mind the sensitivities of the topics discussed and the opinions expressed, details of attendees have been kept as confidential – however, this is a summary of key responses or points made:

1. **The creation and utilisation of content is a significant battleground for sales and marketing**
   The danger for marketers comes in focusing too much on the content creation process and not enough about the customer – this can allow marketers and brands to become too self-referential and not focused on the issues. Sales can be impatient about seeing the outputs from content distribution and creating results which are relevant for them. In some instances sales has come to see marketing as revenue chasers – they don't understand nurturing is required for converting bigger customers, and this takes time. There is often a bigger challenge with the product teams – marketing has a challenge to close the loop. The product teams need to understand what's in it for the customer. The role of marketing is 'engagement' for both sales and product teams: bringing different factions together to drive the desired result.

2. **Effective deployment of content can demand a profound shift in which activities marketing conducts.**
   Some brands have slashed their investment in advertising, events and corporate hospitality and ploughed the resources into content creation – the rules have changed around hospitality which makes it more difficult to run these events, and these new restrictions can help with this migration process. Other brands are building content teams internally and moving money away from agencies. They believe that having this resource internally will create significant advantages in terms of developing and utilising content.

3. **The migration to digital content can be both a blessing and a curse.**
   Creating content to drive events and enable discussions has always been an effective B2B marketing tool – content marketing itself is

nothing new. When migrating content to digital environments, the ability for decision makers to interact on public environments is limited or hampered, because neither party knows who is listening. It can't be open because of compliance issues.

4. **Finding something interesting or relevant to say is the chief barrier to thought leadership.**
   Thought leadership is a great opportunity, but not every business area is able to create the right content, and individuals can require careful stewarding by marketing – guidelines are useful. Authenticity is key to making thought leadership content generate resonance. Marketers need to help experts find something that resonates with clients, not just pushing a product or service.

5. **Company structures can be a barrier to effective content marketing.**
   Previously people planned marketing activity in silos – collaboration is the best way of driving making campaigns that work most effectively. Not everyone understands what good content looks like – some teams want technical or dry content which marketers instinctively know will not resonate. The challenge for marketers is to specify the type and quality required and bring other stakeholders with them.

6. **Sales can be the biggest barrier to effective content marketing.**
   Often when a nurtured contact is handed over to sales, any insights gained from interaction is lost and marketing cannot learn from what happens next. The corporate marketing team can also be a barrier, as they are not close enough to the sales team and don't understand how they think and what they need. The better B2B marketers become at producing content, the greater opportunities there are for disconnect with sales – because the content doesn't come from them, they don't really understand it and therefore aren't able to utilise it effectively. The sales team typically doesn't understand content creation must be a collaborative process they need to participate in to get the best out of the content.

7. **Sales enablement is increasingly important part of marketers' roles.**
   Sales enablement is anything that helps the sales team to utilise marketing content effectively. Marketers need to consider that if they've created a great piece of content for use by the audience, there may need to be a companion piece to explain how it should be used. A high level summary explaining the key messages is often very useful. Sometimes re-purposing content into different formats can encourage sales people to use content – otherwise, if they get it in a single format which they don't like, the effort to create the content will be wasted. The content which marketing creates is not the technical stuff – marketing content is about driving engagement. Some brands differentiate between sales enablement and sales training – others don't. The best content comes when sales is highly involved at the inception.

8. **Content marketing and automation are helping to shift the power balance between sales and marketing.**
   Marketing is taking the discussion with customers further through the funnel before sales becomes engaged. Marketing needs to position itself to exploit the advantages – it's an education job, reinvention.

9. **The sales team needs to become storytellers.**
   They must move from having a conversation about a transaction to telling a story. Buyers care more about what brands do and sell – in other words: 'It's not what we do, it's why we do it.' Buyers want to do business with companies whose values sales people feel align with their own. It's not just about whether you should talk about products or not – reputation is a big part of what is sold. Becoming a publisher doesn't go far enough – publishing is a technical activity. Brands must become storytellers, but storytelling requires an opinion or something to say. Without a core message, brands will just become very good publishers, and will start competing with the mainstream media.

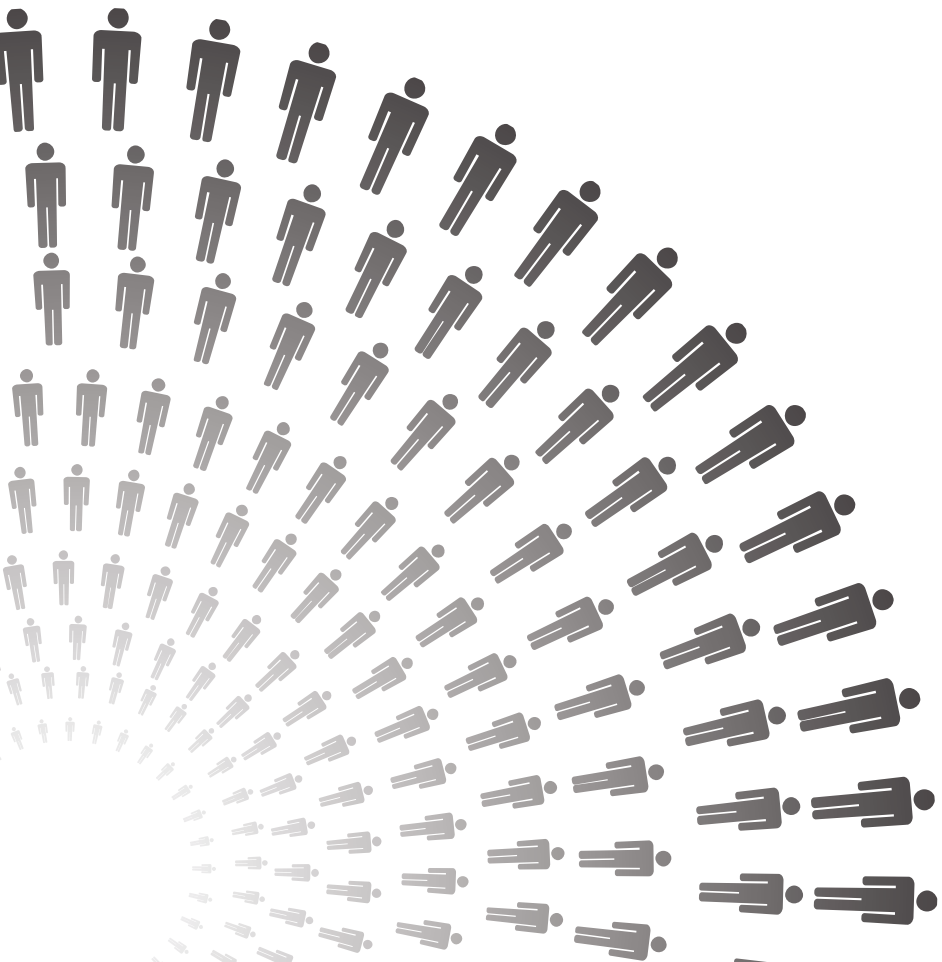
10. **The challenger sale philosophy requires proactive involvement from marketing to be successful.**
    Individuals don't like to be sold to, but they do need help to buy. Marketing and sales are drawn together by this, because you need insights on the potential customer's business to be an effective challenge sales person.

B2B Leaders

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B2B Leaders is an exclusive programme of events and content designed specifically for the needs of senior B2B marketers – including CMOs, marketing directors, heads of marketing and VPs. This includes regular roundtables and networking events where practitioners can come together to discuss key issues and hot topics in a confidential environment with peers from across the B2B sector.

For more information on B2B Leaders, go to b2bleaders.net or call Amie Bakker on 020 7438 1370 or email amie.bakker@b2bmarketing.net



B2B Marketing

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Clover House
147-149 Farringdon Road
London
EC1R 3HN

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7438 1370
info@b2bmarketing.net

b2bleaders.net