Why we're all in ~~Sales~~ Marketing now



"We're all in Sales!" was an oft-heard phrase not so long ago. And whilst it worked as a mantra, it didn't necessarily work as a method. The notorious Sales and Marketing disconnect – "a divide however we tried" – was omnipresent. Sales and Marketing competed for the same objectives, therefore resulting in a tug of war – and both sides were guilty of not sharing territory.

That has, admittedly, changed. Sales and Marketing have become closer bedfellows in many ways. But they're still not fitting together as snugly as they might, and it's because the balance of responsibility between Sales and Marketing has shifted.

So, what's driving this (at times difficult) evolution – and what are the opportunities that emerge from it if businesses get it right?

How digital bigged-up Marketing

Two factors loom large here – technology and Covid, and how they both conspired to distort the relationship timeline; the journey from being an unaware prospect through to an advocating customer.

Through its engagement with technologies like social media, marketing automation, CRM, and mobile platforms, Marketing has now assumed control of more of the customer journey – from awareness to advocacy, and all the stages in between – than ever before.

Why? Because some 80% of buyers' decision-making process is now informed by the digital information and content they consume. And where does responsibility for most of that content sit, in most organisations? Marketing.

Factor in a pandemic that stopped face-to-face Sales engagements and socialisation in their tracks overnight and leant even more heavily on these digital interactions, and Marketing is now adopting the role of relationship guardian.

Doing Marketing the Sales way

Credibility, relationship-building, interaction, customer insight – these are all skills Sales bring to the Marketing table in spades. But whilst Marketing needs to become more commercially savvy, Sales arguably needs to adopt a more marketing-centric approach. So how can we avoid the disconnect, or as it stands now, the overlap?

Role evolution is the answer – and actually, both Sales and Marketing have already proven that they are entirely capable of this.

Salespeople, for instance – once the guiding influence in customers' progression along the buying timeline – have now often transitioned to more of an account management role, as buyers get most of their information from elsewhere.

The "hunter" has definitely not become redundant, but Marketing is actually doing more of the traditional hunting by means of superior segmentation, permission-based communication and dialogue via website, social and content. In fact, if truth be told, it is the prospect who now also hunts, digitally, to make a buying decision – and long before they speak to a salesperson.

Marketers have learned to digitally track campaign success and demonstrate return on investment, thinking like a commercially savvy salesperson.

And the old divisions of Sales and Marketing are being dissolved both operationally and symbolically by the appointment, in many businesses, not of a separate Head of Sales and Head of Marketing, but by a Head of Sales and Marketing.



What's in a name anyway?

But if there's one critical truth that the transition to digital has highlighted, it's that it is customer-centricity as an overarching and, more importantly, shared approach that ultimately delivers results.

The opportunity for both Sales and Marketing professionals to deliver seamless customer interaction here is huge, and use of the "tech stack" – the right choice of technology and automation tools - supports this.

Both teams can use digital channels to garner insight and perception - to know the customer's mind, as it were.

Both teams can engage the audience with communication and interaction that speaks to that mind and its hopes and fears, varying the tone, timbre, and subject matter to draw the audience further into the buying cycle.

Done at its best, this is Cognitive Marketing – a technique that capitalises on not only the rational elements of customer decision-making, but on emotional triggers too.

These are every bit as important in aligning on a buying timeline the seven or more individuals (or as many as ten, according to industry analysts Gartner Group) that, in B2B marketing, constitute the typical customer Decision-Making Unit (DMU).

So, call it Sales. Call it Marketing. Call it Cognitive. But whatever you call it, put the customer's mind at the heart of it, because we're all in this brave new digital world together now.

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