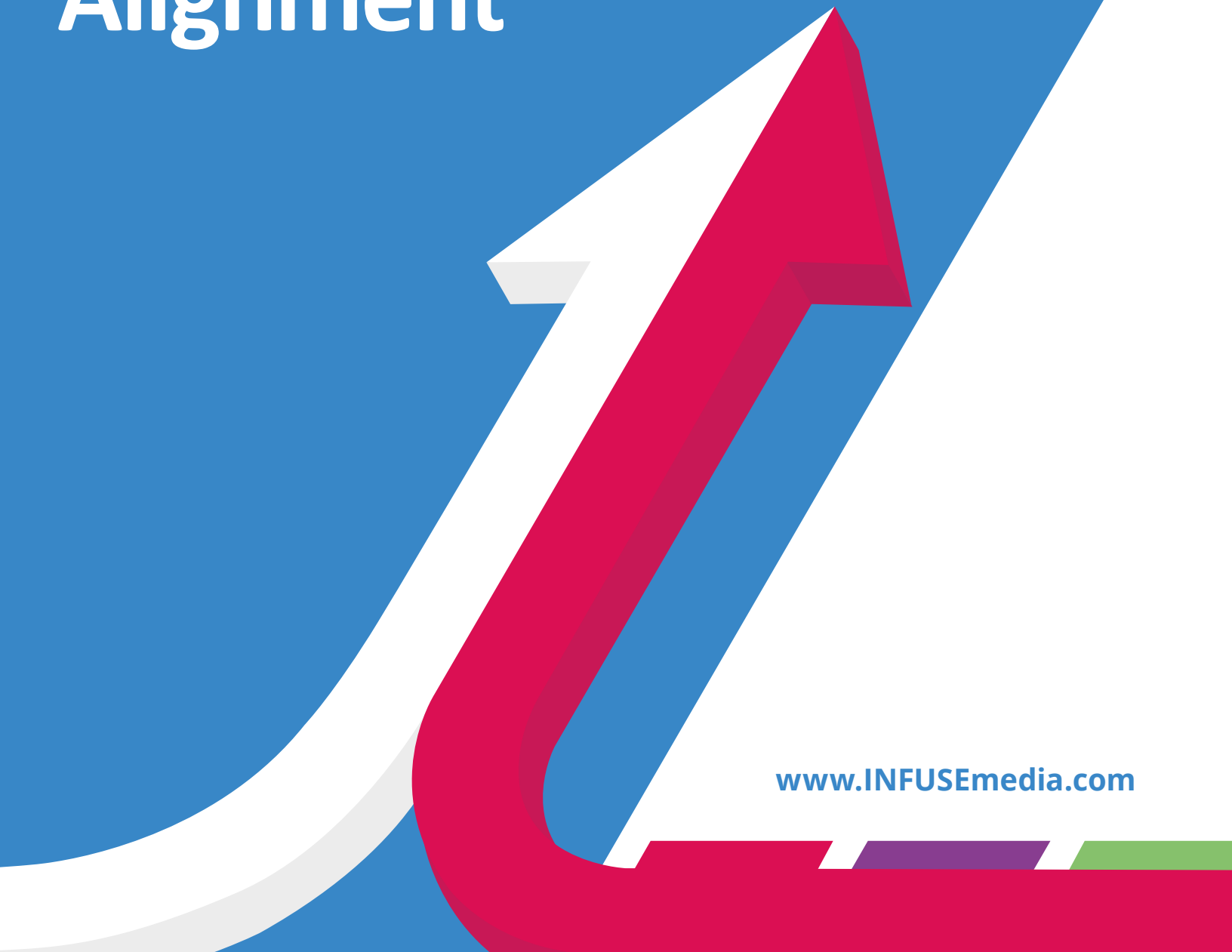
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10 Best Practices for Sales and Marketing Alignment



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Image source: http://appdataroom.com/sales-marketing-alignment-leads-success-infographic/

Sales and marketing work best when they work together. Aligning them can help you achieve an average of 20% growth in annual revenue or a 36% increase in customer retention rates and a 38% increase in sales win rates. These are just some of the many benefits that come along with well-aligned sales and marketing teams.

The business case for sales and marketing alignment goes even further than this. Not only are internally aligned organizations more profitable and efficient, they also provide a better workflow for employees. With alignment comes greater clarity, better understanding of company strategies, and an improved perception of one's job and colleagues.

However, achieving alignment between sales and marketing is often challenging even in the most productive companies. Here are ten best practices that will help you get started on the right footing.

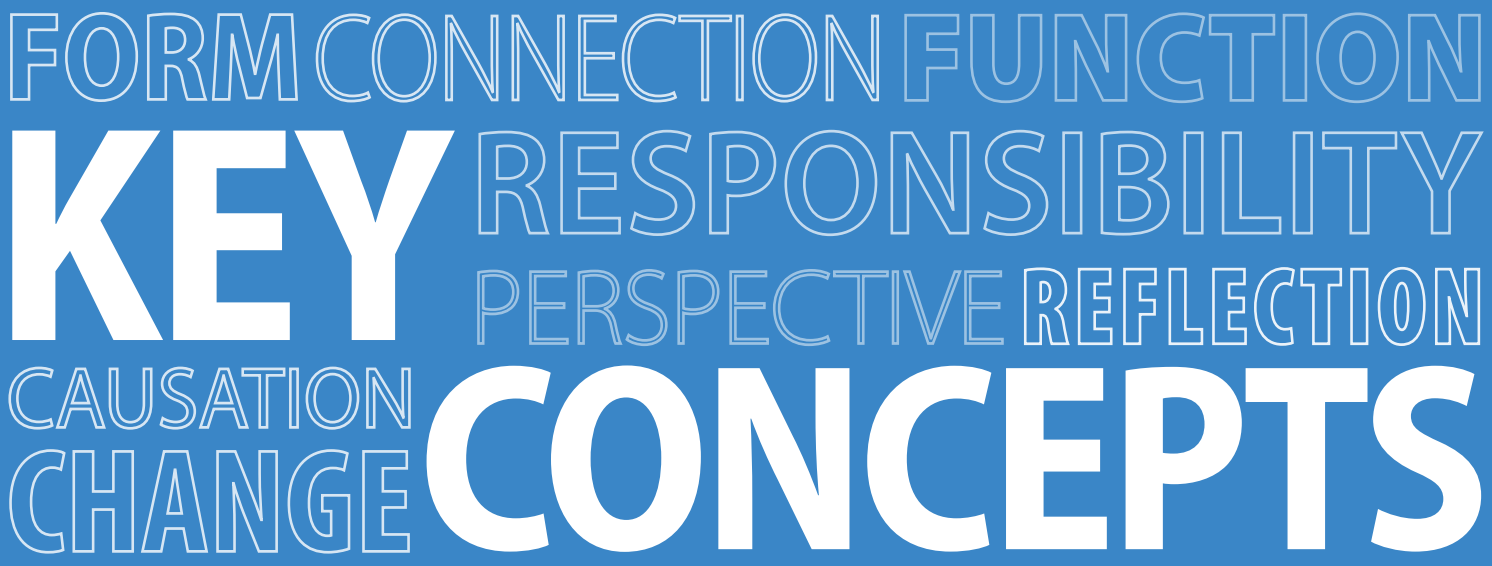
1. Define Key Concepts

Effective alignment should begin with the basics — defining the common vocabulary your teams are going to use. Marketing may have one notion of what a qualified lead is or what an opportunity is, while sales may see it differently. Not sharing definitions is one of the biggest potential mistakes when aligning marketing and sales teams.

Definitions of terms also depend on the sales cycle. When defining terms, teams must make sure they are referring to the same model of sales stages and then begin to map out the vocabulary. Some examples of key terms that need to be clearly defined are:

- Unqualified Lead
- Prospect / Qualified Lead
- Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL)
- Sales Qualified Lead (SQL)
- Opportunity

You don't have to use the exact same terms as everyone else. Some companies only have MQLs, SQLs and Opportunities, while others have more granular categories to track leads even more precisely. Definitions should be shared and both teams should be able to map these definitions onto the sales cycles adopted by the company. This will clarify the lead handoff process and allow teams inside the company to cooperate. The handoff process is covered in more detail in one of the following sections.



2. Define Shared KPIs

Shared key performance indicators (KPIs) help sales and marketing teams work together. Shared KPIs does not mean the same KPIs. Instead, it means that you should strive to devise KPIs that depend on each other to achieve the goals of each separate team. For example, both sales and marketing teams could have a 'conversion rate' KPI. Yet, for each of the teams, this will mean something different, although related to the other team's KPI.

Sales and marketing teams are more similar than they may often look. Marketers require a sales mentality in order to produce powerful messages and content, while sales teams need a marketing mentality in order to approach clients in a compelling way. This is why some experts conclude that sales is marketing and marketing is sales. Or, as Marketo professionals have put it — despite their differences, "sales and marketing are still orbiting around the same sun."

Introducing KPIs in a more systematic way and expecting sales and marketing to go along may prove difficult at first. Creating a sense of accountability on sales and marketing KPIs is a challenge you can expect to face within teams. In many cases, the natural response to KPIs is usually a negative one, as pointed out by Jeremy Boudinet. But there are solutions to the common challenges to sales and marketing KPI accountability that will make teams feel empowered and excited about KPIs rather than annoyed.

According to Boudinet, you can:

- Automate data entry
- Grant access to relevant KPI data
- Incentivize team communication
- Run holistic contests that concern all KPIs and involve the whole team
- Recognize strong KPI performance

Ultimately, shared KPIs and the above measures improve communication between teams, helping their alignment and reinforcing accountability.

KPIs: The Foundation of Sales and Marketing Alignment

CMO KPIs	
GOALS	METRICS
Drive a cohesive strategy and align with sales	Conversion rate: Determine the ratio of closed deals to opportunities at each stage of the sales funnel.
Simplify workflows	Marketing Productivity Rate: Measure both the efficiency and effectiveness of your marketing efforts with metrics like number of qualified leads created, content association with winning deals, and number of marketing influenced closed won deals.
Marketing ROI	Revenue is now the ultimate metric for B2B marketers. Consider metrics like deals sourced and deals influenced.
Control Marketing Message	Content analytics will help you understand whether or not the right content is being presented before prospects.

SVP Sales KPIs	
GOALS	METRICS
Faster go to market	Measure sales rep time spent selling. If a large portion of their time is spent on unproductive tasks like searching for and re-creating data alignment, and ultimately sales, will suffer.
Make Quota	Look towards the conversion rate at each stage of the sales funnel to highlight weaknesses in your sales and marketing processes.
Value Messaging	Leverage content analytics to find out how effective your value messaging is.
Increase Win Rates	Drill into your teams win rates to find your success rates for each vertical, deal size etc.

Image source: http://www.saleshacker.com/how-to-implement-a-sales-marketing-alignment-strategy/

3. Define Strategy Together



Image source: http://www.business2community.com/marketing/looking-beyond-sales-and-marketing-alignment-0162936#Du6uUZ0kMOU3ySl1.97

Another successful practice of aligning sales and marketing teams is to have the two define various strategies together. For example, sales and marketing can collaborate on the lead generation strategy or the content strategy based on the sales cycles.

The lead generation strategy will help teams align their understanding of the buyer persona behavior, including the persona's:

- Interests
- Goals and motivators
- Needs and pains
- Role in the decision-making process

Based on these characteristics, sales and marketing can begin to devise lead generation strategies to capture leads. As part of this process a content strategy may also be defined together, initially in broader terms, and then more specifically as alignment between teams increases.

Other strategies and shared approaches that can be defined and structured together are lead scoring methods (more on this below) as well as service level agreements (SLAs) during each stage of the cycle. With SLAs there will be particular requirements and criteria that need to be passed during any stage — protocols for handling, scoring and handing off leads, for example. SLAs will also assure that processes are documented and steps can be retraced, providing teams with yet another source of data and insights.

4. Coordinate Content Creation and Campaigns Between Teams

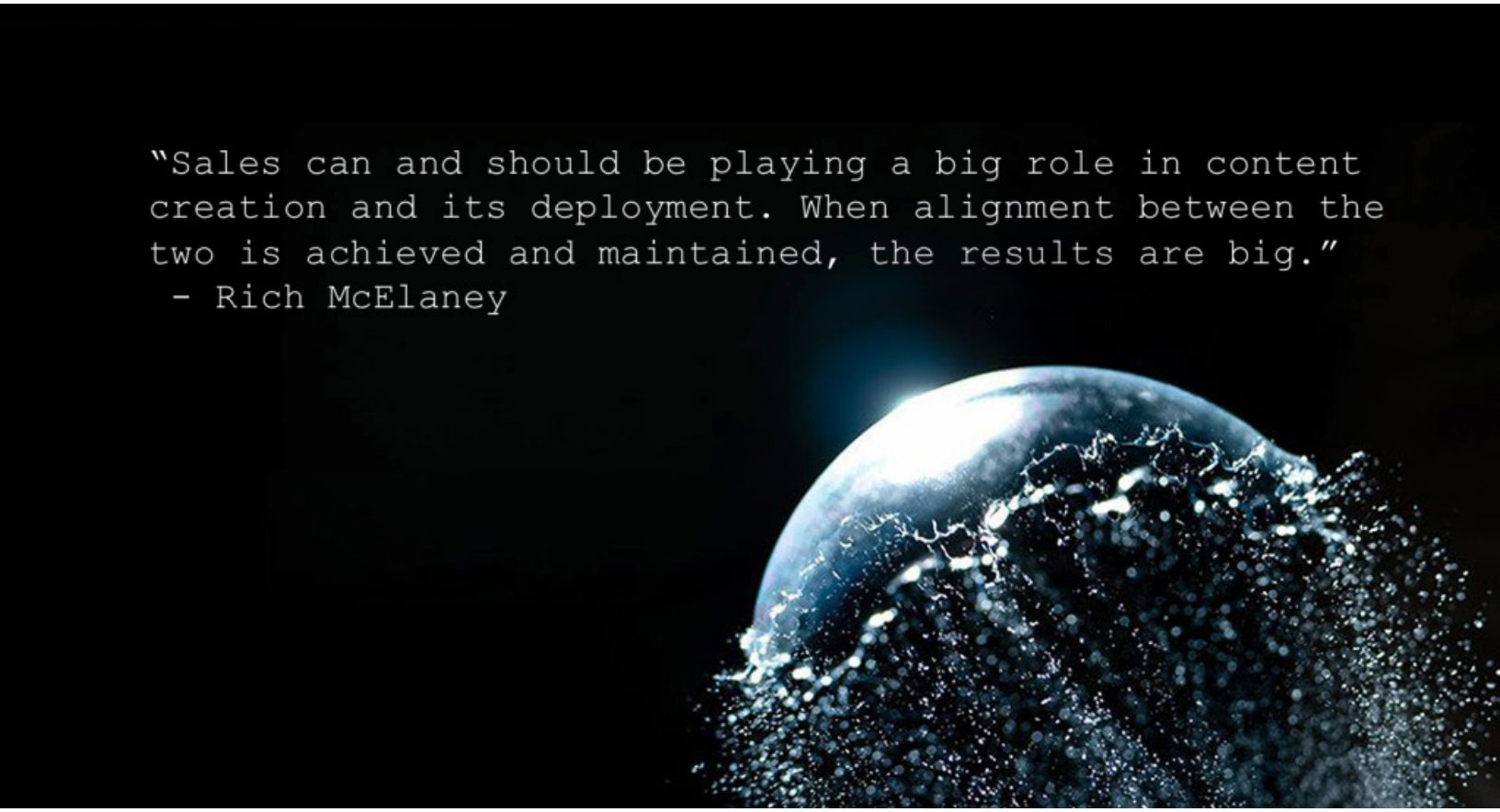


Image source: http://www.docurated.com/all-things-productivity/11-tips-to-align-sales-and-marketing-sales-and-marketing-alignment-tips-from-the-experts

Sales representatives spend plenty of time speaking to prospects and leads or closing deals. They have an idea of what gets people excited, what prospects need to know before they can proceed to the next stage in the sales cycle, what consumers want to get from the product or service the company is selling, etc. You can capitalize on this knowledge by having sales coordinate the content creation strategy with the marketing team.

Coordinating campaigns is another way of aligning sales and marketing. Marketers can notify sales in advance of launching a campaign to promote a new product or service, as well as request feedback.

Once the campaign is launched and leads are being generated, the marketing team can follow up and provide sales with further information regarding the process for a particular individual. This includes providing talking points such as stats, business use cases, and "how to" advice to be offered to prospects. The marketing team can further help at this stage by creating a nurturing email template that sales can use to engage new leads and renew old conversations.

5. Introduce Lead Scoring and Improve the Lead Handoff Process

Agreeing on the proper way of scoring leads is an important aspect to marketing and sales alignment. Lead scoring is the process of ranking leads according to their progress in the sales cycle and according to their 'sales-readiness'. This is important because not all leads are immediately ready to be contacted by sales.

Back in 2011, MarketingSherpa found that 61% of marketers send all leads directly to sales, while only 27% of those leads were qualified. In other words, there is a significant chunk of leads that can get lost when they are not properly scored and positioned within the cycle. Ways of scoring include:

- Demographic scoring
- Asset scoring
- Behavior scoring
- Product interest scoring

Leads at each stage should be scored differently, based on various behaviors and factors. Once lead scoring is in place, the lead handoff process can also be regulated. It can be defined clearly and even cemented with an SLA so that when a lead reaches a certain lead score and is handed over to sales, there is a high degree of certainty that this is not just any prospect but an SQL.



6. Replace the Traditional Sales Funnel With a Revenue Cycle

The traditional sales funnel has become outdated for a number of reasons. One, it is based on the idea that sales and marketing are mutually exclusive; first marketing does its job, then sales does its job, and hopefully, the deal gets closed.

This model also sees the customer as a type of passive participant who gets pushed around and directed towards the goal. This model divides the work of both these teams too rigidly and may sometimes even pit them against each other because of different goals, KPIs, and definitions.

Furthermore, customers today behave differently than they did 5 or 10 years ago. Modern business buyers tend to do more research before they engage with brands and are far more proactive than traditionally understood. This means they need to be engaged differently and taken through different stages, in order to establish a new type of relationship.

Marketo and other experts have suggested that the traditional sales cycle be replaced with a revenue cycle. The stages within this cycle are separated by key 'conversion points' of varying importance. It is called a revenue cycle because revenue is a shared and major goal for both teams, but also because both teams affect the revenue outcome.

Conversion points in this cycle are more distinct, based on particular interactions between marketing/sales and customers. Customers' movement from the top of the funnel to the bottom is not passive. It is a result of active engagement from both the company's and the customer's sides, and depends on the alignment between the two teams to work out. Furthermore, when definitions are clear and each team owns a set of conversion points, greater cooperation will be required to achieve the end goal of 'revenue'.

Finally, with benchmarks and metrics in place, progress along the revenue cycle can be tracked, reported, analyzed, and tweaked according to the situation. Ownership of the whole process is shared, even though marketing may take the lead for some conversion points and sales for others. Opportunities, successes, challenges, and errors are collectively assessed and solutions are shared.



7. Get Executive Support to Make Changes

Beyond definitions, strategies, and processes, executive support of sales and marketing alignment is essential. Since sales and marketing share the same C-level executive, getting him or her involved can have a powerful effect on the degree of alignment. Executive involvement should not be too hard to get, since execs are clearly invested in the success of the whole process.

An executive agreement about the need to achieve greater alignment can speed up the process and get managers and leaders from both teams on the same page. To get executives more involved, you may need to support your request with research data and a demonstration of what their input may achieve. Research should prove the value of greater alignment between sales and marketing. Your demonstration should be able to provide them with a vision of what could improve if they were to offer their active support.

Securing C-level support can provide opportunities for making changes in processes and introducing new technologies, such as integrating a marketing automation platform to be used by both sales and marketing.



8. Train the Teams Together



Image source: https://www.marketo.com/webinars/digital-marketing-bootcamp-sales-marketing-alignment/

A variety of different trainings can be introduced to empower both teams and bring them closer to understanding their shared goal, as defined by the revenue cycle.

Trainings can focus on:

- Effective deal closure for sales
- Creating leads with high closure rate for marketing
- Proper hand-off of leads for marketing and proper response to handed off leads for sales
- Generating new business
- Introducing and mentoring new sales representatives
- Using content effectively during the sales process
- Understanding the target buyer and the revenue cycle
- Enabling sales and working through difficult use cases in a group environment
- Updates on products and services and how to align strategies between the teams

Such trainings will help teams build on their core competencies. They will also have the benefit of bringing teams closer or circulating information and know-how between the teams.

9. Have Regular Meetings

Regular meetings within and between teams create the foundation, which enables training sessions to be efficient and generate the necessary improvements.

There are many different meetings which you could organize and hold weekly or monthly. Here are some possibilities:

- An onboarding 'smarketing' meeting during which marketers get to know new salespeople. During such meetings marketers can explain and demonstrate how they will support the sales process and what salespersons can expect from them.
- Weekly sales meetings during which the sales team briefs the marketing team on their progress, their quotas, and the goals they have met or are to meet. In addition, marketers can share their promotion plans for upcoming campaigns, content, and offers. Ideas and suggestions can be exchanged during this meeting. Sales can suggest how to optimize the lead gen process, while marketers may share suggestions concerning the follow-up process.
- Monthly sales and marketing manager meetings during which results are analyzed and commented. This can include commenting on metrics at conversion points such as lead generation, MQLs and SQLs, and conversion rate. This meeting can also focus on reviewing, evaluating, and maybe even introducing changes to SLAs.
- Weekly brainstorming sessions for marketers only and/or brief sessions with sales where they are asked what kind of content they would like to see or feel is necessary for improving the sales process.



10. Enable Sales and Marketing Teams Through Automation

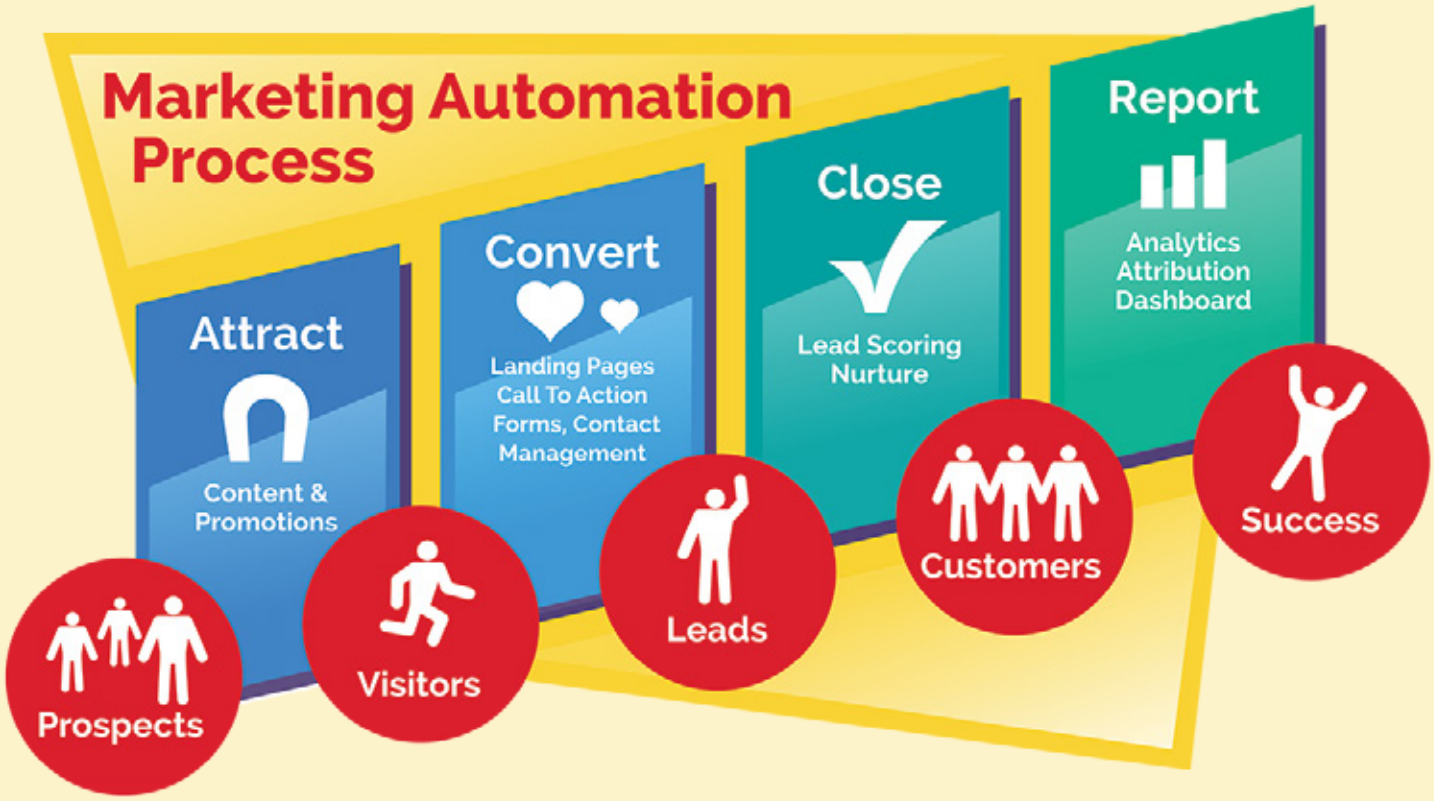


Image source: https://www.reachmarketing.com/marketing-automation/

Marketing automation is a particularly helpful technological change which you should consider introducing, if you haven't already. Among other benefits, a good marketing automation platform will fine-tune the lead scoring process to a high degree.

Marketo's Definitive Guide to Lead Scoring (see #5) offers a great checklist which you can use when choosing a marketing automation platform. It provides particular questions to keep in mind as you choose your automation platform as well as the business reasons behind each question. More precise scoring will also provide sales with the guarantee that what they are getting from marketing are truly qualified for them.

Marketing automation solutions can be connected to all your information channels, which will help all parties stay on track and keep pace with customers. Both teams will make more informed decisions and should communicate more frequently in order to reach their shared goals.

Conclusion

Aligning your sales and marketing teams is not just a good idea that may bring in some more leads. It is a fundamental change to your operations which may significantly alter the quantity and quality of deals and improve internal processes and communications.

Well-aligned sales and marketing teams function in a dynamic and fluid way, exchanging information back and forth and often making spontaneous improvements based on shared KPIs and goals. They are also better at creating working strategies to address buyer persona pain points or to move leads in an efficient manner down the revenue funnel. Well-aligned teams are always better at generating revenue and ensuring a long-lasting business.

Alexander Kesler Bio:



Alexander is a visionary B2B digital marketer with over 15 years of experience. Focusing on solutions for B2B demand generation, digital marketing, ABM, Intent and AI driven lead generation, among others, Alexander embraces innovation and turns concepts and methodologies into products and marketing programs that drive ROI.

As Founder and President of INFUSEmedia, a data-driven B2B Demand Generation Network, Alexander leads a global team that executes campaigns across all industries and company sizes. He leverages his market knowledge and industry expertise to help his team deploy a suite of innovative programs and campaigns that deliver revenue growth for over 400 clients of INFUSEmedia.

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