

Bridge the Sales and Marketing Gap

In an ideal commerce world, Marketing provides handcrafted messages that clearly define the product or service to be sold, which quickly resonates with a potential buyer and is converted into a lead that is handed over to Sales to close the business. The reality in "real life" is that this scenario rarely works.

Marketing sometimes creates unclear messages or ambiguous definitions of their own products or services. Customers incorrectly or even falsely specify what it is they are looking for. Sales personnel prefer closing business with existing customers to facing rejection with leads. They avoid spending time educating new prospects, or if they do new account prospecting, they are likely to develop their own messages, independent from marketing.

Historically, the problem lies with Marketing not understanding first-hand the selling process that Sales is working by, and Sales not feeding back exactly what the customer is looking for. It's not that neither group is doing their job, but the sheer volume and lack of timeliness of information are preventing a good exchange of ideas. By the time you have finally figured out the right formula to fit your customer needs, the market landscape most likely has changed.

The Sales response to not getting useful and timely marketing messages for the selling process is to start implementing a technique called consultative selling. In short, ask the potential customer what is bothering them, listen to their problem, and begin to summarize a solution for them. If their needs align to your offerings you can then begin educating them about your company's products or services as part of that solution. So where does Marketing fit in this picture?

Smart Marketing organizations are working closely with Sales at this stage in the selling process to interject marketing messages that are customer problem/solution centric into a customized customer proposal. The key benefit is delivering a more consistent message when it matters. Working as a team to close the business is an effective way to tighten the gap between Marketing and Sales, but this is a time consuming and non-scaling process for many growing or larger business operations. Some may wonder if there is a technology solution available.

In the early 2000's large IT investments were made to address this problem in the area of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Sales Force Automation (SFA) tools. New monolithic vendors grew almost overnight (like Siebel or Salesforce.com) and more established ones expanded product lines (like Oracle or Microsoft) with technology to bridge the Marketing-to-Sales gap. These costly deployments sometimes require years to roll out and often highlight ineffective or broken sales processes. It is becoming evident that technology alone will not resolve the exchange of information between Marketing and Sales. These technologies often focus on what the customer has done, not what they are planning to do.

Enter the Internet as a new marketing and sales research tool and sales lead generator. Slowly companies are moving beyond a simple brochure-ware function of their web sites and beginning to design-in a selling process. This involves providing some starting points in identifying customer problem statements that they can associate with. Next, they start educating visitors about the causes of the problems with more in-depth materials such as white papers, webcasts or on-line

training events before they start "selling" their own solutions. Along the way they are tracking the prospect to gauge their actual interest and uncover the status of the project. For example, "are you ready to purchase a XYZ type of solution in the next six months" are questions they ask at the registration of a webcast.

This polling or surveying of prospects as they explore your web site also starts to create the impression you are trying to better understand their needs, which you are! Each of these stages is what we call a "trigger point", where it's still too early to declare it a real sales lead but there is real, measurable active interest. This is still one technology area where the tools provided today are very much lacking. There are plenty of rich reporting and analysis tools to measure web site traffic and trends that provide great market research for the Marketing department. But the gathering of this information on an individual web visitor basis and creating a "lead package" for a Sales person to follow-up on is still an underdeveloped resource. Until that time, the bridge between Sales and Marketing most likely will remain open as we let the large boats of information flow past.

Market-Vantage specializes in Integrated Web Marketing. We help companies develop and implement effective Internet marketing strategies for a positive impact on their business. If you would like to improve your leverage of the Internet for marketing, please call us at 603-888-5600 or use our web inquiry form at <http://www.market-vantage.com/about/inquiry.htm> to request an initial confidential consultation about your specific situation.