



## Smart Marketing Starts With a Sales Perspective

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I'm not sure why sales and marketing have developed a relationship just as contentious as IU and Purdue. They're equally important functions that serve the same organizations, and each offers expertise that could benefit the other. But put them in the same arena -- even if that arena is just an average conference room -- and you'll be awed by the rivalry that ensues.

I view that relationship not only as the recipient of a top-quality Purdue education, but as someone who came into marketing through corporate sales support roles. Perhaps that's why I've long understood the connections between sales and marketing and worked to bridge the gap.

Over the years, I've discovered that far too many marketing people are detached from their companies' sales departments. Whether that's because of internal politics or innocent oversights, it results in both functions being unlikely to achieve their full potential.

In simple terms, the role of the sales department is exactly what its name suggests: to encourage sales of products, whether that involves direct sales of individual items or creating agreements to sell large quantities of smaller items. To the company's customers, the sales team is the company's face and their primary connection.

We know that the most effective salespeople aren't the proverbial order-takers. They're the people who engage in consultative approaches, listening carefully to customer needs and creating solutions to address those needs. So not only do salespeople serve as the company's face -- they're also its eyes and ears, gathering information to help the company do a better job of serving its market.

In theory, marketing includes a wide range of responsibilities, including pricing decisions, but in today's average company, marketing's primary role is promotional. (In fact, many companies conflate marketing with advertising, even though advertising is just one technique that can be used as part of marketing.) If we view marketing in that way, their primary function becomes providing the messages and materials that pave the way for the sales department's efforts. For those messages and materials to be compelling and effective, they need to address the prospective customers' needs and concerns.

What's the best way for the marketing team to develop a solid understanding of those needs and concerns? Given that the sales team is gathering information, marketing should use what's being learned as a foundation for its efforts. For example, if the sales team is discovering that customers are frustrated with a competitive product's lack of reliability, it may be time to build marketing efforts around your product's superior reliability. If customers are reluctant to pay your higher price, perhaps the marketing efforts need to focus on the greater value your product delivers.

That's why an effective marketing department will view the sales team as its customers. Yes, the company is trying to sell to its ultimate customer base, but the best way for that to happen is for the marketing department to pay close attention to what the sales team needs to accomplish its objectives. After all, the sales team is dealing directly with the decision-makers and should have a clear understanding of what matters to and will motivate them.

Instead of looking at its counterparts in sales as rivals, a sales-focused marketing team will work in tandem with them, using their specialized expertise to create materials that will sharpen sales efforts. One way to help this process is to encourage salespeople to bring marketing team members along on sales calls so they can get a firsthand sense of the people the company is trying to sell to and the language those prospects use.

There's one caveat to this approach. Sometimes teams can be dominated by individuals with strong opinions. If your sales team includes a dozen people, and one dominates conversations, he or she may see a need for something the others view as unnecessary. So, the leaders of both functions must apply some perspective to the process and ensure that everyone is heard.

Sometimes, the gulf between sales and marketing can seem too wide to bridge. That's when it may be helpful to bring in an outside marketing partner that can provide an objective analysis of the relationship between the two functions and step into the breach as a mediator and facilitator.

If you can instill a sales perspective among your marketing team or choose vendor-partners who have a solid understanding of how the sales process works, you should see higher sales and greater satisfaction among people performing both functions. The best part is that everyone benefits from success, and the more successes you achieve, the more you'll see barriers between functions fall aside.

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