WHITE PAPER

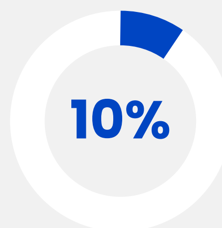
6 Steps Towards Improved Marketing and Sales Alignment and Business Growth

Here are a few steps you can take to help your marketing and sales professionals work better together for a smoother customer experience and to improve company returns.

An Endless Battle

Sales and marketing teams often seem to be locked in an endless battle over leads, tactics and responsibility. Not only does this misalignment result in stress, but it also can tremendously impact the organization's bottom line.

B2B companies that have these disagreements are losing an average of 10 percent or more of their revenue every year. Conversely, organizations that figure out how to work together see great returns for their efforts. In fact, companies can see 36 percent higher customer retention and 38 percent higher sales-win rates.



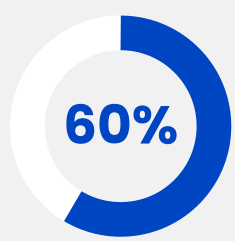
B2B companies are losing an average of 10 percent or more of their revenue every year.

Rapidly Changing

The marketing versus sales conflict largely originates from the rapidly changing business world. Social media and modern technology have changed how consumers interact with businesses.

Marketing departments can now engage prospects in conversations, and sales departments can market themselves on social media.

The lines have officially been blurred.



Some studies show, almost 60 percent of the buying process takes place before a lead contacts the business.

Step 1

Define your ideal client.

Most disagreements between sales and marketing stem from a misunderstanding of who the ideal client is and what the core message to them should be. Start with the creation of ideal client personas— a description of the main customers which you are both targeting.

Begin by looking at the existing customers and identifying common characteristics. Group them into a few categories based on criteria such as their role within their company, the size of their company and their pain points.

The more precise the description, the easier it will be to develop marketing materials and sales pitches oriented towards them. Salespeople will also more easily understand their buyer's journey and what will encourage them to move through the funnel.

Taking the time to complete this step will not only help get sales and marketing personnel on the same page, but it will also help you improve the efficiency of the organization. The teams will spend less time sending out their message to anyone who will listen and more time improving their pitch for those genuinely interested.

Step 2

Agree on what makes a sales-ready qualified lead.

For similar reasons as before, it is also important for everyone on the sales and marketing teams to have a common understanding of what prospects are worth meeting with and discussing the products personally. Some people might have an interest in your products but do not have a particular use for them now, and thus meeting with them would be a waste of time and resources.

A common understanding of what a sales-ready lead actually is will help both groups work together more efficiently to pinpoint the most profitable leads.

At Sandler, we recommend qualifying prospects based on need, budget and decision-making process.

Step 3

Know who owns the relationship and controls the conversation.

As the leads pass into the hands of the sales team, it is important to know that sales should control the conversation with the prospect. The sales team should have a clearly defined sales process, be able to ask the right questions, and provide the right information when it comes time to present.

Remember, today's buyers are coming to the conversation already well educated about their needs and the options available to satisfy them.

However, salespeople are still the professionals, and prospects are the amateurs. You need to be able to meet them where they are and work with them to design an ideal solution. The job of sales is to guide the buyer's discovery process and help them make the best decision. Your marketing process should present the sales person as an expert consultant.

> Your marketing process should present the sales person as an expert consultant.

Step 4

Agree on the follow-up steps and hold each other accountable for doing them.

- Once a lead has been passed over to the sales team, there should also be a common understanding on the steps that will be taken to convert the prospect. It is easy for marketing teams to blame sales teams for losing hot leads by not following through, while the sales team blames the marketing team for not passing along leads that are ready to buy.

- Marketing can make the sales team's job much easier. Concrete steps, such as how quickly the prospect will be contacted, how many times, and in what formats can help alleviate any worries about leads being lost through neglect. Also, the greater the insight the sales team has about the prospect and the more prepared they are for the meeting, the smoother and more successful the interaction will be. Create templates for follow up and send conversation starters as well as contact information.

- The sales team's job is to qualify or disqualify the prospect and provide feedback for marketing. If the lead is qualified, they should report back and pursue the sale. If the lead is disqualified, they should cease all efforts, and return the lead to marketing for more nurturing. Closing the loop on sales leads allows the company to improve its marketing.

Step 5

Marketing should be liked. Sales should be respected.

It’s marketing’s job to attract leads, talk up the features and benefits, and generate interest. Once you have the opportunity to have a personal conversation with a prospect, it is important to not shy away from the hard questions. The sales person’s job is to better understand the pain points and needs of the customers and get commitments. Tough questions just might be needed to uncover information that leads to a sale.

You can also use questions to help establish your expertise with the client. Marketing can educate prospects by teaching them. Sales should educate prospects by guiding them to the answers with interesting questions, so they discover your value and your solution on their own. As they answer questions, be ready with second and third level questions that they haven’t thought of yet.

> Marketing can educate prospects by teaching them. Sales should educate prospects by guiding them.

Step 6

Plan presentations wisely based around customer needs.

When you finally find yourself in front of a qualified prospect, you should have a very clear idea of exactly what the customer needs and how your products address those needs. This should not be just a superficial knowledge, but a deep understanding based upon the marketing and sales relationship.

Use these insights to create presentations and proposals based upon what really matters to the prospect. This will make the presentations more effective and it will prove to your prospect that you have been listening. The best presentations or proposals solve the customer’s needs, within their budget, and according to their priorities and decision-making process.

> Don’t waste your time or theirs by guessing what is important.

Find out the critical information to this decision and plan accordingly.

Help your business thrive.

Creating an atmosphere of cooperation and a business development process for your sales and marketing teams to work together can be an enormous asset to your organization. Evaluate your practices and how they align with the steps listed before. Help your business thrive by improving communication, coordination and efficiency and see what a difference they can make on your business development efforts.

About Sandler

Sandler is the worldwide leader in sales, management, and customer service training for individuals to Fortune 500 companies with over 250 locations. Through our local training centers, we provide advanced communication techniques needed to excel, provide accountability in implementing behavior, and help nurture the attitudes necessary to reach the highest levels of success.

SANDLER®

www.sandler.com