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Salespeople Can Learn To Love Marketers—and Vice Versa

By Ron Hubsher, The Sales Optimization Group

May you never have to walk into a meeting and hear from your salespeople, "We would have made our numbers if only we'd had better leads and support from marketing."

Sales has come to too many meetings where a cheerful marketing manager's newest "leads" are actually a list that was collected from the corporate web site and full of fake names, Yahoo! email addresses and assorted other non-decision makers. The occasional "real leads" are from companies that have already been contacted, are already in the pipeline or have already become clients.

While it may be convenient to blame the marketing team, it won't help your company make its numbers. Marketing believes it is helping sales, and sales is convinced it is being sabotaged. The missed opportunities should have been addressed before anyone sat down at these joint meetings.

How did it get to this point? Let's start at the beginning and see what should have happened.

Lexicons

Marketers have terminology. So do sales teams. Marketers think in terms of market share, brand, positioning, public relations, advertising and, occasionally, leads. Sales thinks in terms of qualified leads, opportunities, pipeline, won and lost deals, quota, forecast and territory.

If your marketing team has never had to cold-call an unqualified lead, members of the team may not understand why the sales group gets so furious when time-wasting unqualified leads are routed to them via a non quota-bound coworker.

As a C-level executive, how do you overcome the underlying problem and help these teams to become more customer-centric? Qualifying leads has to be someone's job. No matter whose job it is, there has to be a clear understanding of what constitutes a qualified lead. Some marketing people are not even aware of the difference.

Even more importantly, upside compensation for marketing people should be based on delivering qualified leads to the salespeople. By clearly defining what a qualified lead is and even adjusting compensation for marketers who handle that part of the business, you achieve better alignment and business practices between sales and marketing. The marketing team quickly learns to feel the pain of a "MickyMouse@yahoo.com" lead and shares in the joy of "DecisionMaker@QualifiedLead.com"—complete with a real phone number—who is actively engaged in a search for your products or services.

Even more critical is that sales is doing its part, learning to use the language of marketing to benefit the customer. So much of the marketing function goes on before the sales team makes its first contact with a prospect. So sales must participate in setting the marketing agenda.

This means communicating an analysis of sales results, being open about the sales process and better anticipating the sales staff's marketing needs at least a quarter ahead. Sales and marketing need to work with each other proactively to clearly define goals and the means to get there.

Your marketing and sales teams must meet quarterly, and together they should answer the following questions:

- **Are we becoming more customer-centric?**
Are your sales and marketing team both thinking like your clients? When sales and marketing communicate their knowledge of marketplace, client needs, industry trends and competitive maneuvers to each other, a clearer picture of present and future client needs emerge. Lack of insight and collaboration tends to lead to a backward, product-centric view rather than a forward looking view of the client.



- **Who are our target audiences?**

Have marketing and sales identified the same targets and ideal customer(s)? If not, why not? Is sales making sure that marketing receives all of the frontline client and prospect knowledge that it accumulates? Sales can provide a valuable reality check for marketing, just as marketing can offer powerful industry knowledge and marketing best practices, *if* sales begins to work with marketing more effectively.

- **How is marketing using funds to reach our common targets?**

Getting ahead of the marketing planning/spending process gives the sales team greater control of its destiny and the predictors of success. If someone on your sales team is not expert in how marketing is spending their budget, find yourself an expert. Sales should be doing its homework on the best way to spend discretionary marketing dollars most effectively to reach critical audiences, and it should be persuading marketing to make those allocations. If targets are the same and goals are aligned, they are better focused on the customer.

The proof

A recent client just implemented these ideas to great advantage, making four key changes. The company, which sells software as a service:

- Created a clear definition of a qualified lead
- Changed the compensation structure for the marketing team to reward the deliverer of qualified leads and to discourage the delivery of unqualified leads
- Created a sales fingerprint with key attributes of the ideal client. The CRM system rates each opportunity by the number of matching attributes and ranks the opportunities accordingly. In this way, the sales and marketing team can get a full accurate view of the pipeline and a cradle-to-grave view of a marketing program and the leads it generates.
- The sales and marketing teams meet at least once a month to discuss the pipeline, qualified lead flow, past success, past wins and past losses and to determine future marketing spend and get a forward customer-centric view of the world

The results can be exciting.

Close rates from improved from 14 percent to 78 percent, because salespeople are working on qualified opportunities rather than chasing down unqualified leads. Average sale size has increased from \$15,000 to more than \$70,000, as the sales and marketing efforts have become focused on prospects with a significant need for the company's products. The sales cycle has decreased from 88 days to 35 days.

As the CEO noted, salespeople and marketers have been seen having lunch together.

Ron Hubsher is managing director of the Sales Optimization Group, an international sales consulting organization, which assists clients in financial services, technology, professional services and manufacturing accelerate sales by putting discipline and best practices into their sales organization. Hubsher has more than 20 years of experience in sales and sales management, marketing, and business development. Previously, Hubsher was in sales management at a leading CRM provider UpShot (acquired by Siebel). A former Management Consultant with Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Hubsher has worked with, and helped provide thought leadership for, Fortune 500 companies on their sales, marketing, and business strategies. Hubsher holds a bachelor of science degree in operations research from Columbia University and an MBA from Columbia's Graduate School of Business.



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