



SYNCHRONIZED SALES & MARKETING— THE NEW DREAM TEAM

There is something mesmerizing about synchronized swimming, don't you think? Some might argue its validity as an Olympic sport, but others will tell you it's not as easy as it looks! Not only does it demand strength and aerobic endurance, but also grace and precise timing. Imagine getting an entire team of swimmers to move in exactly the same way at the same time, while staying afloat. Like most sports, this type of teamwork requires a commitment to a common goal, lots of practice, and good leadership—which coincidentally can also be applied to teamwork in the workplace. In particular, aligning sales and marketing.



Out of Sync

Getting sales and marketing to work together harmoniously produces a long list of benefits, including improved productivity and increased revenue. This is especially true in B2B companies, where aligning these functions can shorten lengthy sales cycles. And yet this type of alliance seems to be as rare as a swimmer without goggles. Why?

Sales and marketing generally have two different mind-sets. First, marketing projects are usually long-term, such as building brand awareness and nurturing leads, while sales tend to think short term as they work toward monthly or quarterly quotas. Sales reps want to solve a client's problems or fill requests right away, while marketing wants to gather data and develop strategies. Not only do they have different goals, but the two typically have different expectations of each other, which can sometimes cause friction. How often have we thought or heard that marketing activities are less quantifiable than sales, because they can be difficult to measure? There may also be differing opinions on the best way to generate and qualify leads, and a strict delineation between roles. What you end up with are members of the same team operating from two different playbooks!



SYNCHRONIZED SALES & MARKETING— THE NEW DREAM TEAM



Change the Routine

The problem is the old model of the sales funnel is no longer relevant, and therefore the traditional functions of sales and marketing are ineffective. Today's buyer journey is driven by the customer who is educating himself prior to making contact with suppliers. The path to conversion is less linear and more like a winding path, with a variety of influences along the way. In this new environment, marketing and sales must rely on input from each other to develop buyer personas, identify where customers are in the buying journey, and how to reach them with the most relevant content at each phase.

The first step in fostering teamwork is to develop a written sales and marketing strategy that focuses both departments on one goal—revenue growth. This plan should be developed with input from sales and marketing and, once it's established, needs to be articulated to everyone involved. This requires coaching from the top down. Without buy-in and direction from upper management, this commitment to work together is likely to fail.

Moving from a sales-forward funnel to a customer-led journey means that both sales and marketing must think more like their customers. Marketing cannot build awareness, interest, and consideration without the input from people on the front line. Likewise, sales reps need quality data and content that solve customers' problems to keep prospects engaged and close the deal. Keep in mind, more data is not always better. Focusing on what customers need at each stage in the buying process, along with where they are looking for it, is more effective than taking a shotgun approach.

Synchronizing Sales and Marketing involves:

- *Committing to a common goal—revenue growth. Making both groups accountable for revenue builds trust and fosters teamwork.*
- *Defining the strategy together—Clarify how leads are generated and scored. What metrics are you using?*
- *Coaching from the top down—The directive for aligning sales and marketing should come from the C-suite.*



"No matter how the CRM industry evolves, getting the sales and marketing teams to synergize is organizational goal number one. Every success grows from their collaboration and free exchange of ideas, because you can't serve the customer right when your best people are working blind."

— Marshall Lager, Managing Principal,
Third Idea Consulting

Changing the routine involves working together to define lead generation metrics. For instance, a marketing-qualified lead (MQL) is a prospect who has shown interest in the company and marketing feels is a potential buyer. A sales-accepted lead (SAL) is someone the sales group agrees to follow up on, and a sales-qualified lead (SQL) is a prospect who the sales rep feels confident is ready to make a purchase. Traditionally, marketing has defined what classifies an MQL, while sales has defined an SAL or SQL. This creates a scenario where salespeople sometimes feel that marketing passes on unqualified leads and marketing doesn't always know what sales is looking for.¹ However, if both departments work together to define what each type of lead entails, there is less chance of miscommunication. Now, everyone knows which leads need to be nurtured and which leads need to be sent to sales for immediate follow up.



SYNCHRONIZED SALES & MARKETING—THE NEW DREAM TEAM



In addition to defining lead generation and scoring, it's important to outline what actions will be taken by both groups. Creating a flow chart with input from sales and marketing is a good place to start. For instance, once you've identified prospects, how will you nurture them? When will they be passed on to sales, and how long does sales have to follow up? If a sales rep passes the lead back to marketing, how long does marketing have to respond? What is the next step in the nurturing process?

Determining these classifications and actions is particularly important prior to implementing marketing automation (MA) platforms. Research shows that many companies are not fully utilizing their MA investment, because they are not sure what to automate! Automation

will be much easier and more effective if strategies are already in place. Though marketing automation tends to fall under the domain of the marketing department, sales folks should know how the system works—particularly how it can help nurture leads.



When sales and marketing work together, the quality of leads improves. At one Tennessee-based software company, the director of marketing found that leads that come from online marketing materials close about 25% of the time, while leads that come from sales, without the help of marketing, close at a rate of 1.5%.

Source: "Four Best Practices to Ensure Sales/Marketing Alignment," by Molly Soat

Add Some Content

The purpose of content is to nudge potential customers further along on the buyers' path and influence around each bend. With buyers educating themselves, content starts earlier to build awareness and provide information. This is where the input of sales is important, because they understand what questions customers have and what problems they want solved. When the sales department provides input, marketing can generate more relevant content at every stage of the buying process. Likewise, when there is a library of valuable content, sales reps have resources to start conversations and shorten the sales cycle (e.g., case studies, white papers, testimonials). These resources are only beneficial, however, if salespeople are aware of what's available and make use of them.

Practice Collaboration

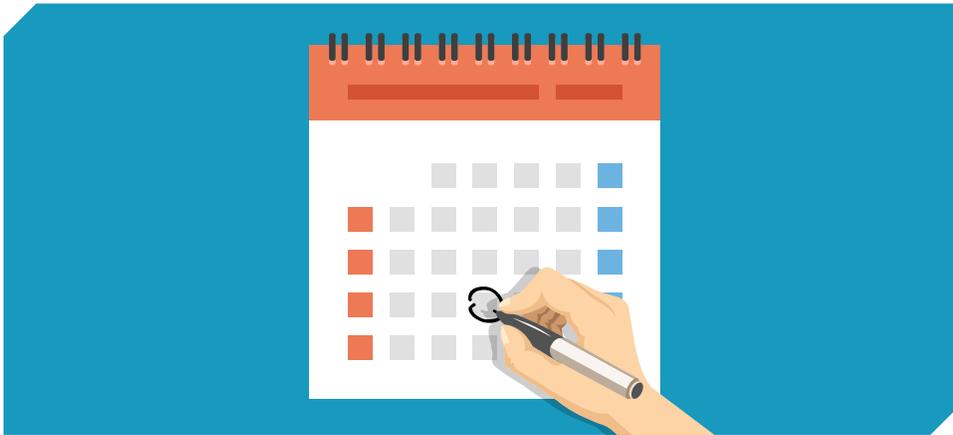
Simply declaring that sales and marketing should align is not enough, because it may not come naturally, especially in organizations where the two groups have been highly segregated. Once you have developed a routine, it's time to practice collaborating. How you bring these groups together may differ for every company, depending on your current culture, but there are a few techniques that have proven effective, including:

- **Hold regular meetings**—Not only do face-to-face meetings help employees get to know one another better, they are extremely useful for sharing ideas and resources, and addressing concerns/issues as they arise. This is the ideal time for sales to provide an update on quotas and determine how marketing can assist with these goals. Meanwhile, marketing can share upcoming campaigns and content and elicit ideas.

- **Schedule team-building events**—These need not be elaborate events, such as obstacle courses or wilderness trekking, but time spent outside the office can foster teamwork. Whether it's the occasional happy hour or sports outing, try to bring the groups together socially. Having fun helps people feel more comfortable with one another and makes it easier to share thoughts and ideas.
- **Get sales involved with content**—Instead of making content generation the sole responsibility of marketing, get sales on board. Set up a way for sales to let marketing know what customers are saying about the product/company, such as a weekly email update or a shared Google document. You can also schedule quick brainstorming sessions to throw out content ideas.



SYNCHRONIZED SALES & MARKETING—THE NEW DREAM TEAM



- **Share campaigns**—Marketing should make sales aware of new campaigns or content with a shared calendar or by sending the actual promotion to the sales group. This not only keeps sales reps informed of what their contacts are receiving, but gives them something new to discuss with prospects. Make sure sales can easily access content resources.
- **Promote sales know-how**—Social media is not the exclusive domain of marketing folks. Sales reps should post regularly on social platforms, either by sharing company content or having marketing provide customized messages/blog posts.

These are some ideas to get you started, but you can probably come up with a host of ways to bring sales and marketing together within your organization. Companies across a wide variety of industries, from manufacturing to healthcare, are reaping the rewards of sales and marketing alignment, including higher-quality leads, increased productivity, and, of course, revenue growth. With a little coaching, a commitment to a common goal, and some practice, these two key areas can perform a synchronized routine that benefits everyone involved—it's a beautiful thing to watch.

"What is Marketing and Sales Alignment?" Marketo, 2016 (<https://www.marketo.com/marketing-and-sales-alignment/>)

Other Sources

"Our Best Practices to Ensure Sales/Marketing Alignment," by Molly Soat, Next Practices, 2015.

"10 Tried-and-True Tips for Sales and Marketing Alignment," by Carolina Samsing, 2016.

Learn more about B2B marketing

Need a topic to jumpstart a conversation between sales and marketing? Download one of our free white papers!



Building Relationships with Content Marketing

www.spryideas.com/building-relationships

B2B Marketing Insights 2016

www.spryideas.com/marketinginsights



www.spryideas.com