

## Perfect Sales & Marketing Alignment? Dream on!

Harmonious alignment of the Sales and Marketing team is the Nirvana most organisations are trying to achieve. It's the supreme strategic, operational (*and some say emotional*) state when the two teams work in perfect partnership; where all elements are synchronised; teams co-existence is as sweet as buttered candy; operations so mellifluous communications must be telepathic.....

Stop 'drinking the Kool-aid'. It's like saying "He always puts the dishes in the dishwasher before getting me another glass of Veuve?" or 'She greets me with a beer, dinner, the TV remote and the kids are happily doing their homework.'

If you want the 'perfect marriage' then grab a Cartland novel, a box of Ferrero Rocher and treat yourself to a Sherry!

For the rest, grab a Peroni and tuck into a dose of reality.

### May I burst your bubble?

The bursting of the bubble (*aka the financial crisis/recession*) caused a fairly radical change in most Board's expectations of their organisation. Pre-recession it was all about Marketing: more ad's, more events, more hospitality, more activity and more budget, measurement was important but it was more about the number of people who had seen the ad's/attended an event/opened an email. Post-recession it's all about Sales: we need the revenue NOW, we need more of it, our customers must be loyal (*previously referred to as 'locked-in'*) because then they'll only choose our stuff.

This change of focus created a realisation in many Board members: What exactly does Marketing do? What is a lead? They know Marketing protects the brand and the reputation of their company, which to some is invaluable, but what do they actually do to help Sales secure customers and revenue because without sales there won't be a brand to protect?

Such a radical change of thinking has caused Marketing to quickly adapt and in most cases has caused them to become pseudo Sales Managers (*Marketers grab another Peroni, Sales stop laughing*). Marketing now has to measure 'leads', pipeline, conversion rates, how much revenue they've 'generated' and analyse win/loss data. But, typically they aren't measured on revenue attainment and they have no control over how or which deals Sales close. Sales leaders typically don't believe that Marketing creates actual sales leads, if they do they aren't the right ones and it takes too much of their expensive effort to close them, making them typically unwanted or ignored.

Add to this, that for many, there is no clear way to measure pipeline contribution. Therefore the contribution Marketing makes to the sales cycle is difficult to understand in the context of sales and revenue. This and the increased focus on revenue make their new role as a 'Sales Manager' a difficult and frankly tenuous one.

## **No more name calling, it's time to play nicely**

Co-dependent relationships exist in many areas, not just work and marriage. Because of the co-dependence there can often be a discord because neither individual has control over the others actions. Take football players. You could have two of the best players in the world but if they aren't working well together they are often disruptive to the success of the whole team, creating blame, mistrust and arguments.

For example, the Manager of Manware United has two such fantastic centre back players, Nenad Vidic and Roland Ferdinand (*literary licence taken*). Individually they are fantastic but since playing on the same team for almost a year their issues have damaged their team's once great track record. Because of this lack of performance attendance is down, the team is suffering bad press and rumour has it a key sponsor may not be renewing their contract. Their Manager decides he now needs to take quite radical steps to resolve their issues and decides to use the principles of RELATE to try and get them working together:

- Use a common language
- Agree the basic working principles
- Agree what you will be held accountable for
- Be open with one another, take responsibility to improve the things you aren't so good at

## **A not so common language**

Ferdinand was brought up and trained as a British football player, Vidic is from Serbia, his English isn't great and he was taught how to play football in Serbia. The first step, and most fundamental, is to ensure they are speaking the same language. Ok, so most Sales and Marketing teams do speak the same language, but actually the meaning of certain key words is different depending on the team. Most critical to their success is the meaning of two little words - Lead and Opportunity.

These two, apparently innocuous, little words are the most commonly used within most businesses and are critical to the success of teams and businesses. Yet their definition is often not clear, shared or understood consistently. I'm not going to purport that I can supply you with the answer, their definition differs in every organisation. Sales and Marketing must take the time to explicitly define and agree what is a lead and an opportunity, relevant to their own sales cycles and their business. For example are there specifics about the size of company/revenue/no. of employees, the prospect's role/decision making level, their interest in a single product or a combination, the potential value of the deal, a compelling event etc..

Whilst simple is usually better when it comes to the definitions, a degree of flexibility in the criteria may be required. For example an opportunity may mean different things depending on the needs of Account Managers or teams. A new Account Manager will want leads which he can close within the next 3 – 6 months, even if it's only single product. He has to prove himself quickly otherwise he's probably out of a job. Whereas an established Account Manager who has already hit target will be quite happy to wine and dine their clients for the next 6 – 12 months until they are ready to buy multiple products for a multi digit deal.

Whatever the criteria and definition, once agreement is reached educate your people in the definitions, their application and what it means to them and their role. Support them and the business by ensuring your technology, systems and processes can support and measure against the definitions.

This will not fix all your problems and honestly it's one of the most difficult things to get right. But speaking the same language is the foundation of any successful relationship so; it's worth taking the time to do it well.

### **It's your fault!**

Now Vidic and Ferdinand are speaking the same language they are communicating most effectively. At the last match Ferdinand and Vidic had a disagreement on the pitch about what each should have done to prevent a goal. Not helpful. What is helpful is using the same language to agree up front, not mid-match, the basic working principles for a good relationship.

As part of agreeing the lead and opportunity definitions within Sales and Marketing for your organisation, I'm sure you will have also agreed their criteria, the desired probability ratings and who has responsibility for what at each stage of the sales cycle. If not, stop drinking the Peroni as you aren't paying attention.

To be successful in creating interest and closing revenue Sales and Marketing teams must work together, hand-in-hand. Yes it's obvious, but how often does it actually happen? Marketing doesn't start here/stop there within the sales cycle, then chuck stuff at Sales to get on and just close deals. Both teams need to clearly agree the basic working principles across the sales cycle, from the moment a potential prospect thinks about your company, through the deal, use of technology and on-going relationship.

Rather than taking you through the whole process I'll give you a short example.

Sales have a number of opportunities which have a very long sales cycle so Marketing nurtures them using targeted messages and activities to speed demand and maintain interest. They take a targeted approach i.e. business events on appropriate topics where Sales can talk to the prospect, sending the latest analyst reports or case studies for credibility etc. whilst regularly informing Sales of what's happening so when the prospect is ready to start buying, Sales can invest their time to close the deal.

If you are clear about your basic working principles, accountability of you and your business partners is next. Just to be clear, that doesn't mean finger pointing and name calling. It's simply about being open, honest and trusting each other. Before you think you are in fact reading a Cartland novel, I'll stop with the sappy stuff.

### **Creative a-counting or $1 + 5 = 30\%$ probability**

In football measurement is easy and explicit, there are standard ways in which goals, passes, ball ownership etc. are measured, often with human intervention in deciding if the measurement is accurate. However in business it doesn't seem to be so easy, in part because many companies measure everything with little correlation between metrics.

Measurement is the key to understanding performance, or lack of, what's caused it and what actions need to be taken. Accountability of these measures is vital to driving profitable opportunities and managing a predictable pipeline. If you've successfully achieved all of the steps above then implementing measures will be easy.

Below are two examples to give you some guidance:

	<b>Example</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
<b>Good Measurement</b>	The number of marketing created 'sales accepted opportunities' which meet the agreed criteria, per quarter. Percentage progression of opportunities to forecast Proportion of accounts where business objectives have been understood and engagement has commenced	Marketing know they've generated the right level of demand with the right people and Sales want to invest their time to progress the opportunity as it's much more likely to close
<b>Poor Measurement</b>	Each week every prospect must be emailed three times by Marketing and called five times by Sales	Marketing and Sales will spend a lot of time and effort really annoying their prospects and making them want to buy from someone else. Not the aim here.

### **Artistic license**

Vidic and Ferdinand are now the star players for Manware United. They have evolved using proven methodologies which has made their relationship a success and meant they are recognised as the best defence team in the league. But the rigorous application of methodologies simply freed their existing flair and talent.

The mystique behind Marketing and Sales is that they are a combination of art and science. The best Marketers and Sales Managers can tell you how they were taught, what they know from experience works and the methodologies they use. But what really makes them great is how creative they are and how intuitively they are able to do their job, really well. Hopefully we'll see more harmonious Sales and Marketing teams because they:

- Speak the same language: Explicitly defined leads and opportunities and their criteria, which is known across the business and supported by the technology
- Basic working principles: For each team, across the sales cycle and understood by each team member and everyone is accountable to deliver their part to generate revenue
- Measurement: Metrics to manage your success, enable accountability and improvement.

Will we one day see all Sales and Marketing teams working together in perfect harmony? I do hope not, where would the fun be in that?

*Written by Aleksandra Alfonso*