Guide:

8 Challenges of Sales and Marketing Alignment

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Introduction

Sales and marketing teams have an interesting relationship. In today's selling environment, where customers expect a personalized interaction every time, sales simply cannot exist without marketing. According to Forrester research, 78% of executive buyers claim that salespeople do not have relevant examples or case studies to share with them. Clearly, cold calls and impersonal emails aren't cutting it anymore, and sales must rely on the content produced by marketing to make sales conversations more valuable for prospects. And it goes without saying that marketing wouldn't have much of a job to do without sales; marketing collateral would be lost and lonely without anyone to share it with.

While these symbiotic teams are very closely entwined, it doesn't mean that their relationship is flawless. In fact, because of their closeness, these two can have some difficulty seeing eye to eye. Especially when it comes to content creation and dispersion, there are a number of challenges that arise when trying to align sales and marketing.

But there are ways to combat these challenges that will lead to even better sales and marketing alignment, allowing these two teams to function as one synergistic entity. Below are eight of the most common pain points that marketing and sales teams often report as a result of misaligned sales and marketing processes and priorities, and surefire ways to bring the two teams back together.

Marketing Challenges

Many of marketing's challenges have to do with helping sales function flawlessly. But the main function of marketing is not just to make the sales team's job easier; marketing has its own responsibilities and goals that are independent of sales support. This means marketing is often spread too thin, and simply doesn't have enough time to do everything sufficiently. Four major pain points often reported by marketing are below.

Challenge #1: I have no way of knowing what outdated and off-brand collateral is being shared and circulated by sales reps.

Even if your company has a functional CMS with high adoption and usage rates, it's often impossible for marketing to see what content sales reps are actually using. The use of older collateral can be detrimental to a company's credibility and competence, especially during rebranding and quarterly or annual updates when old collateral becomes inaccurate. In compliance-regulated companies, this risk is even greater. But there is no way to know who is sharing what, especially when time-sensitive collateral is constantly being updated with new data. Keeping track of all versions and manually updating collateral can be difficult and time-consuming. Further, when sales updates collateral, keeping it on-brand and on-message is not a true priority. This means that content may be in circulation that does not meet marketing's branding standards. Marketing teams need a way to not only control the quality of content that is being shared, but a way to more efficiently update time- and data-sensitive content.

Challenge #2: There is no visibility into what marketing content is resonating with prospects and what isn't.

Similar to challenge #1, the marketing team has no way of knowing what collateral shared with prospects is actually successful, or what doesn't work at all. Having visibility into what content was shared throughout the sales process would help marketers decide what kinds of content to continue creating. Further, understanding what prospects didn't identify with or didn't respond positively to would help marketers choose what collateral to create less of. Having a way to track the usage and conversion rates of successful content would save marketing from having to guess and would keep sales from trying to create their own content.

Challenge #3: I am constantly putting out fires when sales reps need customized collateral or presentations, and spend the majority of my time creating one-offs of collateral that will only be used once.

"Random acts of sales support," as described by Forrester, are unproductive for both sales and marketing and can cause tension between the two teams. When marketing teams spend the majority of their time creating one-off presentations and collateral for sales, it makes marketing processes inefficient and sales ineffective. This calls for a change in process, but also a look into the technology currently in place. The sales team should have a formal process in place for sales to make marketing requests, and companies should invest in a more automated technology for updating presentations than manual, one-off edits.

Challenge #4: It's an ongoing battle to find out what content sales reps are actually sharing, and what they find to be most successful in conversations with prospective customers.

Once a piece of collateral is uploaded to a content repository or CMS, oftentimes it may as well have been sent to a black hole. SiriusDecisions research indicates that **two-thirds of marketing collateral goes unused**, but most companies have no insights into why. Marketers have no idea who is downloading and sharing what, whether collateral is resonating with prospects, or if sales reps can even find the right content. In a perfect world, marketing teams would be able to see which reps are using content in certain situations with specific customers, allowing them to efficiently create more content. This would also give insight into what the most successful reps are doing so the behavior could be emulated, making marketing collateral more valuable to reps. But unless your company's sales reps are reporting what collateral they use in every email and sales call, these insights are likely not the reality.

Sales Challenges

Most of a sales team's pain points stem from process and production inefficiency. When marketing is unable to quickly produce the right content—both in quality and quantity—or when sales is forced to create their own for each customer conversation, tension arises between the two teams. Sales teams feel inadequate and ineffective, and marketing is left scrambling to help sales as fast as possible. The major challenges shared by sales teams are below.

Challenge #1: The marketing content available to me is out of date and irrelevant, so I update it myself or use what I already have.

Without accurate, up-to-date collateral, sales reps are left with stale content to share with prospects, rendering them ineffective. Oftentimes, sales reps will resort to using old collateral that has worked for them in the past, hoping that it will still ring true to their new prospects. Taking a shot in the dark by sending out-of-date content can be detrimental not only to the sales rep, but to the entire company's credibility. Sales reps may also update the collateral themselves, which is problematic because the collateral they piece together may be off-brand and off-message, which can also hurt the company's credibility. Additionally, if reps must dedicate time to updating collateral, they have less time to spend with prospects and clients. A SiriusDecisions study shows that **reps spend only 18% of their time in front of prospects and clients**. If reps can spend more time with prospects and clients, they have a better chance closing more deals.

Challenge #2: Marketing creates plenty of content, but it's never what I need. So at the end of the day, I'm left to create my own.

Another problem sales describes is not a lack of content, but a surplus of irrelevant content. This includes content that isn't specific to the industry or stage in the sales cycle that a rep may be selling in. In today's selling environment, content this specific isn't just a nice touch, it's a necessity. Buyers are expecting a highly personalized sales conversation, but **70% claim salespeople are not prepared for the questions they ask, and 77% salespeople don't understand their issues and where they can help**. But creating collateral and researching is taking up too much time for reps, as they spend on average **30 hours each month searching for and creating their own sales collateral** (RingDNA). This is a very inefficient distribution of time for both sales and marketing, and each team would benefit from having a better understanding of what sales content resonates with prospects in specific situations so marketing can create exactly what is necessary.

Challenge #3: I have a number of meetings a week and need customized collateral for all of them. I need marketing to efficiently create presentations with updated data right before each one.

According to Forrester research, 3 in 5 executive buyers are unsatisfied with their interaction with sellers. Therefore, as stated in sales challenge #2, prospects require a more customized selling situation because the key to keeping the interest of executive buyers is to make your collateral relevant to their situation. This means that a universal sales deck can't be a one-size-fits-all presentation anymore and must vary based on industry, prospect's title, size of company, and more. This calls for a personalized presentation each time, which for companies with large sales teams is close to impossible. It's important for organizations to consider the process involved with creating these presentations and whether the main responsibility belongs to sales or marketing. Typically it will be a combination of both, requiring sales to notify marketing early in the process before a meeting and marketing having a more automated process for creating and personalizing these presentations.

Challenge #4: I send content to my prospects that I think they would like and find useful, but I have no idea how successful the content is in getting their attention, teaching them about our product, or if they even viewed it at all.

Sales reps typically measure the success of content shared with prospects by whether they open or respond to the email. But this doesn't give any insight into whether the prospect opened or read the content, let alone how much time they spent reading and consuming it. This helps neither sales nor marketing, because sales reps don't know what's resonating with prospects and marketers don't know what's working for sales. This leaves both sides simply guessing, grasping for any way to know what is successful and what isn't. Having these insights would streamline the sales process of sending the right content to the right prospects, and better prepare sales reps for follow-up calls by giving them relevant talking points.

Aligning Sales and Marketing

Now, take a look at these 8 challenges not from a sales or marketing perspective, but from an outsider's point of view. You may notice that each of the marketing challenges lines up exactly with one from the sales challenges:

Marketing POV	Solution Checklist	Sales POV
"I have no way of knowing what outdated and off-brand collateral is being shared and circulated by sales reps."	More automated data updates for collateral Quality control of versions shared/updated	"The marketing content available to me is out of date and irrelevant, so I update it myself."
"There is no visibility into what marketing content is resonating with prospects and what isn't."	Analytics that show content conversion rates Customizable content for specific sales conversations	"Marketing creates plenty of content, but it's never what I need. So at the end of the day, I'm left to create my own."
"I am constantly putting out fires when sales reps need customized presentations, and spend my time creating one-offs of collateral that will only be used once."	Customizable content for specific sales conversations Streamlined process for updating/customizing presentations	"I have a number of meetings a week and need customized collateral for all of them. Marketing is too slow at creating these for me."
"It's an ongoing battle to find out what content sales reps are actually sharing, and what they find to be most successful."	Analytics that show content conversion rates Customizable content for specific sales conversations	"I send content to my prospects that I think they would like and find useful, but I have no idea how successful the content is."

While both teams are feeling the pains of sales and marketing alignment, it is imperative to reframe the challenges and issues to see the root of the problem. When sales and marketing teams can look past what the other side may seem to be lacking in efficiency, process or effectiveness, the core issue is evident and companies can begin to problem solve. The main solutions to all of these problems are:

- *Analytics that show content conversion rates:* having rich analytics that allow you to see how content is being used, for how long it is being consumed, and who it is being viewed by enables sales reps to have a more valuable conversation with prospects. It also saves marketing time when considering what content to make more of and what to stop producing.
- *Customizable content for specific sales conversations:* customizable content will allow sales teams to personalize their sales conversations and emails, making them more versatile and effective. Marketing can focus on creating more quality content rather than tweaking old content for every sales meeting.
- *More automated data updates for collateral:* when marketing doesn't have to worry about updating data, branding, logos and other features within collateral, sales doesn't have to wait around for an updated version and has quick access to the newest version. Marketing knows that the most updated versions are being used with correct data, giving them peace of mind and more time for other marketing activities.
- *Quality control of versions shared/updated:* When the branding and messaging of content can be controlled by marketing, the company's credibility is not threatened. Marketing always knows that the content in circulation is the right version and that data, branding and information included is accurate and up-to-date.
- *Streamlined process for updating/customizing presentations:* When a formal process is in place to create and update sales collateral, there are no surprises or fires for marketing to put out. Sales reps always have collateral on time, and aren't forced to create their own content.

Conclusion

All organizations experience some level of sales and marketing misalignment. It can be daunting to find the reason for tension, but most of the time it can be addressed by reconsidering the cause of pain points and getting to the root of the problem. These eight challenges usually aren't explicitly marketing's fault or sales' fault, but they are often categorized and handled as such within the organization.

By reframing the challenges above as issues that affect both sides, you will find that there is a collective solution for each. These five solutions will positively affect both sales and marketing, better aligning the two teams and eliminating the silo effect they experienced. Consider these solutions as you work to better align your sales and marketing organizations to work as a single, selling machine.

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