



Moments of Trust

Why customer value is the key to sales and marketing alignment

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Trust is the
glue that holds
business together.
With no trust,
there is no value.



Trust binds a company through mutual respect and understanding of how individuals each contribute to success. Trust is also what makes customers engage and re-engage with your brand. Without trust you might make a tactical sale, but you are unlikely to build a long-lasting relationship.

But trust is fragile. In moments of stress, bad behaviours - such as the hard sell or scattergun marketing - can shatter the very best customer relationships in an instant. And we have seen plenty of stress in recent months - as well as plenty of businesses that have lost sales because of clumsy campaigns and careless communications.

The overwhelming majority of marketers see “authentic” thought-leadership as the key to building trust with customers¹. It’s about having an ongoing conversation that provides information and inspiration without insistence. But, to foster this trust, marketing and sales need to work together.

¹LinkedIn and Edelman: [2020 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Study](#)

Introduction

We're writing this halfway through 2020, and we are entering a period where businesses are looking to regenerate and return to growth. And as sales and marketing, you are the chief drivers of business recovery, but you have to double-down on trust, rebuild and strengthen bonds and focus all of your efforts on delivering customer value. But there are a couple of twists in the established narrative:

- 1 B2B customers are less interested in being sold to than ever (and they weren't that keen before)
- 2 Sales and marketing need to rethink how trust is formed in their own relationship before they can deal with point 1

We have written this guide to provide insight and practical steps to help salespeople and marketers engender better customer trust. After all, sales and marketing have joint responsibility when it comes to gaining customer trust - you are part of the same journey, even if your outlook and skill sets are different.

²In March 2020, LinkedIn commissioned Forrester to survey marketing and sales decision-makers from technology, financial services, and professional services firms in the UK, Ireland, France, and Germany.

What is in this guide?

While building a stronger relationship between sales and marketing is undoubtedly important, new research we have conducted with Forrester² suggests that the real issue is the gap between perception and reality in the relationship. This means that the traditional view of enforcing alignment isn't the answer; we need to get to the root cause of the problems.

In this guide we will examine the three-way relationship between sales, marketing and the customer. With the help of our research, we will examine how each interaction creates a moment of trust and builds long-term value. We will also look at the fundamental gaps in strategy, process, content and culture that sales and marketing teams need to close to increase their chances of delivering valuable moments of trust. We hope you find our findings useful in your own customer value journey.

Chapter 1

B2B and the rise of the quantum customer



“B2B” isn’t
the best term
to describe the
sales process.

All B2B relationships are, in reality, made between people. On one side you have sales and marketing; on the other you have the customer. And, even when it is the brand speaking, in advertising and marketing campaigns, the most successful cut through is often generated with a human voice and characteristics: empathy, creativity and inspiration.

B2B is no longer totally predictable (and in truth it never really was). There is no single buyer, no single decision-maker and there is no guarantee they sit at the top table or represent a predefined job role. In fact, we recently found that 6.8 individuals are involved in the average B2B sale, and the average sales cycle length is 6 months.³

It is worth remembering that B2B customers are also not leads. They are individuals, with individual wants and needs. Truth be told, salespeople and marketers don’t like leads either - mainly because neither can agree what a good one looks like.

So what is the new B2B customer and how do you capture their attention?

³ *LinkedIn, Sales Technology Summit, 2019*



B2B buyers exist and they don't exist - it's complicated.

Much like Schrodinger's cat, salespeople and marketers know the customers are there, but they don't know whether the sale is viable until they lift the lid on the relationship.

Perhaps it's easier if we look at it from the customer's point of view. We're learning more and more that customers don't like being sold to and they don't like to share data. They also have more information available than ever before; often more than they are able to digest. This means they will stay deliberately hidden until they are ready to engage. If you try to force that moment of value,

you destroy trust and lose the sale. This represents a rebalance of power in the B2B customer-brand relationship and creates a major headache for sales and marketing professionals. Do you cast your net wider to ensure you have a broader pipeline and more moments of value? Do you create more compelling value propositions? Or do you go back to basics?



We believe that sales and marketing departments need to meet the customer on their own ground and on their own terms. This means recapturing the ancient art of conversation. As we all know, salespeople are most engaged with marketing activities when they get to meet real people and have real discussions. Customers are also more likely to engage if the campaigns aimed at them are rooted in a human tone and come with personalised benefits.

With this in mind, here are our three thoughts for engaging the modern B2B customer:

1 Think as the customer.

The way people buy has changed. [Anonymous buyers](#) and fragmented decision-making makes the old ways of converting sales even harder and less effective. You have to fully understand individual customer needs and behaviours. They are not leads, they are people!

2 Create authentic thought-leadership delivered through conversation and engagement.

Tactical campaigns that go for the close or market too desperately are doomed to failure. You don't have all the answers, so invite your customers and prospects to engage in helping you find them.

3 Start by having the right conversations within your own organisation.

After all, if sales and marketing aren't aligned around the concept of customer value, then you will end up working against each other.

And that brings us on to...

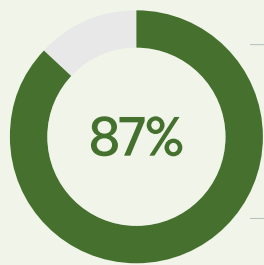
Chapter 2

Sales and marketing: the odd couple



People have been trying to align sales and marketing for decades, with varying degrees of success. We believe that sales and marketing each bring different elements of value. Each has a clear voice and a clear role across the customer journey. The trick is to ensure the customer gets the best of both, a well integrated, valuable experience.

So what's wrong with the relationship between sales and marketing? Despite lots of recent commentary to the contrary, it really isn't the fundamental relationship that is the issue. There is no need to make sales and marketing see eye-to-eye on everything. And, as our latest research shows, there is already a huge amount of agreement on all of the most important issues.



of sales and marketing leaders say collaboration between sales and marketing enables critical business growth

85%

say sales and marketing alignment is the largest opportunity for improving business performance today

If anything, the real problem lies in a false sense of optimism about how well alignment translates from overall aims to the day-to-day relationship.

The strategic intent is there, but alignment breaks down in tactical delivery.

To better understand the issues, we commissioned Forrester Consulting to look more closely into sales and marketing alignment, getting insight from professionals in both disciplines. Together, we uncovered four pillars that create stronger and more sustainable alignment: Strategy, Process, Content and Messaging, and Culture.

Happily, we found there are lots of areas of existing alignment across all of these pillars, but there are also some specific issues that are preventing sales and marketing from delivering maximum customer value:

The perception

There is good alignment on **strategy...**

There is good alignment on **process...**

There is good alignment on **content and messaging...**

There is good alignment on **culture...**

The reality

sales and marketing are **measured in different ways by different people**

the **systems they use are different**

they each create content **without the other's input**

the **day-to-day relationship is too passive**

90%

of sales and marketing professionals agree that when initiatives and messages are aligned, the customer experience is positively impacted

BUT

9 in 10

sales and marketing professionals say they are misaligned across strategy, process, content and culture.

98% and 97%

of respondents (sellers and marketers respectively) think that bad alignment negatively impacts the business and the customer.

#1 | Strategy is best realised through measurement

The most powerful and the most successful strategies are held in common by sales and marketing. They should be developed in tandem and rooted in the concept of customer value.

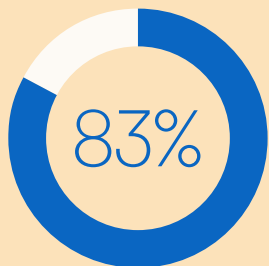
An aligned strategy starts with shared goals, evolves into jointly agreed programmes and campaigns targeted at the same audiences or accounts, and finishes with common, or connected measures and metrics. If you don't measure the same things then even the best strategies will fall apart very quickly.

86%

of marketing professionals spend their efforts on accounts that sales is targeting

84%

of marketing and sales professionals have a common strategy and plan for delivering customer value



of sales professionals say that they are on board with an ABM (account-based marketing) approach

96%

of sales and marketing professionals admit there are challenges with strategy alignment, including

- Sales and marketing don't report to the same executive
- Marketing and sales don't measure success on the same KPIs
- Marketing and sales don't share goals and objectives



#2 | Processes are only as good as the systems that drive them

Alignment issues arise in part because current sales and marketing processes are inward facing, focused on the team rather than the customer journey.

While marketing and sales are different functions, they should be leveraging different processes to achieve common goals - accelerating the buying process, creating value and helping customers achieve success.

But, while marketing is creating demand and managing leads, and sales is managing pipeline and closing

deals, both must remember that they're targeting the same customers.

The handoff between sales and marketing must be seamless and invisible to the customer, which is very hard to do if the systems and platforms you are using are different. Share the same data and act on the same criteria and same platforms if possible.

86% of marketing and sales professionals use the same data pool for customer targeting and insights

85% of sales say that pipeline management is managed as an end-to-end process

85%

Sales is involved in the planning of day-to-day marketing initiatives and events

97%

of sales and marketing professionals report issues with process alignment, including

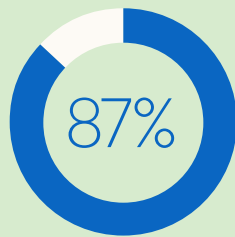
- Sales and marketing plan two different processes for engaging with customers
- Marketing and sales do not cooperate on pipeline growth
- Sales and marketing tools and systems are not well integrated



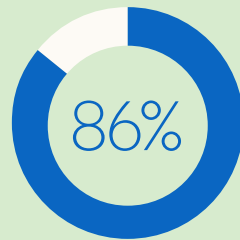
#3 | Messaging and content should support conversations

The Forrester research we commissioned indicates that content and messaging was an area of significant alignment angst. B2B marketers are often hamstrung by creating messaging and content that starts with the product or service and aims to translate features into customer value.

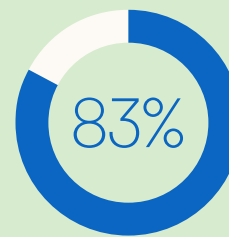
Salespeople, on the other hand, typically start with the customer, laser-focus on their needs and design an offering that meets those needs. Marketing should include sales as they determine core themes, campaigns and content strategies. They can then engage sales frequently throughout their implementation process to gather feedback, brainstorm ideas and maintain alignment. Sales must be willing to engage in this process, adopt a longer term viewpoint and champion the view of the customer.



of marketing content establishes brand awareness, product benefits and value propositions



of marketing content effectively supports the conversations that sales has with customers and prospects

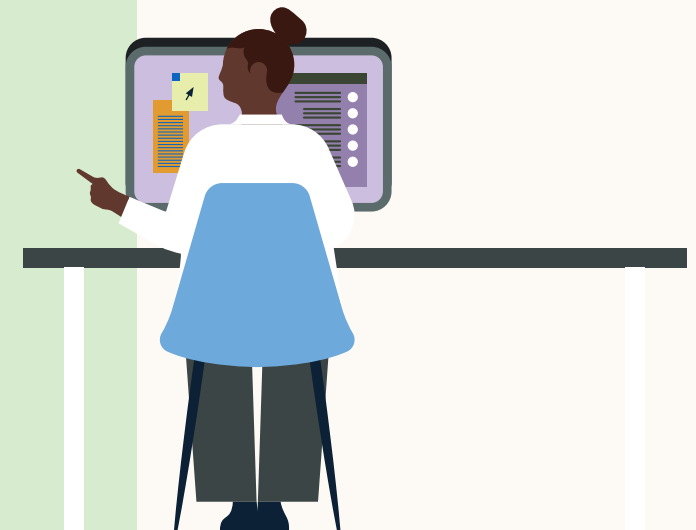


of marketing content is effective at inspiring customers to engage with sellers

97%

of sales and marketing professionals face challenges with alignment on content and messaging, including

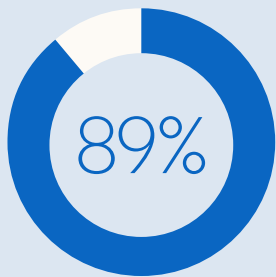
- Marketing creates content without sales' input
- Marketing content is too product-led and does not focus on the problem the customer is trying to solve
- Marketing content does not help the buyer through the buying journey



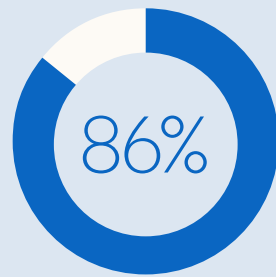
#4 | Culture is the foundation of trust and value

Cultural divides between sales and marketing are generally not a matter of ideology. They're down to a lack of empathy: neither group really understands the trials, tribulations and triumphs of the other.

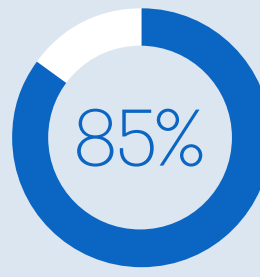
While there is no quick fix, an easy and effective way to make progress is to attend each other's meetings; participate in joint initiatives; recruit willing champions and executive sponsors from sales to drive greater alignment and jointly celebrate each other's successes. Focus on understanding each other's roles and how the actions and tasks of a 'day-in-the-life' contribute to a shared sense of customer value.



of marketers and sellers trust one another



of marketing and sales professionals continuously collaborate to deliver customer value and a collaborative culture at our organisation



of marketing and sales professionals share a culture that is customer obsessed

When it comes to cultural alignment,

93%

of sales and marketing professionals identify challenges, including

- Marketing and sales don't see themselves as an active partner to participate in each other's planning process
- There is antagonism between the marketing and sales teams
- Marketing and sales don't communicate concisely with each other



Chapter 3

The secret to better alignment:
Start thinking value.
Stop thinking leads.



The ultimate measure of sales and marketing success is the sales number and the value to business in cold, hard terms. However, marketing often struggles to justify its contribution and sales can be under pressure to chase short-term numbers.

Our research shows that real alignment goes beyond collaboration. It is about a positive impact on customer value. The secret to generating more sales is not to enforce alignment with marketing. The two functions need a clear, shared view of the customer and their needs at any given time. That way marketing proves its value and sales makes its number. Together.

We believe there are three ways that sales and marketing can maximise revenue opportunities through better alignment:

1 Don't enforce alignment.

People have been trying to build strategies for aligning sales and marketing for years - usually at a strategic level, which is not where the problems lie. The tactical day-to-day delivery of campaigns is where most organisations fall down, so build new processes, KPIs and communication strategies that add value to every day you work, not just every planning cycle.

2 Agree a common direction, language and basis for success.

Sales and marketing have different strengths and skills. Trying to forcibly align them into one combined role defeats the objective. Instead you need to build moments of trust and understanding between these teams, incentivising behaviours that support both short term revenue goals and longer term thinking about how to set customers up for success.

3 Create a single focus.

The B2B customer is difficult to target, so it is important that sales and marketing use the same tools, data sets and platforms to nurture customer relationships. The first step on this journey are common planning, measurement and reporting platforms. However this may require both teams to lobby IT, or other decision makers, for a solution that facilitates joined-up customer-mapping and goal-setting. While the nirvana of aligning the many technologies implemented across the business may not be realistic, at a minimum they should be tightly integrated.

Conclusion

Alignment = trust = value

As sales and marketing professionals, you face numerous challenges and opportunities to build trust and value. Both between yourselves and with your customers. Effective engagement and better revenue generation all depends on how you build and nurture relationships.

From our research, it is clear that sales and marketing alignment, across the four pillars of strategy, process, messaging and culture, is the right starting point. But you have to go beyond simple collaboration.

You should jointly celebrate each other's successes. Focus on understanding each other's roles and how your day-to-day tasks complement each other. You must build a clear picture of the customer, establish measurable goals and then trust one another to deliver.

And then there is the customer.

No matter how well aligned you are, B2B customers don't care about the internal workings of the businesses they buy from. All they want is a great product and a great experience. If you provide what they need, when they need it and in a human and engaging way, then they are likely to buy from you again. If you provide that same experience more than once, then you create trust. And with trust in place you can create long term customer value and value for your business.

So don't make sales and marketing alignment and trust-building a one off activity. Alignment is an ongoing process that requires communication and empathy. We've also seen that sales and marketing are generally over optimistic about their effectiveness (well, that is in their nature, after all.) But we all need to take a pause and address the real issues that are stopping us from generating more revenue.

Be more realistic, build more trust, add more value.