
Is It Sales And Marketing Or Marketing And Sales?

by JOHN GRAHAM

Without exception, every salesperson is a marketer, although oftentimes a frustrated one. To prove the point, recall what salespeople are always talking about. They never stop trying to figure out a way to grab the customer's attention, find the customer's pain or push a customer's hot button. But that's not sales — it's marketing.



When salespeople speak this way, they think they're just trying to figure out how to get the order. In reality, they're actually attempting to get inside the customer's head. They know if they can do that, they will get the customer to say "yes."

No matter what you call it, this is marketing.

As amazing as it may seem, marketers often fail to confront the issue of the relationship of marketing to sales. Somehow or other, they sidestep the unavoidable fact that marketing and sales are not only two sides of the same coin, but marketing is heads.

Savvy salespeople get the message. They are forever looking for ways to attract customers. They are constantly seeking "marketing support," be it direct mail, letters, advertising, brochures, newsletters, web presence or e-mail campaigns.

Isn't this what they mean when they say: "We need something new to sell," "Our prices are too high" or "Can't we offer an incentive?" They're looking for something that sets them apart from the competition.

Again, this is marketing.

Here's the point: Marketing creates a proper environment with customers and prospects for

salespeople to be successful in closing deals. The marketing task is to influence how customers think and feel about a company and its products and services. It's then that salespeople can do their best work.

There are company owners, high-level managers, CEOs, sales managers and others who are quick to say: "We don't need marketing; we need sales and we need them now." You can hear them pound the table and beat the drum every day, but if they just took 20 seconds to reflect on the issue, they would recognize the problem is not sales.

The fundamental problem is not having enough customers who want to buy what your company is selling; they don't know about it, they don't understand it, or they can't appreciate the value. These are the daunting hurdles that affect

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every salesperson, but they should not be labeled “sales problems.”

Those are classic marketing issues and primary examples of marketing failures. Overcome these hurdles and it's far easier for the sales force to hit its stride and cross the finish line of the sales race.

If this analysis is accurate, then there are some interesting implications for every sales department. Here are several:

- ***Every sales manager and salesperson should be uncompromising and outspoken advocates of marketing*** — Far too often, salespeople are asked to spend their time pushing gigantic rocks up one mountain after another. They find themselves trying to sell products and services to buyers who have no understanding of the company they represent or the value of the product or service. If this were true, then why would a buyer bother taking time to speak with a salesperson? Answer: more and more, they don't.

Salespeople are quick to lament, “If I can just get a chance to meet with them, they'll learn all that.” While this is true, it's not happening today. Buyers want a comfort level in advance of meetings before they commit their time to a salesperson. The task of marketing is to help create that comfort level.

- ***Every sales manager and salesperson should demand that his or her company's marketing be based on solid research*** — Once again, this seems contrary to how salespeople think. Ask salespeople if their customers are well informed about the products they sell and the response will be swift and clear: “Absolutely.”

But a recent survey of business owners conducted for an insurance organization in Maryland revealed interesting results. Taking a profile of the agency's “best” business insurance customers, a group of businesses was identified in the market area that matched the same qualities.

The survey findings revealed that these insurance buyers were not well acquainted with their own insurance programs. They lacked a basic understanding of their insurance coverages.

Even though it's easy to understand why salespeople believe they understand their customers, it's not always true. Supported by a marketing program that's based on fact and that focuses on accurate issues, salespeople are in a far better position to attack the real buyer issues.

- ***Every sales manager and salesperson should demand that marketing open doors*** — In many industries salespeople were ex-

pected to find their own leads. Such thinking continues to linger in some industries. In his book *Clued In*, Lewis P. Carbone, the founder of Experience Engineering, Inc., cuts to the core of the problem, when he writes, “With modern management fixated almost solely on the bottom line, the value proposition of far too many businesses has become increasingly one-sided: lots of emphasis on the company, but little on enhancing customer value.”

To put it simply, company-focused businesses don't attract customers. From bottom to top, a sales force should be asking the marketing people to open doors and to generate leads based on what's of value to the customer. In one case, it may be an attractive payment plan, as in the case of today's high-priced TV sets. I may be doubling computer memory without charge, and offering free shipping.

Giving opens doors. Giving means connecting with what's important to customers. For the buyer who pays cash or uses a home equity line to buy a car, a discount counts most. For the person financing a purchase it may be “zero interest.”

Convenience also unlocks customers' doors. If you're in the service business, guaranteed response time is key.

The key to effective marketing is opening doors, and everyone in sales has a right to expect marketing to deliver for them.

Marketing isn't about dialing for dollars — trying to find someone to sell something to. That's a tactic used by companies trying to dig themselves out of a hole, only to find themselves in a deeper one.

Marketing establishes credibility so business flows consistently, so there's trust and credibility when the company's name or product is heard or seen.

Marketing isn't about the sales; it's about the customer.

It's not about taking the customer; it's about taking the customer seriously.

It's about the customer wanting to come back time and time again.

And it's being able to go back to customers time and time again without having the door slammed, phone calls ignored, or mailings tossed in the trash. □

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