

Can These Two Functions Work Together?

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Why do marketing and sales functions in our industry often act as rivals rather than support-teams? This seems to be a growing problem that bears analysis and perhaps change.

While in the past, many products have been designed in such a way that they cannot be produced, most organizations now learned that cost- and time-effective product design requires the design department to not only focus on the design aspect of a part but also on the *producibility*. As such, it has become common in leading companies for their design and manufacturing departments to work closely together, as to integrate product and process design.

With today's consumer becoming ever-more sophisticated, wouldn't it make sense for marketing and sales teams in our industries to work that closely together? In many organizations, these two departments often do not collaborate and even remain rivals. If you think I'm exaggerating, what about the finger-pointing games that happen, when your sales department claims it can't meet goal because marketing isn't generating enough of the "right" tours or accusing them of failing to deliver vacation ownership products today's consumers want? And on the flip side, perhaps marketing blames sales for being ineffective and wasting too many qualified tours or for consistently failing to communicate the brand promise and values. Ideally, both functions should work like a winning sports team, with marketing working the ball down the field and passing it to sales to score. Otherwise, this could be a serious internal problem that will affect your sales performance, efficiency, and bottom line.

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As our product model becomes more mature, it becomes all the more necessary for sales and marketing to work together. And between the scale and complexity of the vacation ownership business, new market realities, and global growth, this relationship becomes all the more critical.

Changing Markets

After 40 years of responsiveness to consumers, vacation preferences, it's less about *what* we are marketing/selling and more about *how*. Nowadays, with the broad base of owners and prospective owners doing their own research and sharing their opinions publicly, what a company says about itself is often less compelling than what its customers say about it.

Prospective customers have a range of ways to acquire candid information on a developer and its vacation ownership products. In addition to doing on-line searches, they can engage with their peers, sharing reviews and war stories in countless blogs and forums. Because they are better informed, they have

Joining Forces

Here are some key facts.

- The growing need to put an end to the division between sales and marketing has led to the steady emergence of the Chief Revenue Officer (CRO), who is responsible for all activities that are geared toward achieving revenue. Amongst those forward-thinking organizations are Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, Coca-Cola, and Marriott.
- According to a study by Miller Heiman and the Northern Illinois University, organizations with strong alignment between marketing and sales functions have fared better during the recent economic downturns, reporting higher levels of new customers, revenues, and customer retention than those with low alignment.
- The conflict between marketing and sales is essentially a consequence of the two functions viewing the world differently.
- In a world that has seen a dramatic change in how consumers access product information and make purchase decisions, the days of easy separation of marketing and sales are gone.

much less need and are less willing to engage with an actual sales person until much deeper into the buying cycle. Given these challenges in the networked age, the rules of the game have changed, and neither marketing nor sales has the luxury of interacting on a perceived as-needed basis.

Where does the break-down happen between these two departments that are so critical to the process? In my opinion, there are many reasons: differences in compensation plans, time horizons, breadth of focus, management practices, differences in culture, etc. However, they can be summarized into two sources of friction: the economic conflicts and the cultural.

Economic and Cultural Conflicts

The economic friction is generated by the need to divide the total budget granted by

senior management to support sales and marketing. Executives in general often see sales as more tangible with more short-run impact, whose contributions to the bottom line are also easier to judge than the marketers' contributions.

The cultural conflict between sales and marketing is, if anything, even more entrenched than the economic conflict. This is true in part because the two functions attract different types of people who spend their time in very different ways. Marketers, in general, tend to be analytical, data-oriented, and project-focused. They comprise upstream (strategic) marketers, who are all about building a competitive advantage and creating, communicating, and delivering offerings that have value for customers, and downstream (tactical) marketers, who are all about generating qualified leads. They judge their project performances with a cold eye, and they're ruthless with a failed initiative.

However, that performance focus doesn't always appear to be action in the eyes of their colleagues in sales because it all happens behind a desk rather than out in the field. Salespeople, in contrast, spend their time talking to existing and potential customers. They're skilled relationship builders; they're not only savvy about customers' willingness to buy but also attuned to which product features will fly and which will die. They want to keep moving. They're used to rejection, and it doesn't depress them. They make a living in closing sales.

Key Opportunities

What are some solutions for this situation? I think the answer could be in creating a shared go-to-market strategy. That strategy (1) focuses on customers (not products) and incorporates a single mission-directed plan, crafted by stakeholders in both marketing and sales; (2) shares the same success criteria, vision of the ideal customer, relationship outlook and process; and (3) allows both functions to jointly own prospective relationships and coordinate activities to optimize customer engagement with the individual and company.

For this process to be effective, sales and marketing need to be much more aligned,

with teams exchanging information and ideas for good outcomes, and a common understanding of the metrics that define success. This calls for an integrated marketing platform that provides real-time situational awareness and metrics about prospect behavior across all marketing campaigns and channels—with mutual accountability. This happens via a common operating picture that enables both sales and marketing to visualize prospect status and take appropriate action at pre-determined points. Such a system gives marketing credibility and sales immediacy; it maximizes attention paid to most likely buyers, who describe themselves as such through behavior, and delivers measurable results.

This joint commitment and cooperation begins from the moment a developer first makes contact with a prospective owner through the tour, the sale, and beyond. ■