

Are your Sales Teams from Venus and Marketing Functions from Mars?

Does it feel like your sales and marketing teams really know and trust each other? Do they work together or see each other as the reason targets are not met? In some companies a culture exists where the two functions view the world and customers' needs and wants as polar opposites. The question is why they do, and what can be done to fix it?

If you are brought up in a different country, spoke a different language, took different classes in school or spent your day doing different things, it's reasonable to assume your view of the world might be different. When stated this simplistically it makes sense to me that sales and marketing "can" see the world and therefore customers' needs and wants as completely different.

The sales force hear the never ending push from customers on lower pricing, non differentiated offers, the customers lack of time and interest to learn about new offerings.

Marketers try to support sales with clear feature and benefit points, brand awareness and pull marketing strategies.

At the end of the day the results of new product launches don't meet expectations, sales slide sideways and each function looks at the other as the reason why results were not met.

Some advanced companies have implemented some neat strategies to help minimise these problems.

First of all, are we really discussing the customers' real needs and how we can actually address them? Get rid of the general brand messages, the vague benefit statements couched in caveats as "higher performance, longer lasting and better for you". Convert your message to a value one that is at the heart of what the customer is really after - why should I buy from you? The simplistic answer is my solution helps you make more money or save more money. By repositioning the sales argument, the marketing message, and the supporting collateral to discuss the customers' results of your value proposition, sales and marketing have the tangible discussion points and material to quantify for customers the value created and communicate it.

What can be done about it?

This takes work by three groups. Of course the sales and product development people need to clearly articulate what the customer wants and what their solution will do. A simple example, that I took a lot from, was one time when I was with our key account person and the product development manager and we were with an important customer. The customer was pounding their fist and saying "we need to lower our costs, the recession is killing us". The others went back to the office and said "see, no one cares about our value, it's all about lowest price". What I had heard the customer say was he needed to lower his "cost". Our sales discussion should have been around how our solution would take hard measurable costs out of his business. In the absence of taking costs out both sides of the table was left discussing or thinking unit price.

When I looked at our communication material, that the product development team helped marketing craft, I saw the usual generic buzzwords we used that were supposed to help the customer see that the solution would be better for them. However, it did not clearly say... This solution will reduce your costs faster and better, and really hit your bottom line better than a unit price reduction.



Amazing how three people from the same company, can hear the same thing, and take two separate conclusions away.

Secondly the marketing team must challenge the sales and product development people to find out what the real value of the offering is versus the next best alternatives. Do not take for granted the engineers opinions that no competitors exist, that quality is all that matters, and that we deserve a price premium because we should. A defined process methodology that is used during the marketing process that asks the tough questions has the forms and tools used to promote the tough discussions are needed. Marketing should not be brought in at the end of the process and be told "now help us position, price, and communicate this". Marketing should be that sober second thought that is a part of the whole process and asks those tough soul searching questions.

Finally management needs to promote this teamwork. Some companies have been successful at promoting this joint strategy by making sure marketing is part of the process from start to finish. This is a good start. However, other things can be done.

Build trust between the two functions so that they see each other as an asset and are willing to ask the questions that need to be asked. Windshield time is one of the best ways to do this. The marketing people need to spend time in the field with the sales force to see the "real world". Don't let them take you to the easiest customers, where everything is rosy. During customer visits, and the drive time afterwards, real discussions can be had... What do you need to help sell our products better? What are the things that resonate with customers the most? What if we could quantify our value proposition? When that customer said lower costs if we could ... would that help? I have also seen some of the best sales people in the world come from being marketers, and likewise some of the best marketers be ones that started in the sales field.

If sales and marketing are measured on the same measurements, can understand each other's job and language, and most importantly learn to trust each other early in the process, your company is on the road to having more successful new product launches, a more effective marketing program and happier customers that really understand the value you are creating.

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Todd has developed and implemented his leading insight into strategies for developing distribution channels, sales and marketing programs, strategic account management, customer value partnership agreements, Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) procurement strategies, and numerous programs that help customers increase profitability by measuring and reducing acquisition, operation, and disposal costs.

Todd has demonstrated successful customer partnership agreements with Fortune 1000 companies, in numerous industries and segments, in all geographies of the world.

Work has been featured in articles on TCO buying and selling, in Purchasing Magazine, and also has been referenced in articles from leading business schools and scholarly reviews published by Kellogg, Harvard, MIT Sloan, Wake Forest, and London Business Press and others.

An energetic leader with experience as key presenter at meetings on the need to buy, sell, and price based on value created and documented; for associations such as Manufacturing Alliance (MAPI), Strategic Account Managers Associations (SAMA), Certified Purchasing Professionals Association (PMAC), Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM), and European Pricing Platform among others.

Todd is a Fellow of the Sales Leadership Alliance and numerous others.