

## Use Data to Build Bridges between Sales and Marketing

by **John McGee** | March 19, 2014 5:30 am

If you were to poll companies in the United States today, the majority of them would likely respond that their internal marketing and sales departments have at times been at odds. Regardless of whether the company sells B2B or B2C, tension frequently exists between these two departments because of their codependence.

Sales teams often look at their marketing counterparts with frustration over the lack of good leads being passed to them. Meanwhile, marketing departments question why sales couldn't convert more of the leads generated by the last campaign. Sales teams, measured by the top line revenue they generate, will look for others to blame when the numbers don't add up. And marketing, always conscious of the need to justify spending, can be critical of sales when enough leads are not closed to meet ROI goals.

To be successful, companies must find solutions to ease tensions between these two vital departments. Fortunately, the ability to track and measure customer behavior is creating opportunities that will allow sales and marketing to advance in concert.

Consumers today have more options than ever before for researching their next purchase. Just look at the rise of services like Yelp that provide real-time ratings from current customers on the quality of the goods and services of a business. Customers can turn to a search engine to get immediate comparisons of different products and price points before visiting a brick and mortar or e-commerce store to make a purchase. Research from Google and CEB, titled [The Digital Evolution in B2B Marketing](#), shows that customers have completed 57 percent of a purchase decision before ever reaching out to a business, regardless of price point. This "connected customer" paradigm is driving sales and marketing departments to re-think their relationship. The roles of the departments are blending to meet the needs of the ultra-informed customer.

To keep pace with the ever more informed customer, marketing teams have begun measuring and monitoring customer behavior, such as immediate responses to e-mail and web campaigns. Having greater insight into customer behavior has allowed marketing departments to fine-tune messaging for maximum impact on the customer.

By monitoring and tracking behavior, marketing teams can more accurately distinguish the interested prospect from the casual shopper. B2B marketing teams can serve up more relevant content and better engage the customer, while B2C teams can drive unique offers to incentivize the sale. All of the customer behavioral data allows marketing departments to drive the customer farther down the sales funnel and produce a better quality sales lead.

Historically, sales teams received a list of leads from the marketing department and were told to contact, qualify, and convert. Information often was limited to the source of the lead – a tradeshow meeting or a campaign response would be the sole qualifying metric. Now, sales can receive information about the customer's entire journey and the associated behavioral data the marketing department collects. Data such as what product the customer showed interest in, how much time the customer spent on a specific page of a website, or a survey response gives sales professionals the details they need to cut through the noise, engage the customer and drive a quicker close.

To align with the increasing amounts of data being provided by marketing departments, companies have worked to fine-tune the sales funnel by improving their measuring and monitoring of sales performance. Tighter scrutiny of sales teams, regions, processes and messaging using new technologies allows management to tweak efforts to drive optimum results.

Organizations that have learned how to make technology work in their favor are reaping the benefits of sales and marketing departments that are functioning in harmony. For companies still struggling to find the solution that ends the finger pointing, here are four key steps to help bridge the divide.

1. Create a common definition of a lead. As simple as this sounds, it is frequently overlooked. Having a clear understanding of what sales needs so marketing can develop a process to achieve the common goal is a critical first step.
2. Start taking advantage of the flow of data that potential customers are generating. Determine what sources of data are available to the company and what information streams can and must be created.
3. Measure and test the data collected to determine which data points reflect customers' true intent.
4. Embrace collaborative technologies that allow sales and marketing to capture and share common data points to close the loop between marketing efforts and sales results.

Following these steps and taking other action to build bridges between sales and marketing departments within a company is an invaluable investment in the success of a business.

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