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The Cultural Shift that will Create an Empowered, Integrated Sales Team

Marketing and sales make a powerful team when working together.

To win business and retain it, a distributor's sales team cannot act alone. Instead, it takes a sales "village," according to Colleen Stanley, founder of SalesLeadership, Inc. As Stanley told attendees during her presentation at MDM's 4th annual Sales GPS conference, creating the village starts by getting marketing and sales to break down the silos and truly work together.

By Elizabeth Galentine

A common complaint from the sales department is that marketing is sending them too few leads that are not strong enough. But marketing will counter that the issue is a lack of sales team training that is keeping sales people from converting the leads.

The reality is, Stanley said, everyone needs to own the sales number. By not giving marketing and sales at least partial ownership of the revenue number — so that they are measured and compensated by that number — then distributors are likely to see the formation of big silos between departments, where each is filled with its own data and asynchronous customer information. With this approach, "nothing is going to change in your organization as far as becoming customer-centric, buyer-centric," Stanley said.

Where to Pair Up

There are three positions on the sales team in particular where integrating marketing into their daily routine can really make a difference.

First, BDR/SDR: For the business or sales development rep, the marketing department is likely already generating the opportunities that bring an inbound sales person their leads. For example, by creating outbound emails, LinkedIn posts and content, web seminar content, sales enablement copy, etc. However, these materials may not be as effective as you think, because they are not tapping into the customer's true needs. "If your marketing department is not listening to calls, they are not learning," Stanley said. "They are not learning, what does the prospect really need? What does the prospect desire? What is the new business problem that needs to be solved?"

Next, the account executive: By having marketing department personnel listening to calls after leads have been handed off to the account executive, you will be able to leave customer interactions with a more complete understanding of what happened. This is because a marketing person is going to hear a different conversation from what the account executive hears. For example, they may hear objections that the salesperson is missing because they are so focused on closing the deal or making their quota, Stanley said. "Maybe your [marketing person is] going to hear a new need that the seller may not hear," she added.

Third, account management: The synergy here is around the goal of retention. Questions to ask yourself, Stanley said, include:

- What kind of retention tools do your customers want?
- If upselling and cross selling, does marketing know your biggest competitor?
- Do they know why your existing customers are reluctant to give you a new line of business?

How to Realign Priorities

Both sales and marketing departments may need a different set of key performance metrics to ensure they are thinking and working like a unified team.

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Sales managers are very good at setting metrics for the sales team — leading indicators, lagging indicators, etc. But do your VPs of sales have a KPI for listening to and observing calls? Same goes for the chief marketing officer or even an outside marketing agency. What is the metric around their listening to sales calls and observing sales calls? "Because again, if you're not listening, you're not learning," Stanley said. "Without listening and learning, I promise you what you're missing in your conversations is that EQ skill of empathy."

I can only create good copy and verbalize good copy if I'm listening to my prospects and customers intently. And that's why marketing might hear differently than sales. The beauty is when the two departments can collaborate. — Colleen Stanley, SalesLeadership, Inc.

Once the new KPIs are established, the conversation can then center around how to answer these buyer-centric questions, Stanley said:

- What's a day in the life of your prospect?
- What's the new business problem?
- What are their personal and professional stressors?

Being able to answer these questions is the beginning of empathy and being able to understand your client's point of view, she added. This is especially critical in this time of rapid COVID-19-induced change. The pandemic has created a lot of new business problems for customers — and thus a lot of new business opportunities for distributors who are aware of them. For example, Stanley referenced a recent *Wall Street Journal* article that addressed the need for kids who are now learning virtually to have chairs at home that are small enough for their feet to touch the ground, thus reducing distractions. "That's a new business problem," she said. "And how many companies are really going after that business problem?"

Emotion management and empathy skills are a smart place to focus for both sales and marketing teams, as the clients you are calling on have been taxed from all directions over the last six or seven months — working longer hours, taking on new tasks, balancing work and home life like never before.

"So, when we can have marketing and sales both listening to the client conversations, I promise you, they will hear it from a different perspective," Stanley said. "It is the absolute adage that two heads are better than one."

Focus on Problems Over Positivity

When both your sales and marketing teams can answer these questions, it will open up the ability for them to verbalize great sales copy that truly speaks to the needs of the buyer, Stanley said.

Otherwise, the natural tendency is to become self-focused rather than other-focused. This often leads down the overly worn trail of, "We have excellent customer service!"

As is pointed out in the book *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath, customers can't see or feel that kind of language. It doesn't mean anything to them, because everyone says it.

Another approach, Stanley said, instead of focusing on the positive, is to focus on the problems that your customers are going through. "Nobody cares about what you do; they only care about the problems you can solve for them," she said. "The neuroscience research is very clear that prospects and customers will buy two to three times faster and more often to avoid pain than to achieve a goal. It's been labeled in psychology, loss aversion."

However, optimistic sales people tend to default to "benefit language" that prevents them from emotionally connecting with prospects and customers. This is seen on company websites, lead generation tools, and even the words that come out of your sales person's mouth, Stanley said.

"I can only create good copy and verbalize good copy if I'm listening to my prospects and customers intently," Stanley said. "And that's why marketing might hear differently than sales. The beauty is when the two departments can collaborate. That's when the magic happens in messaging and conversations."

For more from Stanley's Sales GPS session, "Culture Shift: The Empowered, Integrated Sales Team," and to access all of her previous MDM presentations, join the MDM Sales GPS Network. A monthly work group that will help you accelerate your sales process; the Network provides access to all previous Sales GPS content over the past four years. For more information, visit mdm.com/sales-gps.