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# ANALYSIS

## SALES ENABLEMENT

THE LEADERSHIP BEHIND EVERY GREAT SALES TEAM

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# contents

## Document

Introduction .....	2
Same Recipe, Different Results .....	2
Include Flexibility in Your Structure.....	3
Leave Nothing Up to Chance .....	3
The Bottom Line .....	4



## Introduction

The sales process has many moving parts. A successful sale can directly correlate with the quality of support that is available to the sales team. In today's world, that support is referred to as Sales Enablement. The idea of sales enablement is becoming more widespread and is key to repeatable sales success. A sales enablement toolkit can include a wide variety of items, including curated content, white papers, blogs, podcasts, software programs and platforms, training, and informational resources.

Many believe that the surge in sales enablement is a direct result of changing buyer behaviors. Thanks to the wealth of information that is available on the internet, most buyers will be well into the decision-making process before they even reach out to a seller. According to Gartner, 57% of the buyer's journey is already completed before that buyer will engage with a salesperson and explore solutions for their needs. As a result, solution providers must find a way to be in front of their buyers long before they acknowledge them. Ongoing technological advancements and the power of the internet have made the purchasing cycle increasingly streamline for the customer yet more difficult for the seller.

Due to the changing landscape of our industry, sales leaders are facing new challenges every day. Even so, common threads can be drawn between effective leadership strategies that will apply in almost any scenario. This document outlines some of the key components for directing and optimizing sales enablement efforts.

## Same Recipe, Different Results

Organizations will often seek out well-developed sales representatives, and then give them the autonomy to do what they do best. Although sales reps may be directed to a library of sales tools and resources, many firms will then step aside and hope that the selling magic will happen. In these scenarios, it is not uncommon some reps soar while others fail to reach their goals. The reason for this is simple—even with the most well-thought-out toolkit, the act of passing instructions to your sales representatives is not enough to guarantee good results.

For a real-world example, think about a show like "The Great British Bake-Off." Even though all of the contestants are asked to prepare the same recipe, individual experiences, knowledge, and skills will deliver very different results. In the sales world, the key to realizing the full potential of every member of the team lies in demonstrating and executing knowledge at every step. Leadership is crucial when it comes to ensuring a level playing field for every employee.



## Include Flexibility in Your Structure

The best leaders understand the importance of stepping back and listening to their employees so they can create a culture of sharing and learning. According to a recent study from Salesforce.com, employees who feel that their voices are heard at work are 4.6 times more likely to feel empowered to perform at their best. So while creating a blueprint for capturing more sales is certainly important, leaders must also keep their structure flexible enough so that the suggestions of all departments and team members are considered.

This leads to an important question—who should determine what goes into your sales enablement strategy? In the traditional sense, the marketing department typically owns the sales enablement process. At the same time, however, sales professionals who interact with prospects and customers on a near daily basis may be better informed about the necessary tools and what it will take to influence the buyer to make a purchase. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for sales and marketing departments to operate in silos, with each employing its own independent approach to sales enablement efforts and sales results.

Someone in a position of leadership can create a bridge between these two entities. It is the leader's job to keep the lines of communication open between departments, align multiple objectives to deliver on a common goal, and oversee the execution of sales enablement investments.

## Leave Nothing Up to Chance

Great leaders are able to communicate the value of a unified, collaborative sales and marketing approach. Without pause, the best leaders can share specifically why sales enablement and the tools under that umbrella are important to the intended customer and the organization's sales results. To put it simply, the leaders behind sales enablement must leave nothing up to chance. Whitepapers, case studies, and content are designed to support your audience, but they often become nothing more than a sad and lonely leave-behind. All sales teams need proper skills development training, specific how-to instructions, and knowledge testing. Without all of these components, even the best sales enablement tools will deliver inconsistent results. What's more, it's impossible to measure or adequately evaluate the effectiveness of sales reps who have not been properly trained.

To avoid these challenges, consider implementing the following steps before rolling out your toolkit to support the efforts of your sales and marketing team:

- ♦ Along with each piece of content, create a script that narrates precisely what you want the audience to hear and why it should matter to them.



- ◆ Explain how a piece of content will draw attention to your brand and elevate your salespeople in today's very competitive world.
- ◆ Deliver a road map that aligns the buyers' journey with sales enablement practices and the tools you chose to employ.
- ◆ Test for knowledge, encourage role-playing, and provide a comfortable environment for your team members to practice their talk tracks.
- ◆ Implement coaching if needed.

All too often, the efforts of sales training, sales and marketing platforms, content creation, and curation are not properly realized. The leadership behind the intent of your sales enablement efforts is key to maximizing the return on investment and ensuring that everyone on your team has the same opportunity to succeed.

### The Bottom Line

The current business climate continues to change, and savvy salespeople are learning that they may need to adjust their prior practices to gain the loyalty they seek from current and prospective customers. Although the sales enablement term may be new to many, the reasoning behind it is simple—it involves uncovering better ways to encourage your audience to choose you over a competitor! The best sales enablement practices will often include contributions from both the marketing-minded and sales-focused professionals in your organization, but quality leadership is always the lynchpin. Without leadership, in addition to precise direction and concrete expectations, it is very likely that some of your salespeople will be left behind. Even the best marketing and sales investments can end up as dust collectors if they are not backed up by leadership.

opinion



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As Director of Keypoint Intelligence's Business Development Strategies Consulting Service, Karen Kimerer has experienced the many challenges of expanding current market opportunities and securing new business. She has developed a systematic approach to these opportunities, addressing the unique requirements of becoming a leader in our changing industry.

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