

ANALYSIS

SALES ENABLEMENT: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SALES AND MARKETING

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Introduction

All business owners are focused on two things—generating revenue from new customers and increasing the wallet share of current customers. The print industry is no different. Many Print Service Providers (PSPs) recognize the benefits of advertising their businesses and have therefore chosen to amplify their marketing efforts. Others continue to rely on the skills of their sales organization to meet and exceed revenue goals. At the same time, sustainable growth can be a challenge for even the most tenured businesses despite well-thought-out sales and marketing initiatives.

While sales and marketing are both important to the health of a business, these functions are often misaligned because they frequently have different goals, methods of measurement, and reporting structures. In fact, according to a recent research summary commissioned by LinkedIn, 85% of respondents believe that sales and marketing alignment is the largest opportunity for improving business performance today.

Some of the savviest businesses will place a deliberate focus on sales enablement when attempting to optimize their sales and marketing performance. Even so, the importance of sales enablement in terms of its impact on revenue goals is often overlooked.

Sales Enablement Defined

Most organizations realize that sales enablement is important. By its very nature, the phrase suggests clearing a path for sales success. Despite this, many remain unclear on what sales enablement actually is.

The Sales Enablement Society (SES) offers the following definition:

Sales Enablement ensures that buyers are engaged at the right time and place, and with the right assets by well-trained client-facing staff members to provide a world-class experience along the customer's journey.

In other words, sales enablement is the practice of giving your salespeople the tools they require to be better sellers. These can include:

- ◆ Sales training
- ◆ Skill reinforcement programs
- ◆ Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems



- ◆ Marketing content that is designed to follow the buyer's journey
- ◆ Learning and development platforms
- ◆ Asset management platforms

If sales enablement resources are ineffective or lacking, even the best sales teams can become overwhelmed with repetitive and unnecessary work. There are other challenges, too—for example, the marketing department might be viewed as being out of touch with the buyer. In cases like these, sales efforts can slow down due to buyer confusion if there is no cohesive sales enablement approach in place.

The concept of sales enablement is certainly not new. In fact, its origin can be traced back to 1999 when a former brand manager at Miller Brewing Company, along with a telecom consultant, sought to address many of the problems that have plagued sellers for years. These include:

- ◆ Inconsistent messaging between sales and marketing
- ◆ A lack of easy-to-use sales tools to help close business
- ◆ A sales process that hasn't been defined or is difficult to repeat

The word has spread over the past two decades, and sales analysts across all industries now recognize the benefits of implementing sales enablement programs.

The Rise of Sales Enablement

More Informed Buyers

Enablement continues to grow out of the need to accommodate today's well-informed buyers. We've all heard the statistics—buyers can now find much of the information that they need online, so they usually won't engage with a brand until it's necessary. In many cases, buyers will already be about 70% through the purchasing journey before they finally engage a brand. The ability to reach more buyers earlier in their decision-making process benefits the buyer as well as the seller.

Despite the wealth of information on the Internet, many buyers can't adequately collect or consume the knowledge they require to buy with confidence. Meanwhile, sellers struggle to establish the rapport required to help buyers while also meeting their sales goals. Marketing suffers as a result, and it will often miss the mark with its messaging. By contrast, a solid sales enablement approach aligns marketing and sales efforts with a "customer first" mindset.



The Sales Experience

A cohesive strategy to win more business exposes customers to the best that sales and marketing have to offer. For this reason, the challenging reality of onboarding new talent and preparing them to sell is also contributing to the need for a sales enablement strategy. Leaving a new sales rep on their own to find the right words and gain the experience to properly represent your brand is a risk you simply can't afford to take in today's competitive environment. A well-defined program adds structure, increases the speed of knowledge transfer, and creates a proven process for success. A collaborative sales and marketing approach will maximize every touchpoint that a sales rep has with a potential buyer and deliver a solid customer experience for all, even if they are new to your organization.

Sales and Marketing Technology

The number of available technology platforms that manage a sales enablement program continues to soar. As recently as five years ago, many organizations had to manually manage every step in their sales efforts. Content management, which was part of this process, required accessing shared hard drives to store information and attempting to create a logical filing system so the content could be found. In other cases, market assets were managed with a spreadsheet, forcing salespeople to remember how to access and use the content to support their sales.

As the technology continues to advance, options for implementing a sales enablement program increase. Companies of all sizes are now able to reinforce their sales and marketing efforts within a system. Some are choosing to design their own, while others subscribe to software platforms built with their business key performance initiatives (KPIs) in mind. The result is that sales enablement systems provide discipline and enable both sales and marketing to focus on their customers. The next section of this document explores why these systems are crucial to success.

The Starting Block

Starting blocks are used in Track and Field to brace the feet of a runner at the beginning of the race. When used correctly, runners can rely on starting blocks to increase their speed off the mark and set themselves up with a competitive advantage. This analogy can also be extended to sales training—the quicker someone can begin to do something well, the greater the odds that they will be successful.

Further parallels can be drawn between the sales and running worlds, too. For example, an optimal pace must be set to efficiently get over the finish line. Sales cadence predicts the outcome and also helps with forecasting revenue. The sequence of e-mails, phone calls, voicemails, and social media posts must all consist of highly effective content. What if



your team must slow down to locate these messages, customize them, or even create them so they can have meaningful interactions with buyers?

A steady, predictable sales flow starts with a sales enablement program. At the foundation, sellers and marketing must work together to identify tools, training, and processes to enable more wins. Here are some tips to identify some of the gaps between sales and marketing:

- ◆ Inspect your content library.
 - Do you have current customer success stories?
 - Does your content catch the attention of your intended buyers?
 - Is the content specific to a buyer's interests or a problem they must solve? The content won't help much if it's too high-level.
 - Does it communicate your value proposition?
 - Is it mobile friendly?
- ◆ Evaluate the accessibility of your content.
 - Can your sellers find it?
 - Is it difficult to download, personalize, or present?
 - Are you tracking how often it is accessed?
 - Is it scattered across multiple systems?
- ◆ Brush up on training.
 - When was the last time you trained your sales team on industry developments or buyers' changing behaviors?
 - Do you provide guided scripts on how to talk about and present your content?
- ◆ Review your platforms and tools.
 - Is your CRM set up to advance sales opportunities?
 - Do your internal platforms increase sales efficiency?
 - Are your tools or systems integrated with e-mail or other communication tools for ease of use?



The answers gathered from these questions can get you started with developing an effective sales enablement program. In the same way it applies to every important initiative, execution is the golden ticket. This means you must set clear goals, determine roles and responsibilities, and establish a means to measure progress on a regular basis.

The Bottom Line

Sales enablement is a big topic in terms of size as well as need. It extends beyond sales training and provides your sales team with the resources and tools that today's buyers want. A deliberate sales enablement practice means scaling sales and marketing efforts beyond a few superstar performers. It's about setting up a system that is accessible to all and sets everyone up for success.

opinion



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As part of the Business Development Strategies Consulting Service at Keypoint Intelligence, 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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