

12/20/10 - Integrating Sales and Marketing

It's not easy. Successful integration of the sales and marketing functions is a difficult course. Salespeople often claim that marketers are out of touch with customers, while marketers argue that the sales force over-focuses on meeting the needs of an individual customer just to win the next deal. The balance between focusing on the overall market verses an individual customer is a difficult equilibrium to achieve.

It is a valid point that marketing tends to have a mountain top view, in contrast to the sales department's ground-level view of the same marketplace. Generalizations are risky and it is important to note that both groups need to have at least a basic understanding of the overall marketplace as well as individual clients in order to make informed decisions.

Plus, even assuming that Corporate or Product Marketing has a high degree of accountability to revenue (which they don't always have ? at least not in the direct way that sales does), their decisions are made with quite a different time horizon than sales ? before and after products are rolled out, while the sales time horizon is *now*. Naturally, this can cause some tension. Both parties are looking at the same set of facts, but assessing them quite differently ? based on a different scope and scale.

Both views are critical for each function to do their jobs. Sharing views would be even more valuable to companies, most of which do not have successful integration policies for marketing and sales. To speak in metaphorical terms, marketing, with its high-level view, is able to see all that is unfolding on the battlefield below. Meanwhile, sales does battles every day on the front line, privy to a close up view of what's going on at ground level.

Each group sees things the other cannot. There are things about customers and competitors visible at ground-level, that aren't clear from a "bird's eye" view. From the top, marketing sees clouds in the distance and the approaching competition that can change the way the marketplace will function in the near future. Prospects often tell salespeople how fierce or defeated the competition really is. Both have precious knowledge that becomes even more valuable when it is exchanged ? and costly when the exchange does not take place.

Obviously, both marketing and sales professionals have the potential to see both sides of the coin and if these departments do communicate effectively, they will both have a much richer understanding of what is going on.

When successful integration and information exchange takes place, the sales "troops" at ground level know what is on the horizon and are better able to design solutions for customers. Likewise, marketing would be better able to support sales teams with what they need, when they know what is going on at ground level. Lastly, marketing can take advantage of the many thousands of hours their sales force is investing with clients in real conversations

(strategic) PROPOSITIONS

? an almost shameful loss of market intelligence in organization that don't tap it, formally or informally. **In your company, is that intel being used, or wasted?**

Does sales share the details they can see from their "ground-level" perspective with marketing? Does marketing keep sales apprised of what's happening in the larger market landscape?

What might help your marketers and salespeople understand each others' perspectives, and feel like they're playing for the same team? How can they work together to better meet both your customers' needs and your company's goals?