B2Best Practice

3 steps to sales and marketing alignment nirvana

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Three steps to sales and marketing alignment nirvana.

50%
B2B sales reps fall short of quotas

80%
of a prospect's sales cycle is completed before a call

companies with marketing and sales alignment
+20%
annual sales

companies **without** marketing and sales alignment
-4%
annual sales

In today's business market, the success of your company and product depends on the relationship between the sales and marketing departments.

In fact, according to a recent Forbes article, **50% of B2B sales reps consistently fall short of their quotas**. By the time a prospect is ready to speak with a rep in a real, live conversation, roughly 80% of their sales cycle is already completed.

Across industries, there is a common rivalry between these front-of-the-cycle departments. Marketing thinks sales doesn't appreciate the quality leads sitting in their laps. On the other hand, sales thinks marketing is full of it – *what qualified leads?*

Though the issue may be common, there is a relatively simple solution that too many companies are overlooking - **marketing automation**.

This document lays out three simple steps to reach sales and marketing alignment nirvana. Marketing automation works to establish company-wide lead generation definitions, automate email campaigns, and refine follow-up efforts – bringing inner peace to all.

Industry Stats: According to Aberdeen Research, companies with fully aligned sales and marketing departments experienced a 20% jump in annual revenue growth. Companies with no alignment in place? They suffered a 4% decline.

Shared Definitions and Goals

To gauge exactly how disjointed your sales and marketing departments are, ask each department, separately, to draft a definition of your target customer - the results won't be pretty. Marketing's key characteristics might be completely lost on sales and visa versa.

Take the following steps to ensure that sales and marketing have clearly shared definitions and goals:

1. Get the groups together (and serve lunch! It's hard to be mad with a conference room full of free food) and review every touchpoint a lead has with your company - across departments and channels and in chronological order.

2. Paying close attention to the flow chart you've just created, brainstorm your target audience, also known as a buyer persona. Maybe this fictional buyer works at a mid-sized company and engaged with your website content through an organic search… What comes next? Decide together.

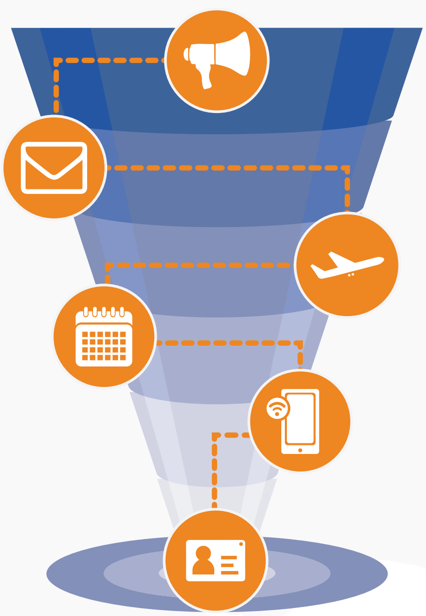
3. Once your persona is in place, it's time to create a company-wide set of definitions. This ensures consistency for everyone, even into IT and customer service departments. Once the list of definitions is laid out, create a document to distribute to everyone. The words that need defining are up to you, but common mix-ups occur with:

   - Lead
   - Contact
   - Account
   - Opportunity
   - Sales qualified leads (SQLs)
   - Marketing qualified leads (MQLs)

From here, begin measuring sales and marketing by the same metrics. If sales is measured by opportunities, then marketing must be as well.

Usage Tip: Try measuring success ratios based on the number of MQLs generated and then by the number of MQLs that were nurtured and closed as customers. This way you're not only tracking the number of leads marketing passed to sales, but also the quality of those leads.

Supportive Nurture Campaigns



Marketing is busy, sales is busy, we're all busy. Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. As you become comfortable with marketing automation, take the time to set up a series of email campaigns to aid sales reps in their lead nurture process.

These campaigns support your mutual goals of quality lead generation and save everyone time down the line (especially the last week of the month or quarter when panic sets in).

Usage Tip: Nurture campaigns are one of the most beneficial marketing automation capabilities. Based on each lead's characteristics, they are dropped in a campaign best suited to their needs, industry, or budget. They will continue to receive emails, updates, event registrations, and check-ins from sales until they're ready to purchase.

Examples of these nurture campaigns may include:

Competitor campaign: Early in the sales cycle, reps may discover that a prospect is actually with a competitor. While their first thought is often to drop the pursuit, encourage sales to treat them as cold leads. Nurture them with emails about product updates or upcoming demo webinars – anything that will show them what they're missing by staying with a competitor.

Thought leadership campaign: Some leads start out emphatic about your company, but may become bored and drop off the face of the earth. Sales shouldn't push too hard with this group, but can instead "check in" periodically with educational resources or industry news.

Cold lead campaigns: First of all, cold does not mean unqualified. These leads should be dropped in nurture campaigns that provide them a mix of product-related announcements and educational content. Did they attend a webinar from an invite you emailed them? Perfect. Have sales follow up with a phone call.

Refined Follow-Ups

Murky follow-ups with miscommunications stem from sales and marketing treating their pipelines as stand-alone entities. Leads go through marketing processes and are then passed over to sales, but does marketing have any idea what sales does with those leads? And does sales know what nurturing process the leads just completed with marketing?

Marketing automation gives both teams greater visibility into what the other is doing. **Sales can see which nurture campaigns the lead is in - while marketing has access to sales' CRM notes detailing check-in calls and any questions presented.**

Alignment isn't some fad diet we're testing out, only to abandon in a late night French fry binge. No, this is a lifestyle and the company's new normal. **Establish open communication across departments for:**

- New campaign initiatives
- Check-in calls with qualified, nurtured leads
- Accountability in CRM notes
- Shared performance metrics
- Quarterly (or monthly) conversion rate reviews

Usage Tip: Review the success of your efforts with a side-by-side comparison of pre and post alignment metrics, such as average lead follow up times and the number of qualified leads passed from marketing to sales.

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Salesfusion helps small and medium sized B2B organizations drive revenue with smarter marketing. With Salesfusion's smart marketing automation platform, marketing and sales teams are delivering lead-to-revenue results more effectively and efficiently than ever before.

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