



SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES IN 2021

FOR CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS

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SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES IN 2021

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84%

B2B and B2C companies, nonprofits, and other organizations are heading into 2021 with a content marketing strategy, according to a recent report.



One out of every 10 B2B marketers and salespeople surveyed reported a high level of alignment between marketing and sales.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing operations have drastically evolved over the past decade resulting in complex back-end processes, overcomplicated tech stacks, and a growing divide between sales and marketing teams. A core component of the evolution is the increasing adoption of content marketing alongside the advancement of digital technology. In fact, 84% of B2B and B2C companies, nonprofits, and other organizations are heading into 2021 with a content marketing strategy, according to a [recent report](#).

However, while most firms are adapting to the growing digital marketing environment, they are struggling to keep sales and marketing departments working together in a cohesive manner. According to a [report by Corporate Visions](#), only one out of every 10 B2B marketers and salespeople surveyed reported a high level of alignment between marketing and sales. Further, the area of marketing operations with the lowest level of alignment was found to be asset/content development. Unfortunately, the end result is a hindered conversion rate.

What is causing this misalignment on the marketing operations front, and how can firms fix it to most effectively grow their revenue? In this whitepaper, learn about the common alignment challenges between sales and marketing and the different steps firms can use to solve them.

ALIGNMENT CHALLENGES BETWEEN SALES AND MARKETING

Individuals in charge of marketing communications, production, and operations have a complex task. They must understand the various stages of the buying cycle, create materials to speak to prospects at every stage of the cycle, and deliver them easily and securely at the right moment to the right people (which often includes the sales team).

Many firms experience a disconnect or challenge at some point along the buyer's journey, which causes a growing divide between sales and marketing. It's an age-old argument. Marketing blames sales for not closing the leads, and sales blames marketing for not providing qualified leads. Meanwhile, prospects fall through the cracks.

How can firms stop the blame game and solve the real problem? Further, what is the core issue?

Here's a closer look at common problems that lead to misalignment between marketing and sales teams.

A changing consumer causes confusion

At the core of the growing misalignment between marketing and sales is the new type of consumer. Sales once carried a much

larger role, which involved educating prospects from square one, often using print materials. However, with the increased access to information provided by the internet, customers and prospects no longer need to rely on a salesperson for information. They can find unbiased information independently. By the time a consumer reaches a salesperson, they often understand their problem and are aware of the potential solutions.

For example, suppose an investor is interested in a wealth management service. Where are they going to start their search? Often, it's on Google or LinkedIn by typing in "wealth management companies" or something similar. Perhaps, they want a firm that will help them with specialty assets like real estate interests. They will then search for that specific niche as well. For a company to show up on the search engine results pages, they have to create content optimized for the relevant keywords. The investor will then do their research to find a few front-running options. While they may call a company to speak with a sales representative about the details, they may find enough information online to make a decision without speaking to anyone.

This shift has left many firms scrambling to make sense of how to successfully engage their buyers and guide them towards a conversion. To get involved with the self-directed consumer's education process, marketing teams need to step in and create

strategic content. Further, they need to work in collaboration with sales so either team can step in and meet the consumer when they are seeking information.

Content disorganization

With so many pieces of content that are all designed to serve different purposes, a high-level [content management system](#) is needed. According to a [Content Marketing Institute report](#), 65% of the most successful content marketers have a documented strategy. A documented strategy outlines the buyer's journey and how each piece of content fits into the puzzle.

As a result, if content interactions are tracked and documented, sales teams can gain insight into the information that buyers have received before the point at which they enter the conversation and after. However, many firms don't have a documented strategy, which leaves them creating content without a defined purpose and hoping for the best. This can be confusing for sales reps who don't understand what buyers are learning, why they are learning it, and where they are at in the buying cycle.

Compliance issues

Compliance in content marketing is an important issue, especially in heavily regulated industries like financial services or healthcare.

Every piece of content must be compliant with the industry regulations. When a system for compliance isn't built into the content production process, it can result in legal ramifications that put firms and customers at risk. Further, if the system is inefficient, it can greatly slow down the production and delivery of the necessary assets to the right teams.

Brand inconsistency

The power of a brand relies on its consistency. When buyers see the same logo and colors and read the same brand voice over and over again, they begin to associate it with that brand, which makes it easier to remember. However, when a firm's communications lack consistency, they won't be as effective at connecting with the audience and staying top of mind.

Many firms struggle to ensure all of their communications are consistently on-brand from both the marketing and sales teams. Marketing may have brand guidelines for the content, but if sales needs a piece of content and can't get it on time, they may develop something on their own. This leads to off-brand communications and misalignment. Sales needs an easy way to get the on-brand assets they need at the moment they need them.



Content performance disconnect

Many firms are creating content but don't have an understanding of how it's performing. In fact, a [recent survey](#) of over 1,500 organizations found that 39% of firms with a content marketing strategy were not measuring their ROI. Without understanding the return on investment, firms have no way to gauge whether the steps are working or not.

Imagine a scenario where a firm is not reaching its targets. The leaders begin to try and investigate what is wrong and how to improve. The marketing team argues that they are following all the best practices to inform and educate buyers along the buyer's journey. They are creating blogs, email campaigns, whitepapers, social posts, etc. However, sales argues that they are not getting enough leads. The content is not converting or driving leads in at an adequate level. Without any measurement or tracking, it's impossible to figure out what content is working and what's not. Firms won't know what levers to pull to drive results, so they wager the future of the business on best practices.

The missing piece for those firms is often a unified cross-channel analytics program that helps them to understand what's resulting in conversions. It's a complex puzzle to track, but a lack of analytics can create an environment where teams become frustrated, and production becomes expensive without justifiable returns.

No personalization

Personalization has been found to [increase visitor engagement](#), improve customer experience, improve brand perception, increase conversion rates, and increase customer acquisition. However, at times, firms fail to connect with their audiences because they can't easily personalize messaging at scale. This is especially true for sales reps who can't personalize content without a time-intensive process involving the marketing team.

Sales teams need to be able to seamlessly customize communications to their specific target audiences. For example, sales reps should be able to customize each newsletter they create based on the demographic of the recipient to ensure it is filled with articles and photos that are relevant to them. To take it a step further, sales reps should be able to add in their personal bio and contact information to introduce themselves to their prospects and encourage replies.

Enabling personalization in this way helps to give the end consumer a connection with a real person rather than a faceless firm.

Accessibility of materials

Sales teams need to access content in real-time as they are speaking with prospects and customers. In many cases, they

have to contact marketing or another department to access the content they need. This may cause delays and disruptions to closing deals. Over time, this can lead to tensions between the two teams.

All of these challenges cause bottlenecks in the lead generation and sales processes, which can slow a firm's growth and productivity.

HOW TO ALIGN SALES AND MARKETING

How can firms align their sales and marketing teams to drive results in 2021? Here's a look at the key steps to follow to get the two teams on the same page.

Documented content marketing strategy

One of the most important steps in aligning sales and marketing teams is planning out a documented content marketing strategy. Being that sales and marketing so often operate side by side when nurturing prospects towards customers (or should be), it's wise to include representatives from the sales team in discussions about content marketing strategy.

By bringing sales in from the beginning, firms can find out their current needs, ideas, and perspectives. These are valuable insights as the sales team is the only one on the front lines



speaking with the customers. Then, firms can integrate those considerations into the strategy from the beginning. They can work together to identify the types of questions prospects are asking and the information they are seeking. Then, sales should be able to step in at any point along the content marketing journey to offer in-person guidance on the topics. Conversely, there should also be content available, so the buyer has whichever resource they prefer.

By creating this cohesive, documented strategy that serves both teams, firms will be starting from an aligned place. Further, both teams will be invested in the strategy and the results as they both have a role in creating it. Each month, the teams should then meet to revisit the strategy, track the results, and make adjustments as necessary. The alignment begins at this step with organization, collaboration, and awareness.

Frequent collaboration

In order to be aligned, sales and marketing teams can't operate in silos. In 2021, they need to be deeply integrated teams that collaborate on every step of the buyer's journey. By beginning with a plan that considers both teams, firms will be starting on the right foot.

However, action should be taken to ensure that the teams are in regular communication. Appoint leaders from each team that stay in touch during the week and schedule meetings to connect and review progress on a monthly and weekly basis.

Collaboration-focused company culture

Another issue to consider is the culture of a firm. Do their core values and practices encourage alignment of the teams, or do they mistakenly encourage the separation? Is it difficult for the two teams to meet or communicate? Does the firm encourage competition between the two? An important step is to consider the messages that leadership teams are sending to the two teams. It may be time to go back to the drawing board to launch an internal campaign that educates both teams on why collaboration is so important in the current environment and how to work together effectively.

Technological support

Lastly, to align sales and marketing teams in our current hybrid environment of digital and in-person communications, firms need a cutting-edge content management solution that can help them seamlessly communicate, create, track, and manage marketing and sales operations. What features are most helpful?

A single platform

One of the biggest problems facing firms today is an overload of platforms and applications. Too many programs can fragment operations and cause confusion, especially when multiple departments need the same information. Firms will benefit from a single platform that marketers can use for their content management and communication distribution, including such materials as marketing messages, fact sheets, investor notices, proposals, pitchbooks and mailings (print or electronic). Meanwhile, sales can use it for sales enablement — giving them the materials they need to close more deals.

For example, let's look at how it could function for event marketing. Marketing could use the single system to email and print materials promoting the overall event to wholesalers and brokers. They could also use it to provide the sales teams with posters, emails, and social posts that can be customized to promote to their current and prospective investors. Further, it could be used to create promotional items that a wholesaler or broker could distribute at the event, such as pens, stress balls, water bottles, etc.

By consolidating various platforms into one, firms can not only cut costs and save time, but they can also enable a single-source solution that both marketing and sales can access, helping to bring them into alignment.



Sales team enablement

The solution a firm chooses should not only be designed for marketers. The success of marketing relies on the sales team. Therefore, marketing communications should work to enable sales.

How? Marketing teams need to be able to create brand-approved, compliant materials that sales can access and personalize. These should be print or electronic, including custom kits and promotional materials. For example, marketing could create event promotions, market outlooks, proposals, pitchbooks, client and plan reviews, and more.

The ability for managers to grant permissions to the sales reps is key, so they can have access to the materials for which they are licensed. Then, they can log in and easily review all of the available materials to support the sales process. Further, they can personalize them to their client, adding relevant content and photos as well as adding in client information, personal bios, and more.

Once ready, sales reps should be able to download, email, or order the printed materials relevant to them. This allows them to access the materials they need in real-time, on their schedule, while ensuring all of the content is on-brand, relevant to their clients, and compliant.

Security and compliance

Security and compliance are also important factors to consider. Firms, especially those in highly-regulated industries like financial services, will benefit from a solution that provides them with certified technology and workflows that make it easy to adhere to the most demanding security and compliance requirements.

For example, integrating document review and approval into a content management solution allows for real-time collaboration with marketing, sales, compliance, and legal teams on content creation and updating. This streamlines the process and improves speed to market. It also provides historical reports to see what was changed and by whom within your content.

Further, systems should be in place to ensure regulated communications are delivered. For example, if an electronic s=message isn't successful, it can bounce to print automatically.

Additionally, the ability to make batch changes is also an important feature to consider. If a firm needs to update one piece of content for compliance, they should be able to automatically update all of the materials within the content management system, even if the materials were distributed by a sales team via the platform.

This type of solution helps firms to gain the technology they need to create content with peace of mind when it comes to compliance.

CRM integrations and more

Although it's helpful to have a content management solution that is a one-stop-shop for all communications and workflows, it doesn't have to be an island. Firms that rely on a CRM, sales desk, or marketing automation platform should look for the ability to integrate their program. This way it can continue to provide a single platform that meets all of a firm's needs.

Obtaining and Managing Delivery Consent

Marketing and sales representatives can help to ensure their messages are successfully received by connecting delivery preferences to IMR systems that connect to enterprise delivery preferences. This should be a feature of the solution a firm chooses. As a result, the platform can help ensure that customers receive personalized communications how and when they want them at a communication level. For example, they may want their newsletter electronic, but their plan review printed.

Business analytics and Insights

Lastly, the key to success in marketing communications is understanding what's working and what isn't. Without that information, firms may end up investing a large amount of money without seeing the returns.

Advanced business intelligence should guide a firm's content marketing strategy. For that to be possible, firms need a platform that collects and analyzes data to show them what types of digital content are being utilized and the level of engagement for each type. Further, it's important to have access to insights on the current usage of print and see trends for budgeting. Through real-time dashboards, you'll be able to find the information you need to inform critical business decisions.

WHY IS ALIGNMENT BETWEEN SALES AND MARKETING SO IMPORTANT?

The sales and marketing departments are two teams working toward the same goal. When they are aligned, firms see revenues increase, but the benefits don't end there. In addition to revenue growth, you can reduce the costs of market-entry, shorten your sales cycle, and reduce the costs associated with new sales.

Often, the biggest hurdle is communication. Both teams have their goals to hit and tasks to complete. But taking a step back to see the bigger picture can reveal how the goals and tasks align. Then, the teams need to align with a documented strategy, stay in communication, maintain a culture of collaboration, and utilize a content management platform that can streamline all operations for both teams.

UNLOCK PRODUCTIVITY AND GROWTH FOR YOUR ENTIRE TEAM WITH TOPPAN MERRILL

Toppan Merrill exists to help firms reach every customer on every channel without compromising accuracy or speed, and that can only happen by bringing sales and marketing teams together. We help firms by concentrating all of their communications on one easy platform that takes care of all of the details — end to end.

We can help you reduce your marketing tech stack, improve back-end processes, and give your team a proactive advantage rather than a reactive stance. With our innovative, single-source platform, Connect, you can leverage cross-channel solutions from electronic to print communications, helping marketing and sales teams to stay on the same page.

Embrace cohesive, forward-thinking technology that does the hard technical work for your business so you can focus on what matters most: seamlessly bringing value to your customers and growing your bottom line as effectively as possible.

[Schedule a demo to see how Connect can work to align your sales and marketing teams and grow your business!](#)

ABOUT TOPPAN MERRILL CORPORATION

Built on the needs of today's clients and the requirements of tomorrow, Toppan Merrill is your partner for your complex and regulated communications.

Toppan Merrill offers a shared commitment in using its combined resources, innovation, best practices, and more than 50 years of industry experience to expand what's possible for your business.

Toppan Merrill offers collaborative and flexible, technology-driven solutions backed by on-staff experts and exceptional service to more efficiently and accurately communicate mission-critical content.

Request a demo or call today and let Toppan Merrill help your business reach its full potential.