



## **Marketing: Beware of 'Outkicking the Coverage'** **By Laura Patterson**

We're in the middle of football season, and it seems appropriate (and hopefully not too cliché) to examine what we in marketing can learn from football.

At the most basic level, we can see a strong relationship between football, or any team sport for that matter, and business. To succeed, players must work together to execute well-orchestrated plays. We're all aware that in business, just as in team sports, weak players create vulnerabilities that can be exploited by the opposing team.

Although football metaphors abound in business, this article explores the idea of outkicking your coverage—an example of an overly strong player harming a team's performance.

Before we talk about how that applies to business in general and marketing in particular, we should explain what the phrase means. When an exceptional punter kicks the ball too far down the field, the receiver for the opposing team, aided by his blockers, actually has a greater chance of gaining precious yardage for the big play. Essentially, the punter has created an opportunity for the competition because his team is unable to be in proper position.

How does "outkicking your coverage" apply to business and marketing? A system—whether a team or other organization—comprises interdependent and interacting elements that function together to form a whole. Systems serve a purpose and are usually made up of subsystems. Marketing and Sales are part of the business system, and each is a subsystem.

Keeping the system in balance is critical to optimizing performance. Overperforming elements can just as easily knock a system out of balance as an underperforming element. Maintaining balance among all the moving parts is a real skill (which is why coaches, CEOs, and chief marketing officers earn the big bucks).

Externally, that might translate into maintaining balance between your company and your customers. Internally, it translates into making sure your marketing team doesn't get too far ahead of the rest of the organization.

With so many organizations in the thick of next-year planning, this is a good time to remind marketers to avoid outkicking their coverage, whether that's team members in Sales, Service, Product Development, or Management.

Here are some examples of Marketing "outkicking the coverage":

- When a product or service is announced before the organization is prepared to support the orders for the new products.
- When Marketing deploys programs that produce too many qualified leads for the sales team to process.
- When Marketing and Sales overpromise features and benefits, Product Development may not be able to deliver.

When those situations occur, real opportunities may wither and die, and good customers and suppliers may defect. We can borrow solutions to those scenarios from football as well.

Remember, the goal is to make sure that everyone arrives to the ball at the same time, which takes exceptional communication and synchronization. The kicker and the 10 players on the field need to work together; otherwise, the players will be moving blindly down the field.

In football, one way to achieve that goal is to increase the hang time, or the time the ball is in the air, to allow the rest of the team to get into position. Other techniques involve the kick itself clearly communicating where the ball is intended to land, such as on the right side of the field, so that everyone will know to move right.

In business, we can apply some of the same ideas. For example, prior to launching a new product or service, create a special "launch" team to include representatives from Sales, Customer Service, IT, Product Development, Marketing, and Media/Public Relations so everyone knows the intended focus of the launch.

Work to make sure everyone is ready to support the launch and has adequate time to prepare. It should be clear to everyone on the team where Marketing is aiming, such as toward a new market segment or a specific customer demographic or persona, so everyone can be moving in the same direction.

It is up to the coach to make sure there is adequate lane and depth coverage. The marketing leadership needs to make sure Marketing is synced up and that Sales and Product Development are ready and enabled to address the opportunities generated by Marketing.

Football teams practice constantly. They run plays and work different scenarios. For business, that means having in place well-defined processes—to manage product and service launches, to evaluate and prioritize leads, and to align internal and external expectations.

For example, your company may need a lead-scoring process to help decide which opportunities can be closed now, versus those that may need further nurturing. Without a well-defined process to score leads, your sales team may take a "let's see what falls out of the tree" approach, which wastes time and can result in poor choices that translate into lost revenue.

In team sports, it's all about communication. It's important that your organization have a process to ensure clear communication and expectations among Marketing, Sales, and Product Development. In the end, the right hand and the left hand need to be in sync; otherwise, the imbalance will result in lost opportunities.

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