



## When the Customer Is the Focus, Sales and Marketing Fall into line

By Laura Patterson, President

Your Sales and Marketing organizations are two of your most critical links to your customers. How these two organizations work and play together impacts the experience of your customers and your company's bottom line.

[Research suggests](#) that cross-functional alignment among Sales, Marketing, and Product organizations can help companies achieve up to 19% faster revenue growth and 15% higher profitability. When Sales and Marketing are in sync, the company is better able to attract buyers and sell to them, achieving [higher customer retention and win rates](#). Forrester suggests that when these organizations are less aligned, revenue can decline by as much as 7%. The financial benefits are clear, which is why companies often invest a tremendous amount of energy aligning these two organizations.

Clearly the Marketing and Sales relationship is about more than a simple handoff at the point an opportunity is generated. You may be thinking, "We are already aligned around the customer." Maybe. However, if your focus is on aligning Marketing and Sales around how your organization processes leads, we would challenge your conclusion. Lead management is an internal process. Your customers don't really care how you process your leads. They care about the experience they have at every interaction point with your organization. Therefore, the key is to align your Sales and Marketing organizations with the customer as the focal point.

### **There Is More to Alignment Than Just Lead Generation**

Let's start at the bottom and work our way up to see where there are key customer-centric alignment points. We'll start with the most obvious, the lead generation process. Perhaps you believe you have already aligned your lead process with the customer in mind. The following two scenarios might help clarify whether this is the case.

#### **Scenario A: Pipeline Elements**

- Identify the buyer.
- Send an email or series of emails with a call-to-action.

- Call/connect to engage.
- Assess the need and opportunity.
- Determine the budget and timing.
- Schedule a sales conversation.
- Deliver a presentation.
- Submit a proposal.

### **Scenario B: Pipeline Elements**

- See a video.
- Visit website.
- Read a blog post.
- Download a document.
- Request a call.
- Describe a project.
- Attend a webinar.
- Schedule a meeting.
- Provide specification and budget.
- Participate in a demo.
- Request a proposal.

Which scenario sounds more like how your Marketing and Sales team looks at the lead gen process? Did you catch the nuances between the two scenarios? If you thought Scenario B described customer behavior and Scenario A described company behavior, you are right on target.

To succeed at Scenario B you need to understand the [customer buying process](#) and the key interaction points. You will need a complete inventory of all your customer interaction points to align around the customer experience.

Aligning around the customer buying process is the first step. The next step moves you back from this process, where we can see that being clear about what kind of experience you want to create and comparing that to the actual experience provides additional insights to improve Marketing and Sales alignment.

Take another step back from this, and you'll be in a conversation about your customer [strategy](#), which to execute will require Marketing and Sales to be in sync. Take another step back, and you should be asking what kind of customers do we want to serve. Customer and market segments provide another alignment opportunity.

One more step, and you're in a conversation about what constitutes success for your organization, looking at questions like what problems/needs do our existing and current customers have, how many customers have this problem, how do we help solve this problem better and differently, and what does success look like for the customer and for us. In only five steps you've moved from aligning around the downstream, lead gen, to aligning around the [upstream](#), Demand with a capital D.

### **Alignment Is a Process and a Project**

Each of these steps and the associated questions put the customer square at the center of the discussion, which facilitates the [alignment](#) process. For Sales and Marketing to

be truly aligned, alignment needs to be in place at all five of these steps. It requires open minds, objective leadership, and specific skills. If you're ready to tackle this important project but think you may be missing some key skills, [let's talk](#).

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