



MAXIMIZE YOUR
MARKETING



COLLABORATION /

On the Same Page

Everyone benefits when sales and marketing are aligned and working toward the same goals.

by **Bridget McCrea**

IN A BUSINESS WORLD WHERE large e-tailers are taking market share away from wholesale distributors, a persistent labor shortage is complicating both hiring and retention, and customer buying preferences and habits are changing quickly, distributors need teams that are aligned and working toward the same core goals.

In other words, the last thing electrical distributors need is sales and marketing teams that are at odds with each other. If sales and marketing don't talk, then someone is bound to get blamed when sales decrease, revenues are down, and the new customer pipeline dwindles. The sales team may get the credit for boosting sales revenues, for instance, while the marketing team gets blamed when sales are down. This divide is particularly deep at companies where sales and marketing don't get together for regular meetings, discuss their challenges, and explore opportunities together.

The current business climate hasn't made the situation any easier. After experiencing a monumental

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shift in how they operate as a result of the pandemic, distributor sales teams would probably like to recenter their efforts back on face-to-face customer meetings and phone calls. Over the past three years, however, customers have gotten pretty used to doing things virtually and many would now prefer to do their research and buying online, with salespeople standing by ready to help as needed.

This shift in both shopping and buying habits puts marketing teams in the perfect position to be able to support sales teams as they navigate the new realities of the selling world. With U.S. B2B sales expected to reach \$1.8 trillion this year—roughly 17% of all B2B sales—getting sales and marketing teams working from the same playbook is no longer a “nice to have”; it’s a “must have.”

“If distributors want to be competitive in the digital marketplace—which incorporates e-commerce and the use of the Internet, websites, social media, and other digital means of getting in front of your customer—their sales and marketing teams definitely have to work together,” said **Susan Merlo, a digital sales and marketing strategist at Next Level iMedia and author of *The Digital Distributor: Six Steps to Accelerate Sales***. “Their alliance ensures that the customer or prospect receives—and hopefully responds to—the appropriate sales message.”

The need for better sales and marketing alignment at the distributor level existed before the global pandemic, but COVID and its subsequent impacts accelerated the trend. Getting face time with customers was already difficult, for example, and the pandemic temporarily removed any “in-person” meetings that were left on the calendar. At that point, any customers who weren’t already doing their shopping, researching, and buying online began moving in that direction.

“Buyers know that in many cases it’s easier to Google something than it is to pick up the phone and call someone for that information,” Merlo explained. And because most customers are also using a similar tactic in their personal lives as B2C buyers, the transition to digital business has been relatively natural for them.

“These days, a salesperson’s ability to get in front of a customer is often largely dependent on the distributorship’s digital collateral,” Merlo continued. This of course connects directly back to the marketing team’s ability to produce digital content that both attracts and engages customers. For best results, sales teams must be involved in these efforts. This is important because salespeople know their customers’ goals, pain points, and what keeps those buyers up at night. And anytime those challenges can be diagnosed and solved by the distributor, it positions that company to win the sale.

If marketing teams are left to guess at what those web visitors, prospects, and customers are looking for—because the “digital experience” is a different animal—then it could

lead to missed sales opportunities. It can also drive a wedge between sales and marketing teams that are working toward different goals and relying on guesswork within their respective roles.

So unless your sales team is going to write the product information, sales messaging, blogs, and other content that customers expect to see on your website, marketing teams need to be kept informed of the latest trends, requirements, and challenges that customers are dealing with. “Someone has to bring and keep the marketing team up to speed on what’s going on at the customer level and what type of information buyers are seeking,” said Merlo. “The sales team would be best positioned to share this much-needed expertise and knowledge.”

Solving Customer Problems

In an ideal world, sales teams and marketing professionals both would be focused on solving customer problems. When this synergy happens, everyone centers on how to make the B2B buyer’s job easier, eliminate friction from the buying process, and provide solutions that keep customers coming back for more. The fastest route to this

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“nirvana” runs right through the C-suite, where leaders who adopt a problem-solving mindset can readily transfer that mission to their managers and employees.

“The directive that sales and marketing must work together and maintain equal footing in the organization has to come from leadership, such as the president or CEO,” Merlo advised. With that box checked off, the next step is to set up a series of meetings that will involve members of both the sales and marketing teams. Together, attendees can work through some exercises from Merlo’s book that help each department understand the other.

For example, you can identify a customer problem and ask both sales and marketing teams to come up with ways to solve it. If electrical contractors are struggling to find electricians in the tight labor market, for instance, have both sides of the table brainstorm solutions to the problem. You can come up with a list of area trade schools where contractors can recruit new graduates or develop a series of blogs on the “Top Ways to Find New Electricians in 2023.” Both pieces of content can be published online (on the company’s website, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) and handed to customers during face-to-face sales meetings.

“The key is to narrow down the buyer persona and then explore the various goals and pain points that persona is experiencing right now,” said Merlo. “Then, brainstorm the different ways that you can help them reach their goals or overcome their challenges and use that to tie your sales and marketing campaigns directly back to that buyer.”

Another reason to get sales and marketing on the same page is that the former can usually rattle off exactly what challenges their customers are grappling with right now. After all, they hear those gripes on a daily basis—whether the customer is sitting in front of them, talking to them on the phone, or sending them an email.

Marketing isn’t always privy to this level of detail, which makes the “sharing sessions” even more valuable for both departments and the distributorship itself.

For best results, Merlo suggests starting off with a series of meetings where sales and marketing talk to each other, jot down notes, and then refer back to those notes as they go back to their respective roles. Reinforce the need to “work as a team,”

websites leave without any kind of interaction. This presents a major opportunity for the electrical distributor that puts the time and effort into dialing in their digital sales and marketing messages.

“If a distributor sees that thousands of people came to their websites without making a purchase or otherwise interacting with the content, it’s probably because those visitors can’t find what they’re looking

“The reality is that most people these days won’t speak to a salesperson until they absolutely have to, which puts the pressure on the distributor to create the best, most informative digital presence possible. The company with the best content will be the one that attracts the most eyeballs, answers buyers’ questions, and ultimately makes the sale.”

—Susan Merlo,
Next Level iMedia

she said, and ensure effective two-way information sharing by helping marketing better understand the end customers and their needs and educating sales teams on what goes into developing and honing an effective digital marketing presence in the modern business environment.

“Most importantly, marketing needs to know everything about the buyers that’s in a salesperson’s head,” said Merlo. “After all, the idea is to sell more and make money. If marketing’s not familiar with the customer base, they’re not going to be able to speak to the goals or hit the pain points that matter.”

Don’t Ignore the Problem

Buyers are doing most of their research online these days, yet Merlo said that 90% of the people who visit

for,” said Merlo, who tells distributors to set up “bread-crumb-like trails” that pull the buyers in, answer their questions, and educate them on the value of working with them vs. one of their competitors.

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