

Different Worlds, Different Realities

Back in the days when I sold computers, marketing people used to hate me. I worked in a regional sales office that was located in the same city as the corporate headquarters. Whenever a new product was introduced, marketing kicked off their road shows with us. Eager to show off their hot new stuff, they'd send an entire entourage to our facility. As salespeople, we were excited to learn about anything that could give us a competitive edge.

We'd spend hours listening to talking heads cover every excruciating detail of how the system worked, the multiple configurations available, its connectivity, how to demonstrate its capabilities and comparisons to the competition. Then the focus would switch to the marketing campaign that was being implemented. Finally they trotted out the sales collateral. There was always an impressive display of brochures, fact sheets, tech specs and more.

As the meeting would draw to a close, they'd always ask, *"Does anyone have a question we haven't addressed yet?"* My hand was always the first in the air. I could see the shudder run through their bodies. They looked around the room, hoping to call on someone else. But, with both hands waving wildly, I was hard to ignore.

With deep resignation, they'd say, *"Yes, Jill. What do you want to know?"*

"Well," I'd answer. *"Actually, I have quite a few questions. I think this new SureFire! system sounds really cool. It's clearly on the leading edge and a big step for the company."*

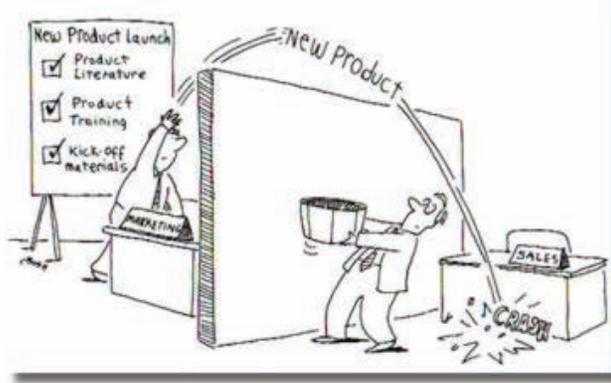
Their heads were nodding as they listened politely, but you could see that they were waiting for the shoe to drop. It always did when I raised my hand. As marketers, you're probably wondering why they dreaded what was coming.

Marketing is from Mars

and Sales is from Venus

But the reality of the situation is this: Marketing is from Mars and Sales is from Venus. The organizations live in totally different worlds and have completely different perspectives on what's needed for success. In way too many companies, communications between the two groups is minimal and alignment is non-existent.

So what was I asking about? I had a litany of questions on a wide range of topics. I was trying to put everything I'd learnt into the context of what it would take to sell this new offering. Marketing had given me a huge data dump, but shared virtually nothing to help me speed up the sales velocity. They'd left all that up to me.



I'd been given all the details, but not one thing to help me drive sales. Virtually every question I asked Marketing was answered with, "That's your job to figure out, Jill. You're in sales." Or they'd say, "Just show the prospects. They'll understand its value." Those poor marketers had labored furiously to get the product out on time, so my demands for more info frustrated them to no end.

Ultimately I was able to put the puzzle pieces together, but it usually took a couple extra months. During my learning curve, I always lost a few good prospects – mostly to indecision, but sometimes to competition. Unfortunately not all my colleagues were quite as quick on the uptake and their sales results (or lack thereof) showed it.

Failure of Marketing to give Sales what they needed hurt the company big time

To make a long story short, the failure of Marketing to give Sales what they needed hurt the company big time as sales results failed to materialize in the projected timeframe. Each group pointed fingers at the other, claiming it was their fault. Sales screamed that the pricing was too high and the new offering was missing important capabilities. Marketing shouted back that product was perfectly fine, but the darn sales force couldn't sell value.

Even when Marketing asked how they could help, the feedback from the sales organization was often next to worthless. Salespeople couldn't articulate what was missing because they'd never seen anything different. So they always reverted to what they knew and asked for better brochures (which only exacerbated the problem) or more advertising (which was money down the drain).

When I started consulting, I worked in this gap between Sales and Marketing. I made sure the salespeople had what they needed to jumpstart new products/services in the marketplace. As a result, my clients were able to shorten time to revenue, improve the lifetime profitability of their offering, and keep major competitors out of key accounts.

Sellers need you to know this! Why? Because it's really tough these days to set up meetings with corporate decision makers. Virtually every call they make rolls into voicemail. They leave messages, but seldom (if ever) get a return call. In fact, they may leave a dozen messages and still never talk to a human being. If they do happen to catch a decision maker on the phone, it's only because he/she was expecting a call from someone else at that exact moment in time.

Virtually every call they make rolls into voicemail

That's the world they live in. If you stop to think about it for just one moment, you'll realize it's the same in your office too. My guess is that you also barricade yourselves from salespeople.

Sellers also want you to know that corporate decision makers expect them to be experts — and that isn't limited to in-depth knowledge of their product or service. Unless they sound like they really understand their prospect's business and industry needs, they'll never get their foot in the door. Becoming a trusted advisor is an imperative in today's market, but few sellers have the luxury of taking years to develop the requisite expertise. They need it now. Or better yet, yesterday.

Now that you have a better idea regarding this exceedingly difficult challenge, we'll talk about how you can help sellers get more and better prospects in their pipeline. The first two suggestions tie in with lead generation programs developed by Marketing. The remainder of the recommendations support sellers in their own prospecting efforts — which should be targeted at specific corporations they'd like to land as customers.

1. High quality, well nurtured leads

More than ever before, salespeople want Marketing to focus on lead generation. But their definition of a quality lead is often very different from what they're typically handed by Marketing. From the seller's perspective, being handed a list of 217 people who expressed interest at a recent trade show is a nightmare in the making. On the other hand, Marketing is pleased as punch to have collected all those names.

The sales organization really needs to be involved in defining what a high quality lead looks like. This definition may include demographic factors such as industry type, size of company and revenues. But it also needs to include much more. One of my clients is very specific about the best prospects for their service offering. They only work with firms that have 5000+ employees.

"Businesses that put in place measurable and repeatable demand generation processes see these investments pay significant dividends in the field. Higher revenue, shorter sales cycles, better communication and increased scale are only some of the benefits"

- Mark Organ,
CEO, Eloqua

Plus they have the greatest success with "progressive firms" which have the following characteristics:

- They're keenly aware of their market position.
- Much of their growth has come through acquisition.
- Attracting and retaining top talent is a business imperative.
- They're focused on streamlining operations and consolidating functions.
- They use online services in every aspect of their business.

Clearly this puts an additional burden on Marketing, but Sales doesn't want to spend its time trying to connect with impossible-to-reach decision makers only to find out that the company is too small, has been shrinking in recent years or is a slow adopter of new technology.

Sales needs Marketing to put together a long-term program that nurtures prospects at the very early stages of the sales cycle. They need marketers to identify potential decision makers, to send out white papers, to invite people who've shown interest to a webinar. Then, they need to work with Marketing to define when the lead should officially be passed over to the sales organization for follow-up. So if you're getting complaints about your lead generation program, sit down with the sales force right now and reach agreement on these critical definitions.

2. Strong value propositions

The lack of powerful, compelling value propositions hurt more sales efforts than any other factor. It continually amazes me how few salespeople can clearly articulate the business results that customers get from using their products or services.

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The responsibility for this failure lies in the hands of both Marketing and Sales. When new offerings are introduced, Marketing touts leading-edge capabilities, state-of-the-art technology or unique methodologies. Expensive collateral glorifies the multitude of new features. Detailed charts point out the differences between competitors. Salespeople, armed with all this wonderful knowledge, race out to their top prospects, eager to land a big deal.

Unfortunately, they usually fail. Most corporate decision makers don't want to waste time meeting with sellers just to learn about their products or services. Nor are they one bit interested in how great your offering is compared to the competition. Their only concern is how it impacts their business when compared to the status quo.

5. Enticing voicemail strategiest awareness

Most sellers don't have a clue what to do with voicemail. They've resigned themselves to the fact that it's nearly impossible to talk to a human being. They're shocked if anyone calls them back. And they don't have a clue what they can do differently.

Most sellers don't have a clue what to do with voicemail

Here's how a typical voicemail message sounds today: BAD EXAMPLE

"Hi John. This is Terry Smith calling. I'm the account executive with Generic Systems. We specialize in working with companies in the area of marketing communications. We offer a wide range of services to handle all your advertising, direct mail and graphics needs.

I'd like to set up a time to find out how you're handling Marcom in your company and show you some of the really neat things we're doing for some of our customers. I'd be glad to meet with you at your earliest convenience. It would only take about ½ hour. My number is 541-xxx-xxx. I look forward to talking with you soon. Have a great day!"

This message is so boring that it's deleted before the end of the first paragraph. Marketing needs to show Sales how to create customer-focused messages that get listened to by decision makers. Show them how to integrate their value propositions into their voicemail. Show them how to leverage their ideas and insights to pique a decision maker's curiosity.

Marketing needs to test the voicemail strategies before handing them off to the sales force

For example, salespeople will be much more successful with a message like this:

"John. Terry Smith from Generic Systems calling. In researching your company, I noticed that a key business initiative in the upcoming six months is to expand into the medical devices market. I have some ideas about how you can leverage technology to penetrate that market segment much more quickly. One of our recent customers achieved their 6-month's projections in just 4 months and is well on their way to a banner year. Let's get together and talk. My number is 541-xxx-xxx. (repeat) I look forward to meeting with you."

The Author



Jill Konrath

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, is a recognized sales strategist in the highly competitive B2B market. She helps her clients crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and create demand for their offering.

Konrath publishes online newsletter with subscribers from more than 88 countries plus an industry-leading blog. She's developed the *Winning More Sales* manual, *Getting Into Big Companies* audio program and multiple teleseminars on critical sales topics. Most recently, Konrath has been featured in *Selling Power*, *Entrepreneur*, *New York Times*, *The Business Journal*, *Sales & Marketing Management*, *WSJ's Start-Up Journal*, *Sales & Marketing Excellence*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Business Advisor* and countless online publications.

Speaking

Jill Konrath is a popular speaker at sales meetings and industry events. She wakes your sales force up to the new realities and shares a wealth of strategies to help them be successful. Her approachable style combined with her depth of knowledge make her a winner with even the toughest sales groups.

New Book

Stop struggling to get into big companies. Learn practical strategies to crack into corporate accounts, shrink your sales cycle and close more business in Jill Konrath's new book.

Download the first two chapters

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