



Three **Critical** Ways Marketing Can Be Applied to Close More Sales

By Andy Slipher

Do you operate in an organization where sales begins with a capital “S” and marketing with a lower case “m?” Sales-centric organizations often operate at such a high level in sales, they lack marketing prowess. Some are even altogether marketing-phobic, believing marketers exist to usurp the importance of salespeople or to replace them altogether. What happens, as a result, is that sales-centric organizations fail to integrate fundamental marketing principles into the sales process—principles that could actually improve their effectiveness. Although this phenomenon is not uncommon, it can leave customers with feelings that range from a lack of a clear understanding to downright confusion. Who does this kind of thinking benefit? Certainly not the customer.

The bottom line regarding marketing and its place in a sales-dependent organization is that it should thrive upon supporting sales, and not to supplanting it. It’s a simple fact that in certain environments where customer relationships must be continually nurtured and where product investment is high (business-to-business environments, for example), sales and good salespeople are of paramount importance. They help solve customer problems, bestow benefits, share product knowledge, behave proactively, and are simply there for customers when called upon.

At the same time, such organizations can have blind spots when it comes to using marketing to their collective advantage. They don’t see that marketing is there to extend and expand the sales opportunity. As a result, their salespeople aren’t fully prepared and equipped with what they need to do their best while enabling better outcomes for their customers.

Want to improve your odds of success in sales by using marketing to your advantage? Here are three ways:

1. Understand what marketing is and what it is not.

Marketing is not simply media. It’s not cheap or cheesy gimmicks designed to get the attention of your customer. Rather, proper marketing is anything you do in good faith to get your product or service into the hands of the customer. The breadth of marketing spans the entire buying cycle, and beyond. As such, effective marketing involves planning, investment and understanding of the needs of your customer. Think of it as everything else that wraps around your sales approach (in front of, during and beyond) to ensure that the customer has a positive and persuasive experience.

For example, what if, by asking your business-to-business customer, you learn that he or she will have to champion your business and product to others within his or her organization? What do

you do? It's not feasible to be at every internal meeting. You might instead think in terms of clear, succinct messaging and professional materials to leave with your customer—ones that upon initial presentation by you, he or she could then represent to others with an adequate degree of confidence and knowledge. This is one possible marketing tool. But, it begins by discovering and understanding customer's own mindset, needs and buying process.

2. Embrace the visual.

Effective salespeople are generally great at the verbal aspect of selling—persuading with words. However, virtually all customers today also rely upon and expect the visual. For example, who would have thought 20 years ago that we could manage a significant part of buying a new home by taking virtual home tours from anywhere? Yet this is the world we now live in, thanks to technology. The lesson is that people are now accustomed to buying only what they can see. It's a studied fact that people generally remember only 20% of what they hear, but up to 50% of what they both hear and see. Therefore, the more you can help them visualize what they are buying (even if what you sell is a service), the greater your odds of success. How does this play into your sales process? How could you improve upon the visual beauty of what you sell? What objects, models, graphs, photos, maps, videos, tables or illustrations could you use to better persuade? What is both practical and effective? If you cannot yet answer these questions, start by asking your customers what they would want to see more of.

3. Integrate your process.

Have you identified and broken down your sales process? What is the first thing you do? Second, third and so on? How does your process both move the sale forward and serve the needs of the customer? These are wider questions beyond, "How do I get more chances in front the customer?" Yet, by asking such questions, you have the opportunity to integrate a wider range of tactics into your sales process that work toward a common goal. For example, rather than focusing on getting a sales call first, what about an approach that begins with having a wider conversation with would-be customers about their needs and challenges? How would you ask such questions? Would you engage with them around a common issue through social media? Would you mail them an old-school letter? Would you offer a free lunch-and-learn session? Or would you make a gratis overture to solve a relevant problem in order to build even more goodwill and trust? This opening up of the sale to a larger process engages a marketing mindset. It integrates your everyday sales tools with a broader set of options that work together for better outcomes.

Sales and marketing shouldn't be thought of as mutually exclusive. After all, they serve a common goal. Even if you are deep in a sales-centric organization, you can still integrate strategic marketing thinking and tactics into your own approach to improve your chances for success, while delighting more of your customers in the process.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*Andy Slipher is founder of Slipher Marketing, a consultancy where strategy comes first, followed by tangible marketing results. He is an accomplished strategist, interim CMO, speaker and writer on marketing strategy. He is marketing lecturer for SMU's accredited Bank Operations Institute for professional bankers, and for the Independent Bankers Association of Texas (IBAT). Andy is the author of *The Big How: Where Strategy Meets Success*. For more information, visit TheBigHow.com*