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Restoring the Balance:

Why Marketing Holds the Key to Effective Selling in a Changed Business World

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Introduction: The Crisis in Sales Management

Is selling harder than ever? Consider some recent statistics:

- the average sales cycle is 22% longer than five years ago¹
- more than 50% of prospective buyers talk to users of a product before they contact the vendor²
- three-quarters of companies reported a decline or no improvement in lead conversion rates over the past year³

These figures add up to a crisis in sales management. Simply put, salespeople have to put in more effort for each dollar of revenue. Unless managers can reverse this trend, the costs of selling will become higher than their companies can afford.

This paper will discuss a way to restore the balance between buyers and sellers, and in doing so, help businesses profit from the new Web-based buying process. Sales leaders might be surprised to learn that the solution to these problems is right under their nose – in data collected by marketing.

What's the Problem?

Selling has always been hard. But the eternal stresses of competition and economic cycles have been joined by a fundamental change in the purchase process. Internet searches and social networks now empower prospects to research solutions in depth without even talking to a company representative. By the time they do reach out to your company, they've probably formed pretty firm opinions of their needs and how well your company can meet them.

Since a large part of the traditional sales role is to engage buyers early, build trusted relationships and frame conversations in a way that is favorable to a specific product, this is a major disadvantage. Sales professionals are struggling to overcome a relationship gap that is directly threatens their success.

Cold Lead

Date	Activity
25-Oct-08	Call - Left Voice Mail
15-Oct-08	Call - Left Voice Mail
10-Oct-08	Email Sent
5-Oct-08	Call - Left Voicemail

How Marketing Can Help

What can sales management do to help? Increasingly, the answer lies with marketing.

Think about it: if prospects wait longer before they engage with sales, then they're spending more time with marketing instead. This means that sales and marketing must cooperate to ensure that every marketing interaction delivers the right messages to move buyers through their decision-making process.

But today's marketers do more than deliver messages. They also gather data. In fact, marketers gather a great deal of data about how people research your company online - both before and after they identify themselves. This data can reveal important insights into the wants and needs of each prospect - exactly what sales needs to make that one to one connection.

¹ SiriusDecisions *Research Brief: Buying In to Longer Sales Cycles*, 2009

² Enqiuro, *Mapping the BuyerSphere*, April 2009.

³ Aberdeen Group, *Sales Intelligence: The Secret to Sales Nirvana*, January 2009

From Who You Are to What You Do

Effective salespeople have always used a variety of data sources to understand their best prospects. Where industry directories like D&B and OneSource once ruled, business and social networks like Linked-In, Jigsaw, Plaxo, Facebook and Twitter are now ascendant. The depth of contact information and detailed relationship mapping makes these resources potentially more valuable than ever.

Yet even the best public data is generic. It can tell sales professionals who their prospects are, where they work, who they know and where they've been. But it rarely tells you what they are thinking. Worse still, the same data is available to all competitors, so it cannot be a source of true competitive advantage.

Deep within your marketing department, a great deal of data is being collected that can reveal much more. Information on website visitors, email response rates, popular search terms, form submission data – each is an important piece of the puzzle created by prospects researching products and solutions on the Web. These clues are part of a new 'digital body language' that, when assembled can provide your sales team with a detailed profile of prospect interests that is vastly more useful than public data alone.

Hot Lead

Date	Activity
25-Oct-08	Call - Left Voice Mail
10/17/2008 9:15 am	Website visit - 2 pages
15-Oct-08	Call - Left Voice Mail
10/11/2008 9:00 am	Website visit - 10 pages
10-Oct-08	Email - Response
10/7/2008 8:45 am	Website visit - 4 pages
5-Oct-08	Call - Left Voice Mail

Best of all, this activity data belongs only to your company. No competitor can use it against you.

Breaking into the Data Vault

The good news – make that great news – is that today's marketing automation systems gather this data as a matter of course. Email response, Website visits, clickstreams, Web forms and surveys are automatically collected using a single database organized for campaign execution and analysis. It's not even a question of mining for gold. The gold has already been refined, cast into bars, carried into the vault and neatly stacked.

The problem is, that vault is down in marketing where salespeople can't reach it. So the final step in letting salespeople take advantage of marketing-generated information is simply getting it to them.

That's easier said than done, for a number of reasons. Salespeople have a vastly different set of requirements for their tools than marketers.

- Data must be easy to access. Salespeople won't search in marketing systems for valuable prospect data; sales tools must bring the data to them. At a minimum, this means the marketing data must be integrated with the CRM system or other primary contact management system. Prospect activity data must be presented with information captured in the CRM system to give salespeople a more holistic view of their prospects: for example, showing how a telephone call triggered website visit.
- The data must be intuitive and understandable. Salespeople need graphical summaries that highlight important trends in prospect behavior at a glance. Then, they must be able to drill down into the specifics, to see which email generated a response or which Web pages the prospect visited. This combination of pattern recognition and nuggets of detail is invaluable in helping the salesperson quickly make relevant connections with buyers, instead of simply guessing at their motivations.

- The system must be easy to use. A dedicated salesperson will waltz on hot coals to make quota. But the more effort a system requires, the less it will be used. Beyond an intuitive, user-centric interface, the tool must be configurable so that each salesperson can match personal preferences such as the degree of detail immediately visible and which prospect activities will trigger alerts.

Making an Impact

The impact can be enormous. The most important application may be using prospect profile data to help salespeople prepare for a call. This is when they review everything they know about a prospect in order to plan the most effective approach. Insights gleaned from the data at this point contribute most directly to choices that lead to a sale.

Prospect profile data can also improve sales forecasting accuracy because activity details give a clearer picture of the buyer's intent. A company checking out support plans and reference clients is close to a decision. One that receives a proposal and never visits the company Web site is unlikely to buy.

Prospect profile data can improve sales productivity. For example, real-time alerts for web-based activity free the salesperson from personally monitoring dormant opportunities yet still react to new signs of interest. That reaction may be a call, an email related to the activity in question, or adding the prospect to a nurturing program that can 'warm up' buyers over time.

Making It Work

The holy grail of sales effectiveness is the combination of these assets on the salesperson's desktop: prospect profile data, external data feeds like D&B or Jigsaw, and packaged response materials like email templates, letters or nurturing programs. The real challenge is not technology, but presenting the data so that salespeople can easily use it. The rewards for getting this right are significant, particularly in a tough selling environment where salespeople are looking for any insight that provides a competitive advantage.

The full potential for cooperation between sales and marketing extends beyond information sharing. Today's prospects visit marketing-run Web sites and receive marketing-generated emails throughout the buying cycle. This means that sales and marketing must jointly define the business rules and processes that determine which messages are delivered in each situation. They must jointly own what has traditionally been called the 'sales funnel.'

This necessitates a new level of cooperation between marketing and sales. This isn't always easy, but the benefit is freeing salespeople to focus on what they do best: building trusted relationships and influencing the buying process. These are the tasks that can never be automated.

Summary

Changes in the buying process pose a direct threat to sales effectiveness. When salespeople were the gatekeepers for company information, delivering that information gave them many opportunities to understand each prospect and build a relationship. Today, prospects gather much of that information on independently, greatly reducing sales influence.

Closer integration between marketing and sales can help restore the balance. Salespeople can analyze prospect behavior earlier in the process and use this knowledge to provide more relevant and valuable communications that foster a positive company-prospect relationship.

The easiest and most productive first step in this sales evolution is to make web-based behavior and activities readily available on the salesperson's desktop. Success will yield immediate improvements in sales effectiveness and pave the way towards more extensive collaboration in the future.

About Raab Associates Inc.

Since 1987, Raab Associates Inc. has provided independent consulting on marketing technology and analysis to major firms in retail, communications, financial services, hospitality, and technology industries. David M. Raab has written hundreds of columns for publications including *DM News*, *DM Review* (now *Information Management*) and *Relationship Marketing Report* and spoken to audiences around the world. He is author of the *Raab Guide to Demand Generation Systems* and *The Marketing Performance Measurement Toolkit*.

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About Eloqua

Eloqua is the category-defining marketing automation leader and provider of best practices expertise for marketers around the world. The company's mission is to make its customers the best marketers on earth. Thousands of customers from leading companies such as American Express, AON, Apple, Cognos, Dow Jones, Fidelity, Seagate and Sybase rely on the power of Eloqua to execute, automate and measure programs that generate revenue. Eloqua helps companies read and decode their buyers' Digital Body Language™, thereby improving the quality and quantity of sales leads, increasing marketing effectiveness, and accelerating the selling process. Eloqua is headquartered in Vienna, Virginia, with offices in Toronto, London, Singapore and throughout North America. For more information, please call 866-327-8764 or email demand@eloqua.com.