

MARKETING/PLANS

Aligning Sales and Marketing



by Linda Hanson

ALIGNMENT COMES by nurturing a healthy culture filled with people who know where and how they fit. Alignment is a unique problem for sales and marketing. So, maintaining alignment with the rest of the company requires effort. Who better to exert this effort than sales managers who are people-oriented by nature and who are concerned about developing the right culture to meet customers' needs? Add to that the marketing department's close work with planning and sales and you have a powerful team to implement "best practices" and align the corporate vision, mission, and activity.

Achieving corporate alignment means matching people and teams to the organization. If the CEO understands the value of achieving alignment, then the CEO needs to hire sales and marketing managers who feel the same way.

Top-Down Alignment

How do leaders become as comfort-

able with their cultures as they are with their numbers? They need to walk away from their "hard skills" myopia and look more closely at the softer skills that create their culture.

While it all begins with leadership and the right people, sales and marketing are unwittingly sabotaging strategic plans by not sharing information. Poor communication with other departments creates silos and poor performance. "People need financial and other information," says Tim Webster, CEO of American Italian Pasta Company. "If their scopes of influence and understanding are too narrow, they're not likely to make sound business decisions."

With fewer layers of management today, it makes accessibility and interaction with employees more difficult because of the increased number of direct reports. Yet personal contact is more important than ever. Here's a typical scenario. The sales department plans to increase market share by launching four new products. The marketing department has developed the launch plans. The operations department doesn't hear about it and is completely caught off guard when it comes to delivering. The result is finger pointing.

Mergers and acquisition are creating two big hurdles: communication and change. According to *Fortune*, in 70 percent of cases where CEOs fail, the problem is "bad execution...not getting

things done, being indecisive, not delivering on commitments." But what is really behind bad execution? The wrong processes and poor communication that results in a plan that cannot be implemented. So, if sales and marketing worked closely together, they could build unity to achieve alignment.

Sales and marketing managers can create a united front in five ways:

- 1) Make sure sales and marketing mission statements are short and complement the corporate mission and vision.
- 2) Set objectives that support the mission statement to develop good strategies and plans.
- 3) Keep plans simple but tied to results that fit the strategy, vision, and mission.
- 4) To ensure that sales and marketing plans support each other, work together to review and develop each other's plans.
- 5) Present sales and marketing plans to the other departments together to quickly address issues and gain consensus.

Sales and marketing departments need to look at plans as living, breathing documents that are adaptable to change. Also, it helps to foster a united front to ensure no barriers will block plans. By focusing on a united front, sales and marketing can ultimately turn their plans into success. **SME**

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