

An IRSMarketing White Paper

## Sales Engagement

By Paul Stewart, Chairman, IRSMarketing Ltd

Back in the day, the dominant feeling in sales for marketing was benign tolerance, and that was on a good day. If a request was made to sales for action or accountability, a rye smile would dismiss the concept. When marketers had the nerve to suggest sales approaches or talk about customer needs, sales hackles would rise. “When you’ve been out selling sonny, then come and talk to me about customers.”

In those days, too, marketing was its own worst enemy. Quality was low with direct mail generating no more than enquiries, most of which were fruitless. Salespeople lost heart and confidence in marketing’s ability to deliver genuine sales opportunities. DIY and NIH were rife. There was little marketing focus, virtually no analysis and rarely much bottom-line contribution. So, marketing budgets remained low and a negative spiral took hold.

The sales-marketing relationship isn’t as bad today (of course). But when marketing training programmes focus on topics such as *marketing-sales integration* and *how to engage with sales* and our daily client experience highlights potential points of friction between the two, it reminds us that we still have work to do in this relationship.



This paper suggests four essential ingredients of a happy sales-marketing relationship. It is not written to lay blame or provide support to one side or other. These ingredients work both ways.

### 1 Communication

As marketers we should look ourselves in the mirror on communication. Do we communicate the best we can, if not what can we do better? OK, let’s start from scratch: we can begin by listening, understanding what sales need. It’s basic, but oft forgotten.

You will ask sales what they want. And you’ll listen to what they say. Sometimes, marketers know better, but in this case, it is vital to take on board the sales perspective and not to talk at your sales colleague with marketing speak. We all do it, but it is unhelpful. Go away, cogitate and *interpret* what the salespeople are telling you in the light of other intelligence you have and the knowledge of what you can do. *Play it back* to sales to get their agreement on your direction of travel.

Keep on doing this through planning, execution and review.

Constant communication is necessary to keep each other informed and on-side. It may appear like time-wasting to you, but trust me, you cannot succeed without a strong sales partnership.

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### 2 Quality

After Communication, look in the mirror again. This time about Quality. Have you always delivered with the best quality? Is there a legitimate criticism to be had with your quality of outputs, your pre-campaign thought and communication and your processes. Have you been honest at review time, do you have stage reviews with sales, to discuss how you're getting on? At IRS, our strapline is *Quality with a Passion*. We do know about the need for quality, but *still* we have to remind ourselves what quality means in our world, for each campaign. We try to bring the learning from one programme through to the next. Quality is not about fine words, it is about hard deliverables. How can we improve this time?

### 3 Ownership

A significant part of the historic (and sometimes current) problem was the lack of ownership felt by sales. Why? Campaigns and initiatives were dreamed and fired up in Marketing, then packaged up and 'given' to Sales as a fait accompli. Where was the sales input, where was the buy-in?

It makes perfect sense in a partner arrangement, that both parties create, develop and execute campaigns, own the targets, review mutually against them, and share the plaudits or brickbats.



Yes, it might take longer for Marketing to involve sales at an early stage, might require some persuasive skills, might necessitate making unplanned changes. But, without a sense of ownership and excitement in Sales, there will be failure – guaranteed. And where Sales is involved, you might be surprised in Marketing at the high quality of input. After all, Sales does have that personal customer experience, salespeople do know what is feasible, above all they do what the customer wants.

After initially sharing ownership, regular reviews, open and transparent, are the way forward. Not just words, actions. If things are going wrong, avoid blame, look for solutions. In IRS, we've learned from experience and now formalise the marketing/sales partnership in our client programmes. A method we use is a *Contract with Sales* which addresses each sales executive's needs, focuses on that person's accounts and sales priorities and writes down an agreed plan. This ensures the right individual focus and fosters a personal sense of ownership. It also provides a review mechanism.

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### 4 Respect

Here's a word we don't hear much in business management manuals, but is of the *utmost* importance in partnering and relationship management. At IRS, we practise respect in our telephone-based campaigns and work on it in our internal and client teamwork.

We are all different, have diverse perspectives and come from varying points of view. In particular, a layman might imagine (rightly) that, as there are common goals and a deal of synergy between marketing and sales in a business, the two would work in harmony to achieve the ends. In reality, the difference in sales and marketing perspectives can lead to clashes and friction.

By working together, and by having respect for the other's viewpoint, the *partnership potential* is huge. So what is the potential?

A recent Aberdeen Survey\* of 453 companies who reported the greatest success in aligning sales and marketing, showed these results:

- On average, they grew sales revenue by over 20% year on year
- They aligned marketing goals with sales targets and objectives
- On average, 47% of the sales pipeline value (SPV) is generated by marketing

*"Sales and marketing alignment – producing results together" Aberdeen 2010*