



THE MARKETING PRACTICE

WHAT SALES SAY ABOUT B2B MARKETING

AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT





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Sales and marketing alignment is widely acknowledged to be a good thing.

At The Marketing Practice, we strive to engage effectively with sales teams, so we're working to the same end and producing useful materials that feed their pipeline and help them convert opportunities.

But are we really getting it right? Are we going about it in the best way?

To find out, we asked seven sales directors what they wanted from marketing and what they thought of the department.

In Part 1 of this e-book we share their voices and views. In Part 2, we analyse the implications for marketing and how you can respond.

[PART 1](#)

[PART 2](#)

WHAT SALES SAY ABOUT B2B MARKETING

PART 1: INTERVIEWS WITH SEVEN SALES DIRECTORS

Each sales director that we interviewed:

- Has at least 25 years' sales experience.
- Works for a large, well-known business.
- Works in telecoms, IT hardware, software, IT services or outsourcing.
- Is expected to hit this year's sales targets, with typical deals ranging from hundreds of thousands to hundreds of millions of pounds.
- Is expected to provide sales leadership within their business and solutions to take to market.

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SALES DIRECTOR #1

NEEDS SUPPORT WINNING LARGE DEALS

"I'd like marketing to be right in the middle of the bid, helping and shaping the thinking, the win themes, how we are going to get the deal, and asking themselves, 'What are we going to do to help win?' We spend a hell of a lot more of the marketing budget on bids and deals than we do on generic campaigns. Some of the big bids require significant marketing spend.

"Marketing can help with background research of the client and the client's environment, and provide us with industry knowledge. In the actual bid itself you basically have deal-specific marketing campaigns. These campaigns can last for many, many months, and we want to make sure that everyone in the sales team, which can be quite large, is delivering the same message and the same win themes. And I think that's the job of marketing.

"Marketing can't just be passive in the process, they can't just be managing the process. They have to understand the business: our own business, and the client's business. Marketing have got to see themselves as part of that sales campaign, not something that sits on the side.

"On the whole, I'd say there's too big a gap between sales and marketing. I don't think there's enough cross-fertilisation between them: I don't think enough marketers have been in sales, and I don't think sales appreciate the potential of marketing. A lot of traditional salespeople see marketing just as a lead generation vehicle, which is a limited view of what marketing can do.

"Marketing generally doesn't take the leadership in terms of building offerings and solutions to take to market. I still see marketing as too passive.

"The real danger is marketing coming up with their own programmes, which aren't signed off and bought into by the sales functions. So sales feel these programmes are being done to them, rather than things that they want to do themselves.

"I tend to find [in-house marketing departments] controllers, not liberators."

Sells a small number of very large deals. Largest customers have a choice of four top-tier vendors, and this company is one of them.





SALES DIRECTOR #2

NEEDS MORE LEADS AND PIPELINE

"My big problem is pipeline. It needs to be three times bigger than my sales target, and it is nowhere near that. I need more leads from marketing, and higher-quality leads.

"We've cut marketing headcount several times over the years. Field marketing's almost completely gone, and we have lots of people in corporate marketing who've been around 10 or 15 years, and don't have up-to-date, digital skills.

Sells to mid-market companies. The company has a strong brand, but is not well known for the products this sales director sells.

"They have limited knowledge of what tactics and programmes are likely to deliver leads. They also have limited measures and KPIs, so don't know what marketing spend is working, and what isn't.

"Marketing needs to be more collaborative. It needs to be willing to share information about marketing activities, and to take input from us about what to do. Marketing is too controlling."

SALES DIRECTOR #3

WANTS CLOSE ALIGNMENT AND A VARIETY OF SUPPORT

"There are several things we need from marketing. Whenever I or one of my sales team meet a prospect, we explain what we do and what we want to talk about and the response is always the same, 'I never knew you were in this market'. Marketing needs to work on this. Better web presence is a part, but we need much better brand awareness.

"We need two kinds of messaging and sales tools. I need genuine C-level messaging around business transformation that is strategic enough to interest the people in organisations who have power. We need a second set of productised offers that are more operational, quicker to sell and easier to buy.

"We need leads. Our pipeline is not big enough to hit our sales target. We need a steady flow of leads each month. At the moment, I've got the sales team doing prospecting, but it's not the best use of their time, and they're not all good at it.

"I'd rather they worked on deals, and marketing generated the leads. I'd rather have a smaller sales team supported by high-quality leads.

"We have a customer database, but we are not communicating with them. If I meet someone, and there's no immediate sales opportunity, nothing happens. I want us to stay front of mind, communicate with them every month. And invite them to events too.

"I want everybody in marketing to go to some customer meetings, and marketing's bonuses should ideally be tied to sales performance."

Sells to large accounts in a sector where their company's brand is largely unknown.





SALES DIRECTOR #4

LOOKING FOR SUPPORT WITH PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT, THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, NURTURING LEADS, AND TARGETED EVENTS

"The biggest issue between marketing and sales (which happens time and time again) is that the initial meeting happens, then thereafter... nothing. All the effort's gone in, the interest is there, but there's no initial quick next step, and then it falls off a cliff. If there's nothing there now, and nothing say for Q3, Q4 maybe Q1 latest, then people aren't interested. And then the salespeople change, so everything you've done now is forgotten, because somebody's new, picks it up and hasn't got a clue what is going on.

"At [my previous company], typically the marketing budget was allocated by November/ December the previous year, and there was very little flex in it, very little innovation in it, and it was pretty much all spent on the obvious things like big

global events – generic events where everything's already been said. That's all well and good, but if we are clinical about it, you don't get a lot of clear business from those. I would see that as classic nineties-type marketing.

"Where it works well is where you've got very specific, personalised roundtable-type events, where someone picks up on a current trend, really understands what the mood is, and then is able to execute and turn that around quickly to be relevant for a very targeted audience.

"We have a complex value proposition. We use value engineering consultants to identify the value and triggers relevant to the customer, and show the customer a realistic path to implement it – with client references. Marketing are much better at turning this into a clear, simple message that's joined up.

"One marketing guy at [company] would spend a lot of time with customers. So he actually understood what they wanted, and he understood how marketing could help. Whereas a lot of classic marketers spend most of the time in an office. For them it's just words, there's not enough feeling in it. I think marketers have to be much more visible with customers – get much more actively engaged with them – to understand how we position, how we can execute on what the propositions are and what the products can do."

Sells complex propositions to large enterprises.

SALES DIRECTOR #5

SEEKING CLOSE COLLABORATION ON ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING

"We have to sell solutions. When we sell [hardware] on its own, that's likely to be sub-five-percent margin. When we sell managed services, that's where the real margin is.

"Normally what we'll do is work closely with the client to find what they're looking for. So effectively we're designing a solution for them against the outcome they're looking to achieve.

"Marketing can support this with account-based marketing. Together we work with the client to help them either reduce costs, increase productivity or increase efficiency with the solutions that we have – and then get buy-in from the board. Landscaping [account mapping] is important as well, you can't do account-based marketing without landscaping. From a solutions point of view, it's very difficult to do solution selling without account-based marketing. It's a domino impact: one leads to the other.

"Marketing's in charge of our message, figuring out in detail how we present ourselves to each particular client, and working connectedly, collaboratively with the sales community. Where it works really well is where there's mutual respect, and very clearly defined roles between sales and marketing."

"Working collaboratively means the account-based marketing programme is led by marketing, but actually they can't do that on their own without sales. It needs the sales community helping them. Then ultimately the sales community are on the hook to ensure the account-based marketing plan is delivered against.

"It's important that marketing is able to scale ABM programmes, and scale fast."

Sells large deals to large accounts in a sector where their company's brand is not especially well known.



SALES DIRECTOR #6

NEEDS TARGETED LEAD GENERATION AND CREATIVE SUPPORT

"Up until now, our marketing has been a little 'shotgun'. In future, if we are going to go for larger, more strategic deals, we need to make ourselves famous for some things in the market.

"I'm looking for marketing to create this messaging, execute campaigns, and deliver different kinds of leads for our sales team. I'm also looking for a more strategic approach to segmentation, perhaps targeting a particular company size, or certain sectors such as pharmaceuticals or professional services.

"And going into that segment saying, 'This is what we are awesome at'. This is the hook, fishing in a particular part of the sea for particular fish with particular bait, otherwise we're just fishing in the sea and hoping something comes along and bites.

"We have an inside sales team for lead generation. It's a team of millennials who trawl through websites,

Dun & Bradstreet reports, LinkedIn and other social media, and then send out speculative requests for connections or send out information targeted towards the particular individuals. It's not, 'Bang we're great at everything,' but, 'I understand you may be experiencing problems with such and such an area, this is what we could potentially do to help you.'

"The marketing department – basically one person and an offshore team – do things like website design, or mark-ups, Photoshop, that kind of thing.

"This works well. We have a good website, we get good leads, we follow up on leads well. I'm not concerned about our ability to generate leads and promote ourselves in the market. I don't see an issue with marketing being able to step up to more strategic deals.

"Sales and marketing are tied up quite closely together. They talk. And marketing is heavily tied into the sales organisation, because otherwise what are marketing marketing?"

Sells to the mid-market. Company is a niche player without the brand recognition of the market leaders.

SALES DIRECTOR #7

WANTS A VOICE IN THE MARKET AND END-TO-END PROCESS MANAGEMENT

"We need to have a voice in the market, something to say to our target audience. Marketing needs to create the point of view and thought leadership that will reach the key stakeholders. Using more creative channels such as social has led to more success than the old, traditional ways of generating demand or interest.

"There's an end-to-end process that starts with working out which propositions can deliver what commercial returns through what channels. Then being really focused on our execution: what marketing readiness we need, what sales readiness we need, what service delivery readiness we need. Marketing needs to own this. When that process is completely aligned and thorough, we've typically had better success.

"We should be a powerhouse given the scale and the propositions we have. I need us to have better visibility and voice in the market. Our demand generation programmes could work more seamlessly for customers.

"We need to be more agile. We're on our journey, but I'd not be different from any sales leader if I said I want it faster, I want it here and now and I want more of it.

"We've always had a reasonably good relationship between sales and marketing. I would say that in the last two years in our transformation programmes, we have gotten as good as you're going to get a true marketing and sales alignment on process management."

Operates in a mature, low-growth market with a well-known brand. Sales function covers all customer segments and channels.



WHAT SALES SAY ABOUT B2B MARKETING

PART 2: WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

The sales directors' responses have given us real insight into how well B2B marketers are currently aligned, and highlighted a number of opportunities for improvement.

In Part 2 of this e-book, we will cover:

- Our analysis of the interviews.
- Implications for field marketing.
- Key challenges for CMOs and corporate marketing.

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HERE'S WHAT WE THINK

Reading through the transcripts, it's clear that each sales director wants different things from marketing and you can't assume you know what those things are. You need to ask.

These are the key requirements the seven sales directors highlighted to us in their interviews:

- #1 Support winning large deals.**
- #2 Leads and pipeline.**
- #3 Close alignment and a variety of support.**
- #4 Propositions, thought leadership, ongoing nurturing, targeted events.**
- #5 Collaboration on account-based marketing.**
- #6 Targeted lead generation and creative support.**
- #7 A voice in the market and end-to-end process management.**

All the sales directors work for established brands, but several of them are selling into sectors their brand isn't associated with. In this situation, the brand tends to need work and leads are in short supply, which is when sales directors have the greatest need for marketing support..

Where the brand was targeting a sector they were already associated with, sales directors tended to have less of an issue with pipeline, were more satisfied with the support they received from marketing, and had a wider range of requirements.

Two of the seven sales directors referred to how marketing is a core part of their team and that it provides support in multiple ways to help them hit their targets.

However, for others it is seen as a narrower function that provides ad-hoc and tactical support.

Our overall sense from the interviews was that sales teams are inclined to operate on their own and not proactively seek support.

Therefore, we think there is definite potential for marketing to get closer to its main internal stakeholder, and to better promote all the different ways it can contribute to delivering commercial outcomes in tandem with sales.



HOW FIELD MARKETERS CAN IMPROVE ALIGNMENT WITH SALES

Level 1: The basics

- Sales have a reasonable understanding of what marketing offer.
- Marketing know sales' priorities, align to them, and deliver on commitments.
- There's a common definition of a lead, and a workable system for handing over leads between departments.

(The interview findings suggest these basics aren't always in place, so you may need to run an internal activity for sales teams that explains the marketing function and the value it can deliver.)

Level 2: Break down barriers

- Field marketers attend sales team meetings. They understand where sales are relative to plan, the status of pipeline, what kinds of deals the business is winning – or missing out on – and get a sense of what is driving the numbers.
- Every year, each field marketer joins a handful of customer-facing meetings.
- Sales attend marketing planning meetings and pipeline review meetings.



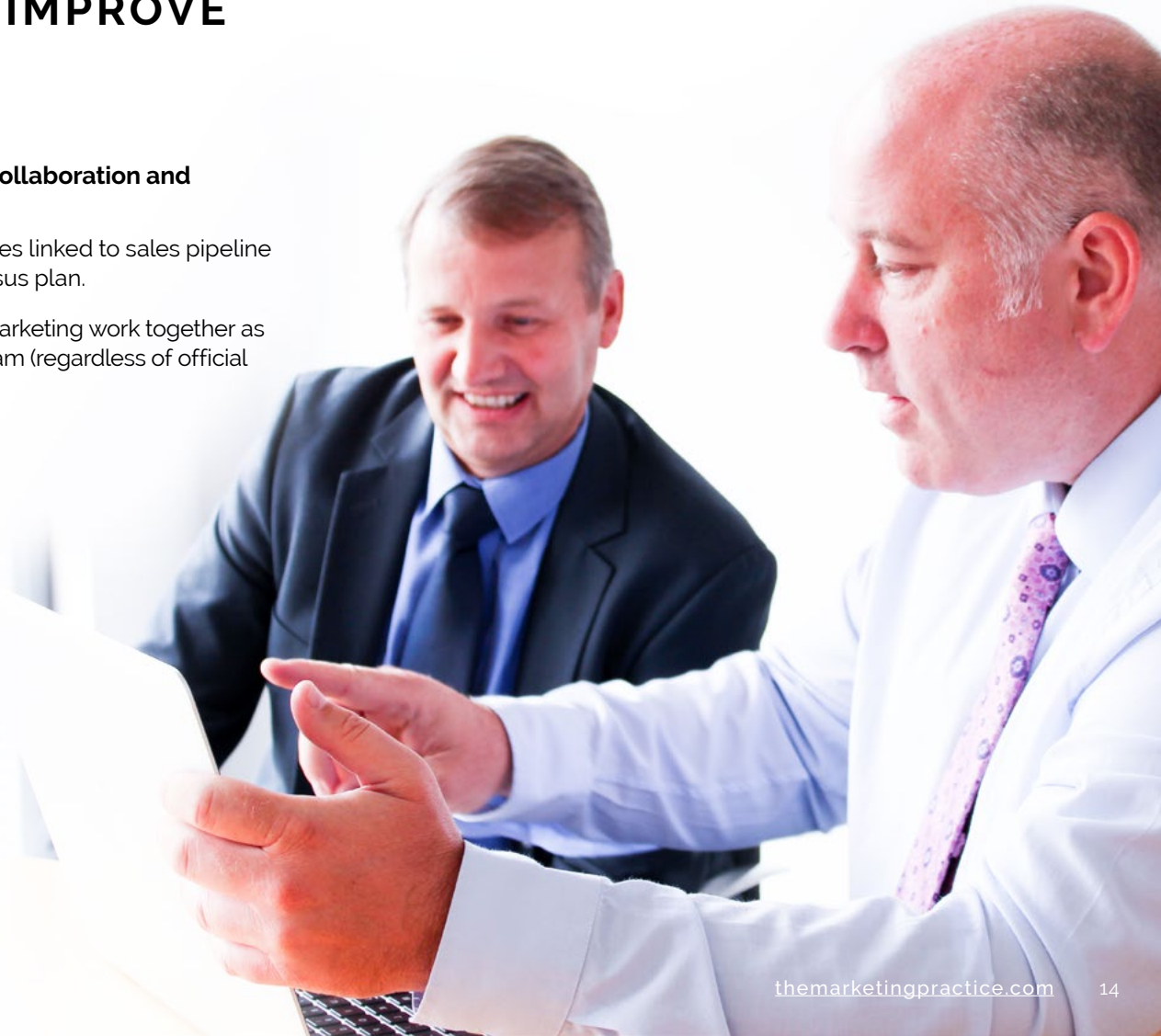
HOW FIELD MARKETERS CAN IMPROVE ALIGNMENT WITH SALES

Level 3: Manage demand creation as a single process

- Sales directors review early-stage leads and late-stage opportunities in their monthly meetings with salespeople.
- Sales and marketing systems are well integrated – ideally, they are common systems.
- One funnel for sales and marketing, with an agreed set of metrics that span the entire funnel. Some metrics are owned by sales, some by marketing, and some are shared.
- Single set of management review meetings, with a single plan and set of targets.
- Both are focused on driving revenue, even if marketing metrics are earlier in the funnel.

Level 4: Deeper collaboration and integration

- Marketing bonuses linked to sales pipeline and signings versus plan.
- Sales and field marketing work together as one extended team (regardless of official reporting lines).



KEY CHALLENGES FOR CORPORATE MARKETERS AND CMOs

The integration challenges facing CMOs include:

- Low awareness among key business and sales stakeholders of the value that marketing can bring.
- Many marketing functions, especially corporate ones, are not close enough to day-to-day business operations – and it is not always part of the culture to work collaboratively with sales.
- The skills balance in B2B marketing often leans towards tactics and tools, more than strategy, segmentation or proposition development. Mark Ritson calls this “the tactification of marketing”.

There's no single response to these challenges that will work for everyone.

For example, we spoke to one CMO who implemented a major transformation programme to bring marketing closer to sales. He expected it would take at least three years to yield results.

This huge programme was built on three pillars: operational excellence, alignment to business priorities, and upskilling and professionalising the marketing function. It impacted multiple areas, including technology, processes, measurement, reporting, professional development, talent management, and relations with business stakeholders.

Clearly, this level of change won't be appropriate for all – but it demonstrates the breadth of potential issues that sales and marketing alignment could entail.

IN CONCLUSION

We think the vision for B2B marketing was summarised well in a recent ANA survey.

It stated that CEOs want marketing to “understand sales, think company-wide, be a company-wide brand leader, and focus on customer acquisition”.

Yet the same survey found only a fifth of marketers saw their role in the same way.

So perhaps the first step towards better sales and marketing alignment is for us to review how we think of ourselves.

That’s what the O2 Business marketing team has done. They used a recent ABM programme to transform the way they work with sales:

“The ABM programme has shifted perceptions of what ‘normal’ should be; the teams have become true extensions of each other, rather than working in their own silos.”

**Carmen Cuadra Gomez,
Public Sector Marketing Manager, O2**

In 2017, Carmen’s programme beat every other campaign out there, winning B2B Marketing’s award for the most commercially successful campaign. Her team delivered three times their target pipeline.

Questioning what ‘normal’ means for sales and marketing collaboration within your organisation could be a great starting point for enhancing the value you add.





THE MARKETING PRACTICE

MAKING B2B MARKETING INDISPENSABLE TO THE BUSINESS

Our mission is to provide marketing that delivers the best commercial outcomes.
To make B2B marketing accountable – and famous – for the results it returns.

To do that, we bring the full range of skills and specialists together in one place
to solve the toughest marketing challenges, from strategy to creative to delivery.

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Further reading

[Making B2B marketing indispensable to the business](#)

