

## Nine Steps to Ensure Marketing and Sales Speak the Same Language

By Barbara Reed

Sales and marketing departments have always had a love-hate relationship. Although they share the common goal of driving revenue, at times, these two disciplines appear to be speaking a different language. While corporate messages are often developed by marketing, they are rarely communicated to the sales force in any meaningful way. The result is a sales organization that develops its own messages, which are often at odds with the positioning and brand strategy that marketing is working to develop.

Surveys find that the majority of marketing and sales executives recognize the importance of messaging in building brand equity, customer preference and competitive differentiation. Yet few are satisfied with their sales and frontline employees' ability to deliver targeted messages in the key areas of value and solution selling.

The growing awareness of the need for developing consistent, targeted messages provides a unique opportunity for marketers to develop a unified sales and marketing communication platform that articulates a compelling value proposition that directly impacts customer acquisition and retention. It encompasses every customer touch point from the Web site, sales collateral, print and online communication to customer service applications and sales presentations.

The following steps provide a systematic methodology to develop a unified messaging platform that is directly tied to increasing business value and meeting organizational objectives:

### 1. Understand what's at stake.

When companies fail to speak in one voice, company credibility is compromised and the brand message is not delivered. Moreover, thousands of cross-selling opportunities are lost, customer satisfaction is diminished and brand equity is diluted. When an organization fully understands how unified messaging impacts the bottom line, commitment to the concept increases dramatically.

### 2. Evaluate objectives.

Before sales and marketing efforts can be aligned, overall objectives must also be aligned and agreed upon.

### 3. Create your value proposition.

Articulating features and benefits is no longer enough. Customers want to understand what you do in clear and simple terms that speak to their needs.

### 4. Define competitive differentiation.

This is often the most difficult step, particularly in a saturated market. The goal is to identify what truly sets a company apart in real terms.

### 5. Craft your messages.

Organize, prioritize and articulate key messages that tell a compelling story.

### 6. Get key stakeholders to buy-in before going to market.

Create internal buy-in to the messaging to help develop internal evangelists.

### 7. Train executives, sales force and customer-facing employees.

Introduce the messaging in interactive role-playing scenarios that allow employees to internalize and practice the messages.

### 8. Develop an aligned go-to-market strategy.

With unified, consistent messaging in place that supports business objectives, the foundation is in place to create a go-to-market strategy that achieves tangible results.

### 9. Measure effectiveness.

The approach outlined above builds a platform for marketers to gauge effectiveness based upon business objectives and demonstrate return on investment to the business.

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