



White Paper

Does the sales team get it?

*Maximising the impact of Product
Marketing*

January 2010



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1. Introduction

This white paper first appeared as an article in *Marketing Africa*, October 2009.

Every message we create, be it an advertisement, a brochure or on the website, should be linked to a future usage conversation – how might a potential purchaser use it? Put quite simply, the job of Product Marketing is to “give ‘it’ a life of its own”.

2. Why sales doesn’t get ‘it’

...in many organisations Sales and Marketing are barely on speaking terms.

It should have been so different! A major offensive to reclaim market share. A brand new product – revolutionary. The biggest marketing investment the company has ever made. You had to overcome fierce cost objections from the Finance Director to get the personal endorsement from the CEO. The sales projections were sensational, especially for new customers. The competition would be left in the dust. To be fair, you knew the sales team was going to be a challenge – it always is. So you put together really detailed product training and gave the website a complete facelift. You were certain that your innovative advertising campaign and a country-wide mailing initiative to create leads would get results, regardless of your previous bad experience. But it's your worst nightmare: sales are still well below target despite everything you try to do – and the Sales Director is blaming you! “Leads are rubbish”; “Sales collateral is not worth the paper it's printed on”; “Marketing has no understanding of what it actually takes to sell the product”; “We could have used all that money better by offering a discounted price”. So now everyone is calling for your head – it's so unfair. And the real problem is that Sales just doesn't get it – never has and never will.

Does this scenario sound familiar? Amazingly, in many organisations Sales and Marketing are barely on speaking terms. They should be working hand in glove to make the company successful but too often they just have a poorly disguised contempt for each other. Sales believe that Marketing lives in the safe area behind the desks in the office with no conception of what it takes to sell “out there”. Too much time and money is spent creating pretty brochures and product presentations that are far too long and which just send prospects to sleep. If only that effort could go into providing the sales team with fully qualified leads, then Marketing would really be doing its job instead of being a very expensive overhead. Why doesn't Marketing get it? The flipside, of course, is that Marketing believes Sales to be some sort of prehistoric monster – deadly slow and set in its ways. Despite incisive market analysis and segmentation, targeted campaigns and comprehensive product training they still just carry on selling the same old way, achieving the same old results. Why doesn't Sales get it?

Of course, as far as the CEO is concerned, the ‘it’ they should both be getting is revenue growth. So what is stopping them? He might suspect that it is merely a personality clash between the sales and marketing executives, so either their two heads need to be banged together or a change of personnel is required. But that diagnosis

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could be too superficial. It is much more likely that both individuals are totally committed to the task and are actually motivated to find a way of working together more effectively. The problem is that they head up discrete departments with objectives that are not always mutually supportive, so they end up operating in parallel silos. Thus the underlying problem is actually one of process, not personality, management – what is the company's single top level "Go to Market" process? If this can be mapped out, then the distinct roles of Sales and Marketing within it can be determined, understood by all and measured appropriately.

It may be helpful to consider this process against the traditional business development funnel model through which all good business should progress from initial lead generation activity to closing a sale. This should be a continuous flow with both functions contributing throughout, Marketing initially taking the lead role, then reducing in importance as Sales controls the climax of the process – before looping back to Marketing again in order to stimulate the next cycle. In our scenario above there is a disconnect in the process, often seen as a sloppy baton change from Marketing to Sales. Herein lays the crux of the issue – two processes with an imperfect handover, rather than a single flow of activities with varying levels of responsibility. For the commercial operation to really punch its weight it needs to have a clear process which enables both parties to pull in the same direction. So what should the Sales Management's expectation of Marketing be at key stages in this common approach? In summary, we know that the essential elements are:

- Target market validation
- Competitive analysis
- Product marketing
- Customer satisfaction
- Pricing, terms and conditions
- Company credentials
- PR management
- Web presence
- Product training
- Demand generation
- Sales collateral

Simplistically, however, from a Sales standpoint, Marketing primarily exists to deliver prospects and the collateral to help close them. This may not instinctively feel right, but ultimately all of these activities should be in place to create valid opportunities to boost sales and so hit revenue targets. Of course there is a significant amount of work to be done in both identifying and conditioning the target market but there remains a duty of care right the way through to the successful completion of the sales cycle. Most marketing executives would accept this, but just how much attention is given to the Sales-led part of the process? By nature sales people are often selfish and unlikely to give credit to anyone else for their success, but quick to attribute blame to others for their failure. Yet, for the good of the company, it should not be acceptable for Marketing to just do the groundwork and then leave Sales to get on with it – they need help. Mind you, a thick layer of skin may well be required!

By focusing attention on the "sharp end" of the sales cycle it is possible not only to make that part more effective but also to subtly change the emphasis of earlier elements. What do we really

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understand by the term "sales collateral" - brochures, flyers, company reports, give-aways, PowerPoint presentations, spec sheets, proposal templates, USPs versus competitors, pricing calculators, reference stories, case studies, telesales scripts, favourable product reviews, sample cost-benefit analyses, etc? Probably all of the above and more – but with what levels of importance? According to the American Marketing Association up to 90% of collateral created by Marketing is never used by Sales. What a waste – but how can we do a better job? The answer lies in visualisation. We need to create a realistic "video clip" in our own mind of the sales person actually in the act of selling our proposition to a client and then listen in to the soundtrack. What highly predictable conversations will that sales person need to have to close the contract? If we really understand that then not only can we supply the right ammunition but we may even be able to help them nuance the conversation in order to maximise their win rate.

A predictable conversation should cover everything needed to get our offer sold, financed and implemented successfully. The generic theme is simple – what business event or situation could the buyer realistically be expected to encounter that could cause them to want or need our offer? This is the type of conversation that sales people must have with buyers, talking about what is important or scary to them and how our offer can help. Remember we are not talking about the product, but rather about how the use of it could be beneficial. So here is the real 'it' of our story – and how can we ensure that the prospective customer gets it? We must also be aware of the typical sales trap of regarding 'it' as the product: "It will reduce your accounts receivable"; "It will schedule your production line more effectively"; "It will save you a lot of money on electricity"; "It will create an eye-catching website" etc. The product does not do any of these things – the customer achieves them by using it. So now we know – the 'it' we all need to get is an exciting vision of how the customer can use our product to help them overcome a specific business challenge. With this insight we can begin to design powerful tools to assist the sales team in driving commercial conversations.

The secret is to build a compelling potential usage scenario, or "PUS". Notice that we referred to a "specific" business challenge earlier. The most effective sales conversations are going to be about that one individual prospective client in their office. The sales person will need to know exactly what job that person does, not just the company they work for and in which industry. Only then can the conversation revolve around a potentially realistic use of our product by that specific individual. By anticipating this scenario Marketing can now create conversational prompts that Sales can use to initiate the discussion and steer it in the right direction. Like all good ammunition, these prompts must be capable of causing pain, otherwise they will not gain the prospect's attention. The basic design rule for a prompt is: "Today, without our product, how would this individual respond to the scenario situation and how might they be negatively affected?"

Of course we need to be alert when prompting the customer to think about a PUS. Not only must the situation itself be realistic but also our product has to offer a viable way of addressing it. This demands that the sales person really understands the situation so as to bring the scenario to life in glowing colour, creating a vibrant vision in the mind

of the customer. An effective prompt will have three essential elements, denoted as "IPA":

- Incident – what realistic business event is occurring
- Player – who is primarily involved (it may not be the client themselves but a colleague or staff member)
- Action – what ideally would they like to happen and how would our product help them do it

When products may seem similar on the surface, differentiation may still be achieved by perceived differences in "usefulness".

It is clear that in its ultimate delivery form the prompt must be tailored to suit each conversation. The product may need to be sold to several individuals within the customer organisation, each with a unique perspective on how business events affect them. Even the same event can have different implications and therefore the efficacy of our product in helping them will need to change too. Although this IPA refinement responsibility ultimately lies with the sales person, it is vital that we give them as many powerful building blocks and templates as we can. The more we can support sales people in the field, even down to this final execution stage, the more likely it is that our company will have a coherent sales process with consistently good and predictable results. Clearly, the biggest contribution we can make to Sales success is to develop and maintain a PUS catalogue containing a range of scenarios segmented by industry sector, customer job description and product, each with supporting IPA prompts. Even if the task of driving down to this final level of refinement seems too daunting, we can start by putting the fundamentals in place and so minimise the random element of chance that is introduced when the sales effort goes completely unguided.

Having focused on Marketing's role at the very sharp end of the sales process, it is now possible to step back a little to consider what wider implications this PUS concept might have for earlier stages in the business development cycle. Most obviously, our traditional sales collateral needs to reflect a PUS approach. For example, credentials and references need to be more than just a list of, hopefully, well-known names. Instead they must focus on how customers have used our product to their advantage. Even more specifically, they should drill down to defined individuals within customer organisations to highlight how they benefitted from using our product – if possible with quantified gains. Indeed there should ideally be a cluster of references for every organisation, each one reflecting a different PUS from the unique perspective of a specified executive. These briefs have a critical role to play, not just in creating curiosity amongst potential new clients but also as solid proof of concept once a sales person has created a vibrant potential usage vision with a prospect.

Moving further back in the pipeline we also need to adapt these particular "one on one" messages to the "one on many" landscape which is much more familiar to marketers. This is particularly the case if our company is more involved in B2C than B2B markets where the messaging has to be somewhat more generic. Yet we should not forget the power of the PUS, even in a commodity environment. When products may seem similar on the surface, differentiation may still be achieved by perceived differences in "usefulness". With this in mind we can now consider our third new acronym, "TRM" - Target Ready Messaging. Essentially this demands that whenever we seek to support a part of the business development cycle we must bear in

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mind that final decision point for the prospect, the conversation either with a sales person or in their own head about why they would want to use our product. Every message we create, be it in an advertisement, a brochure or on the website, should be linked to a future usage conversation – how might a potential purchaser use it? Put quite simply, the job of Product Marketing is to “give ‘it’ a life of its own”. This is particularly the case in an immature market or with a new product offer. Whereas the pre-chasm visionaries and innovators may get it straight away, the early and late majority who represent the bulk of the market opportunity will only buy once they understand how they will use it. The chasm represents a willingness to change. Only by illustrating relevant beneficial usage can our marketing messages help potential clients over this hurdle.

In this discussion we have seen how Marketing can work together with Sales much more powerfully by paying particular attention to “where the rubber hits the road”, that final stage of the sales process where the customer makes a buying decision based on the usefulness of the product to them. With a TRM mentality we can significantly increase the probability of our getting a positive decision. Remember that Sales believes that Marketing exists to deliver high quality leads and the collateral tools to close them. We are now in a much stronger position to deliver on this expectation. Not only will the sales collateral we produce be more pertinent, but our whole approach to market conditioning and lead generation will be fundamentally different. Advertising initiatives, mailings or telemarketing campaigns will all be TRM-compliant, focusing on how a future customer might achieve a goal, solve a problem or satisfy a need. Rather than going for quantity, our campaigns will be much more about quality – addressing maybe smaller audiences but each with a commonality of business challenge and potential product usage. As a result, the leads passed to Sales will be much better than just a contact name – they will have been qualified against powerful PUS criteria. In pursuing them the sales team can also rely on collateral that has been created to the same design. Hopefully too at the end of this sales cycle there will be a loop back through Marketing to refine the collateral, in particular building a new cluster of references based on this new sale, all of which will improve our effectiveness in the next cycle.

This is the power of a true TRM approach in really empowering Sales to go out and do what they do best – close the business. In creating these opportunities for them, Marketing should adopt a single mantra towards prospective customers - ask not what ‘it’ will do for you but rather ask what you can do with ‘it’.

3. About the author

Rhys Torrington leads Wright Associates Sales Performance focus area.

Rhys has over thirty years executive management and consulting experience in the technology sector gained with major organisations such as IBM, Groupe Bull, SAIC and Gartner Consulting.

His focus is on helping companies take their propositions to market, particularly in an international context. For most organisations this

means enhancing their direct and indirect sales capability and Rhys is a leading sales management mentor, coach and trainer.

As an example, he has most recently worked with an international mobile telecommunications company in creating and launching a full function pay-TV service across sub-Saharan Africa. Previously he led several major European Go To Market engagements with leading technology companies on behalf of Gartner Consulting.

4. About Wright Associates

Founded in 1994 Wright Associates is a management consultancy firm offering support to senior executives lacking the time or resource to deal with critical issues as fast as they would like. Our clients range from corporates to SMEs and start-ups. We work across business sectors with a particularly strong track record in technology, media and services. Our services are grouped into focus areas:

- Go to market
- Decision support and planning
- Sales performance
- Africa solutions
- Organisational support

5. Further Information

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