

Many B2B sales and marketing teams are struggling in today's consumer climate. According to a recent [Forbes article](#), 50% of B2B sales staff consistently miss their quotas. By the time prospects *do* come out of the shadows to engage a sales rep, 80% of the traditional purchasing cycle has already been completed.

"The traditional sales cycle – a familiar arc of meeting, educating, building a use case and closing – has evolved. If your reps aren't adapting to the complexity of the modern sales cycle, driven by an ever-more-educated buyer, you will find yourself missing quotas until your bottom line falls out."

- Kurt Andersen (@[SAVO_Group](#)), Executive VP of Sales Enablement and Marketing, [SAVO Group](#)

How should B2B sales and marketing teams respond to this evolution? Is there still a place for traditional sales representatives, now that clients have unlimited access to information?

Three words can frame the future of marketing and sales for any organization or brand:

Education

Expertise

Alignment

For unique insights from current thought-leaders on how and why alignment between sales and marketing is essential in *any* industry today, read on.

Education: Your Prospects are Your Students

Purchase cycles are shifting away from traditional models, which means sales strategies need to shift as well. The salesperson is no longer the exclusive expert, and the marketer is no longer the exclusive promoter.

"The Forbes data is not just informative, but directional: Today 80% of B2B purchase cycles are made without vendor contact, and this percentage is only growing. Clearly, buyers are self-educating far deeper into the sales cycle than they once did."

- Jerry Rackley (@[DemandMetric](#)), Chief Analyst, [Demand Metric](#)

In this climate, organizations have new responsibilities to educate potential buyers. To become trusted

educators, organizations must:

1. Provide the content that customers are looking for.
2. Become experts in their industries.

What does this mean for the sales funnel? Because customers are spending more time self-educating, businesses have greater opportunities than before to influence a bigger pool of buyers. The funnel might be getting shorter, but it's growing exponentially *wider* at the same time.

Provide the content

Remember the scene in *A Miracle on 34th Street* when Santa Claus refers a mother to a competitor's store for the right toy? The manager was furious, but before he knew it, his store was full of customers and he overhauled his sales strategy.

Customers are looking for information, so give it to them.

"Many vendors are prospering in this new B2B purchasing landscape because they understand that buyers are still seeking information. Savvy vendors are making this information available in the form of non-sales oriented content designed to educate."

- Jeff Rackley (@[DemandMetric](#))

Make sure you're giving out information on your prospects' terms. Don't wait for them to find you.

"Smart organizations are adapting by creating first-party content, optimizing it for search, and participating in social media. They're also leveraging calls to action, landing pages and educational offers to convert those visitors into leads."

- Peter Caputa (@[PC4Media](#)), Founder, [Collaborative Growth Network](#)

To build trust and respect for your company, you must create educational content that is genuinely helpful.

Become the Industry Expert

It's not enough to be the expert on your product anymore. Providing good content means educating prospective buyers on every part of the industry, and establishing your brand as the voice that can help them cut through the clutter.

"With new technologies and more information, most prospects need a guide. They need someone who asks thoughtful questions, can design custom solutions, and helps prospects navigate the changes they need to make in order to be successful with any new product or service."

- Peter Caputa (@[PC4Media](#))

You can still steer the conversation if you're prepared to have a true dialogue with prospective customers. Start sharing more information, and start sharing it sooner, over a variety of networks. Build your reputation as a trusted expert, and you will endear your brand to your customer base.

Expertise: Your Sales Reps are Consultants

Broadening your content output and honing your expertise should also involve your sales reps. Fifty percent of B2B sales staff are missing their quotas, because 50% of B2B sales staff are not adjusting their individual strategies.

"Most sales organizations are running the transactional sales playbooks invented in the early part of the 20th century. They're just using modern technology to interrupt you more and pitch you harder and sooner, which makes it even more of a turn off for prospects."

- Peter Caputa (@[PC4Media](#))

The increase in educated customers does not negate the role of the sales rep, but it does demand a change in approach. Rather than dish out information, a sales rep's job becomes more about deciphering and adding to a customer's existing knowledge.

"In the old world of sales, salespeople controlled the information. Today, all of the information is publicly available on the internet. The salesperson must now add value, because if salespeople are not adding value to the discussion, they're losing. They're losing the chance to get in on the deal early, the chance to set the buying vision, the chance to create an evangelist customer that will help spread the word about their product or service, and obviously the chance of closing the deal."

- Cliff Pollan (@[CliffPollan](#)), Founder and CEO, [Postwire](#)

The sales team is one face of a company, so as the brand begins to expand its knowledge library and its leadership in the industry, sales reps have to keep up and understand how their role is shifting from gatekeeper to tour guide.

Alignment: All For One

As marketing becomes more and more about content, and sales becomes more and more about expertise, an undeniable new strategy for teamwork across the organization emerges. The skillsets shared by both

teams have greatly increased.

“B2B sales and marketing teams need to prepare their reps to have high-value conversations with prospects. This includes tailoring collateral and content to meet the needs of new buyers, so that sales reps are providing answers to the questions buyers are asking at each stage of the buying cycle. To enhance this process, organizations need to invest in technologies that provide real-time access to specific data, so reps can align themselves with what their prospects want and need – not what they already know.”

- Kurt Andersen (@SAVO_Group)

As your marketing team and sales team come together strategically, let these four anchors guide your brand:

1. Intentional content creation
2. Post-purchase communication
3. Sales team feedback
4. The 1:1 experience

Focusing on these four anchors will help develop a strategic alignment that will guide your brand through the changing face of B2B sales.

Intentional Content Creation: Guide the Conversation

The first step in intentional content creation is creating useful, educational material for your prospects, establishing your brand as the industry expert.

“The key for marketing and sales teams is to effectively execute a content marketing strategy. This begins with understanding the informational needs of the buyers during each stage of the purchase cycle. Next, it requires an investment in producing quality content that is perceived as helpful, not necessarily ‘sales-oriented.’ This content should ideally exist in a variety of formats, not just the venerable whitepaper. Finally, the content creation and publication process needs the support of an SEO strategy. The key to making this strategy work is to be easily found online.”

- Jeff Rackley (@DemandMetric)

This is where the sales experts provide valuable insights for the marketing team. Later, as prospects move down the sales funnel and start to engage in conversations with sales reps, the marketing team feeds content to create salespeople who add value to the conversation.

Aligning the sales and marketing teams to create thoughtful, intentional content means your brand is the one driving the train.

Post-Purchase Communication: Customize and Enhance

Turning a prospect into a client happens at the first sale, and then the relationship changes. Getting a date takes one kind of communication, but building a friendship requires something more.

“Regular activities should include a considerate approach towards each client, and detailed processing of the orders - shipments and mailings, dedicated events, discounts, special offers, etc. Internal processes must be completely automated for a timely and efficient service before and after purchases made by the client.”

- Eugene Kasinsky (@Logaster), Co-Founder, [Logaster](#)

An experienced sales rep will already know about follow-ups and maintaining relationships, but with the help of the marketing team, those services can be expanded and tailored.

Sales Team Feedback: Help Me Help You

The process of creating and tailoring content is never finished. As the marketing team is feeding and enriching sales reps, those individuals with first-hand access to prospects and clients need to be constantly reporting back on what works and what doesn't.

“All sales organizations, B2B and B2C, should work closely together with marketing to agree on what a marketing qualified lead really is. This is only the first part of the pie. The sales organizations need to report back on the quality of the lead. Perhaps, for example, you need to tweak your behavioral qualifiers to give time for the lead to mature and self-qualify through marketing campaigns and website engagement.”

- Jacob Baldwin (@JacoBaldwin), Search Engine Marketing Manager, [One Call Now](#)

Lead quality, content quality, how people are moving through the funnel - in these areas, the sales team has more visibility than the marketing team. It's a core piece of their job, rather than a peripheral task, to report back to the marketing team.

The 1:1 Experience: Now Available 24/7

As the sales team continues to update data on market segments and client profiles, the marketing team is

able to create increasingly relevant, personal material that can be delivered any time and accessed at the customer's convenience.

"Smart organizations are doing things to attract the right prospects to them, and then deliver the right message to those prospects at the right time. They are leveraging marketing to deliver the 1:1 experience that only salespeople could deliver before."

- Kurt Andersen ([@SAVO_Group](#))

Now that your prospects and clients are finding more and more information that is relevant to their specific position in the cycle and the funnel, your brand will continue to lead the industry and guide the conversation for decision-makers.

Conclusion: Representatives and Reputations

Marketing and sales are the two faces of your brand, responsible for creating and maintaining your image and reputation. As they come into alignment to serve an evolving purchasing cycle and a shortening sales funnel, their influence - if harnessed correctly - will only expand.

"The company's reputation plays a significant role. On the B2B market, it is important to pay an attention to developing an outstanding business reputation for the successful development of the company."

- Eugene Kasinsky ([@Logaster](#))

To guide the conversations that prospects are no longer having with your sales team, create a variety of educational content. That content, constantly tailored and updated, will create sales reps who are experts in their fields, and marketing material that can extend the personal relationship with a client beyond the sales team.

As the sales and marketing teams continue to align, the cycle will continue to build momentum.