Sales & Marketing Alignment

How to achieve sales and marketing alignment in your business

Lupo Digital Helps Grow Organisations by Transforming How They Attract, Engage and Delight Their Customers

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WHY IS SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT IMPORTANT?

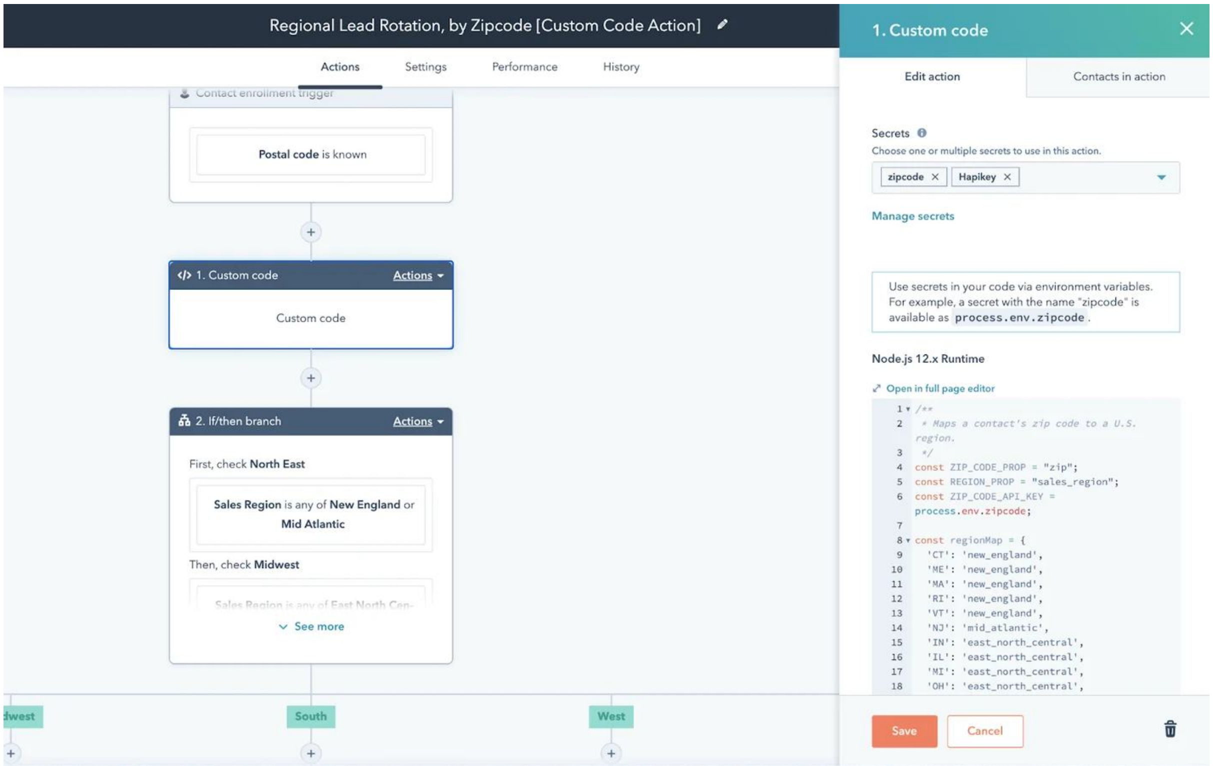
Effective lead generation is only a part of the growth equation. To maximise results and properly manage every lead throughout the entire cycle, you need sales and marketing to be united.

The opportunity sales and marketing alignment presents has always existed, but the need to capitalise on it has grown in recent years. Changing buyer behaviour has driven a shift in the effectiveness of sales and marketing at different stages of the 'funnel'.

Modern B2B buyers rarely behave the way our models of the buying process describe, meaning both sales and marketing need to be ready and able to respond to the actions of any lead at any time.

It may sound simple, but a great many things can get in the way of these two functions working well together, especially when they have their own pressures, targets and challenges.

It is the duty of business leaders like you to remove barriers, establish systems and help sales and marketing achieve alignment to maximise the value of every single lead generated.



WHY IS SALES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT IMPORTANT?

Make no mistake, alignment is worth pursuing.

Highly aligned organisations achieve 38% lead to sales conversion rates.

Misaligned organisations, meanwhile, fail to follow up on 50% of marketing leads, and 79% never turn into sales.

For alignment to work, you need people, processes and technology to work together and support one another in the pursuit of common goals.

WHEN SALES AND MARKETING IS ALIGNED:

- Which leads it can market to
- How to segment which leads to pass to sales
- Which leads convert to opportunities and customers
- Which sources and content perform best
- Which leads are opportunities to be followed up
- Which leads to nurture
- The detailed history of each lead
- That cold leads will be nurtured

Data is at the very heart of sales and marketing alignment.

Many of the potential problems associated with aligning sales and marketing can be avoided if you first understand how your teams have been creating and using data and whether they've been using tools and systems correctly.

The first step on the road to sales and marketing alignment is to conduct an audit to fully understand the systems that you already have in place and how they are being used.

Incorrect or inconsistent use of marketing automation and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are the biggest barriers to successful alignment, as being able to connect these two systems is critical to its achievement.

If these systems have been misused, it can lead to data quality or compatibility issues which can require significant effort to correct. Spending time, or money, to improve the quality of historic data may not sound like a valuable investment, but failing to do so will silently derail the whole initiative and ensure that you never realise the full benefit of alignment.

LUPO TIP

Don't be surprised or discouraged if your data is in poor condition.

Data integrity is central to sales and marketing alignment and is

SINGLE VIEW OF THE CUSTOMER

Establishing a single view of the customer – a single source of truth – will enable your sales and marketing teams to effectively manage every lead throughout the entire lifecycle and across all marketing channels.

A single view enables an accurate dialogue between the two teams, which enables smart decision making, effective campaigning and timely sales engagement. Crucially, it also closes the 'sales and marketing loop', providing the marketing team with feedback about which leads turn into customers, and the ability to measure marketing channels in terms of revenue, alongside other metrics.

A single view of the customer is achieved by integrating the systems that hold contact data and is a vital cornerstone of sales and marketing alignment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN AUDIT

- Adherence to sales and marketing data guidelines
- Correct use of individual data fields - i.e. lifecycle
- Consistent population of mandatory data fields
- Correct use of data objects - opportunities for example

INTEGRATING SYSTEMS

The two systems that most commonly need to be integrated are the marketing automation platform and CRM system. Every system that can capture or store contact data should, however, also be integrated.

Many such systems promise easy interconnection, either through native or third-party integrations, but rarely are these promises kept. When integrating systems, combine the findings of your audit with a thorough review of the documentation for each. This will enable you to plan how fields will be mapped and how data will behave when it is synchronised between them.

The synchronisation of contact data is a usual starting point, and, although typically straightforward, can be challenging. The critical step here is mapping the various fields between each of the systems. Different vendors use different naming conventions and these need to be aligned to ensure that data shows up in the right places.

Next, you will probably need to synchronise accounts (aka companies) and opportunities (aka deals).

This can be a bit harder to get right but is essential to close the sales and marketing loop - enabling marketing to know which tactics are most effective at generating customers and revenue.

The systems you're integrating may also have settings that streamline data processing, such as copying fields between accounts and contacts, or changing fields automatically when certain events occur. When you integrate two or more systems these processes may be applied to large sets of new data, and those changes may be synchronised back to the source, so be careful.

LUPO TIP

Different systems can structure what on the surface, looks similar, very differently. It can sometimes be the relationship between two fields in one system that determine a field in another. For example, by default, Salesforce has 'no lifecycle' field. Make sure all opportunities have contact roles assigned so that

SHARED DEFINITIONS

Speaking a common language permits seamless communication and collaboration which is disagreement-free and allows everyone to focus on the shared objective.

Many of the terms used frequently by your sales and marketing teams have no concrete definition and that can lead to confusion when attempting alignment. Some of these terms may become metrics by which one or both teams are measured, or the subject of a sales and marketing Service Level Agreement (SLA), so clarity of meaning is a must.

This clarity is achieved by identifying, defining and documenting any ambiguous terms being used regularly by either team.

COMMON TERMS

Marketing Qualified Lead (MQL)

A MQL is widely agreed to be a known contact who has shown interest in your product or service through their interaction with your marketing channels. It makes sense to regularly review the criteria to ensure that the balance between quality and quantity is optimal.

Sales Qualified Lead (SQL)

A SQL is a contact that has been passed onto sales (and possibly further qualified by sales) but has not yet become an opportunity. Sales might use the BANT (budget, authority, need, timing) or GCPT (goals, plan, challenges, timeline) frameworks to identify contacts that are a good fit for the company's proposition.

Opportunity

Marketing to opportunities can be delicate, therefore it is important that sales and marketing are clear on which contacts are opportunities and why. In many tools, an opportunity must have a deal with a financial value and probability of closing associated with it, which helps establish clarity.

Customer

The main thing to decide is what happens to individual contacts when their account becomes a customer – do all the associated contacts become customers too, or do they stay at their current

INTERNAL NOTIFICATIONS

Notifications that inform sales when leads perform important actions or when new MQLs are generated will enable timely sales outreach and maximise your close rate.

It isn't possible for the sales team to monitor the behaviour of every single lead looking for the right time to make contact, especially when marketing automation is in use or when content marketing is converting more leads who are earlier in their decision-making process.

Fortunately, most marketing automation systems include the ability to send internal notification emails and these emails should give the appropriate sales person relevant information on qualified leads such as:

- Name and contact information
- Recent actions and conversions
- Key properties gathered through form responses
- Links to their marketing history or CRM record

Sending notifications like this will minimise the time to followup and maximise the potential for opportunity creation.

AUTOMATING NOTIFICATIONS

To realise the full benefit of internal notifications, they need to be sent to the right person at the right time.

RIGHT PERSON - ASSIGNING SALES OWNERS

Before they are passed over, every qualified lead should be assigned a sales owner who will then be notified and will manage the relationship thereafter.

Most marketing automation and CRM systems will support the implementation of assignment rules. These can be used to assign contacts to the right sales person based on criteria such as region, industry vertical, company size, product interest or others. If there is a pool of sales people for whom a contact is relevant, round-robin rules can ensure they are distributed equally among them.

RIGHT TIME - LEAD SCORING

While some contacts will be qualified by individual actions, for most , the sum of their actions is used to measure their engagement and sales readiness.

Lead scoring is the most effective method of measuring engagement based on behaviour and can be used to trigger your internal notifications.

When establishing your lead scoring system, recognise that, unless you are using statistical analysis to assign points to actions, you are guessing. Rather than assigning arbitrary scores to many different actions, focus on the big things and use lead scoring to highlight engaged leads that may be sales ready.

LEAD SCORING EXAMPLE

- Set a lead score target of 100 for a contact to be passed to sales.
- Assign 100 points immediately to any action that equates to requesting contact with sales.
- Next, assign 25 or 50 points to top and middle of the funnel actions - meaning that if a content completes enough of these, they too will be passed to sales.
- Finally, assign up to 25 or 50 points for website page views and email interactions.
- Now you've built a lead scoring system that can be used to pass the most engaged contacts to sales, without guessing which actions predict future customers.

Both sales and marketing perform best, and can grow results more easily, when they follow repeatable, measurable processes.

A repeatable sales process defines how and when contacts will be picked up from marketing, as well as the opportunity stages that will be used to track their progress. It will give your aligned teams the best foundation for measurement, collaboration and continuous improvement.

While sales engagements will vary in their length and course, basing them on a consistent set of steps and stages will ensure that critical actions are never overlooked. This helps ensure that stakeholders on both sales and marketing teams feel they can trust one another, easing collaboration.

Implement your sales process within the opportunity stages of your CRM, or marketing platform, to ensure that it is possible to correctly move contacts to opportunity and customer lifecycle stages when appropriate. This will ensure that the pipeline can also always be analysed by marketing channels.

Sales not following up SQLs appropriately is one of the major complaints cited by marketers in misaligned teams. Establishing a repeatable sales process will remove this and other concerns, and ensure that every S

COMMUNICATION

Getting sales and marketing on the same page by facilitating effective communication will maximise the impact of your efforts to align them.

All the processes and technology in the world are not going to help your teams achieve the growth they seek if they don't also communicate.

Most of the onus here falls on the marketing team. They should share campaigns and content assets with the sales team so that they can speak knowledgeably to the leads that they create, should they ask. These assets should ideally be shared before they are launched, however timeconstraints may mean that this is not always possible.

Sales and marketing teams should meet frequently to develop deeper understanding of each other's areas of business. The teams should meet to review results, improve processes and

Both teams will have a lot to offer one another. Joint meetings should, however, be based on clear definitions of accountability so that attendees can focus on sharing information and avoid treading on each other's toes.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Developing and documenting procedures helps your teams to produce repeatable, scalable results.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) also help to maintain data quality - crucial in today's data-driven marketing and sales worlds.

Documenting your SOPs in word documents or spreadsheets is a good starting point. If your processes are numerous or frequently changing, you may find that an online knowledge base is more useful.

Some processes can't be adequately captured and communicated in text or list form. For these, diagrams can work better and online charting tools can be put to good use.

KPIs

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are a perfectly good way of measuring sales and marketing, if they don't conflict with the shared objective of your aligned teams.

Review or set KPIs, both in terms of the metric used and the targets set, to ensure they don't become counter-productive once your teams are aligned.

For example, setting an MQL target for marketing without considering the impact on sales could lead to problems. A very high MQL target might result in marketing upping lead scores and passing more, less qualified leads to sales – marketing may reach its target while the sales conversion rate will go down.

The best way to set KPI targets is to review current conversion rates across the whole funnel and work backwards calculating:

- How many new customers do you need to reach revenue goals?
- How many MQLs or SQLs do you need to close that number of sales?
- How many leads do you need to generate to produce that number of MQLs?
- How much website traffic do you need to create that many MQLs?

FINAL THOUGHTS

You will see the greatest return from any marketing investment if you align your sales team and apply similar levels of strategy, process and measurement to its performance.

Many businesses fall at the first hurdle, discovering the poor state their data is in and failing to integrate systems and close the loop. If you can achieve this crucial step, everything else becomes possible.

HOW LUPO DIGITAL CAN HELP YOU

We're specialists in aligning your conversations with your inbound marketing strategy

We help businesses increase revenue, reduce cost and improve efficiency

We understand the challenges of finding, nurturing and converting leads into customers. We know what it's like for your sales team to fight for your customers' attention.

CONTACT US

We create digital marketing machines to grow your business.

Lupo Digital isn't just a digital marketing and lead management service provider. We also offer full digital business solutions. We can build back-end integration and full customer experience solutions.

GET IN TOUCH

Interested? We'd love to hear from you.

Email Us

info@lupodigital.com

Call Us

1300 727 569

Mon-Fri 9 am-5 pm (EST)

Find Us

45 Denison Street Bondi Junction, NSW, 2022