

Six Tips to Integrate Sales, Marketing, and Communications, Online and Off

As I was researching *Cashing in with Content: How innovative marketers use digital information to turn browsers into buyers*, I poked, prodded and analyzed the Web sites, marketing programs and sales strategies of quite a few diverse organizations. I've noticed that many B2B companies as well as consumer and non-profit organizations don't do a particularly good job of integrating their various communications programs and aligning them with the sales process. Sadly, the failure to integrate sales, marketing and communications, both online and offline will always result in lost opportunities.

One of the most cost-effective ways to help drive sales is to look for ways to leverage the programs you're already doing by re-purposing the content for other initiatives. Too often, organizations spend tons of money on, say, a PR program that targets a handful of journalists but they forget to communicate the same information to clients and prospects. Or a company's advertising program designed to generate new sales will drive people to a Website that doesn't match the message of the ads, resulting in lost interest.

TIP #1 -> If it's important enough to write a press release about, consider telling your clients and prospects too.

Many companies devote extensive resources to their PR and media relations programs. Often the outputs of these efforts are buried in a difficult to find news section of the company Website. Consider re-writing your press releases into an easy-to-read paragraph or two and posting it on your home page. Or take the PR content and turn it into a section of your email newsletter for clients and prospects.

TIP #2 -> Sales leads are too important for just salespeople.

Every salesperson loves leads. And marketing people spend lots of effort providing them. But too often, especially in B2B sales, there's an artificial demarcation between the role of sales and that of marketing.

Consider the tradeshow: many companies spend thousands of marketing dollars to exhibit at important industry events. But after the show concludes, marketing simply ties a pretty ribbon around the business cards they received from prospects and tosses the leads over their shoulder to the sales manager.

Of course it's the salespeople's job to follow-up on the leads. But you might consider how you can integrate marketing with sales by, say, sending each of your tradeshow visitors an appropriate thank you offer such as a free trial of your service or a complimentary download or white paper. Maybe add the sales lead to your email newsletter list. Heck, send them a re-written paragraph from your latest press release (see tip # 1 above).

TIP #3 -> If you're driving people to your site, make sure you put your best face on.

Many companies develop expensive online and offline advertising programs designed to drive traffic to their Websites. But all too often, the content of the site doesn't match the promise of the ad.

Before you spend thousands (or millions) of dollars on advertising, make certain that the information you want people to read is available on your site. Read the site carefully and compare it to the ad. Maybe you'll need to post additional compelling content. Hey, maybe there's a press release you can re-purpose (see tip # 1 above).

TIP #4 -> White Papers are for clients, partners, the media and employees too.

You know how big an effort it is to write and publish a compelling White Paper. Most B2B companies, as well as many consumer and non-profit marketers, are finding that White Papers are good "bait" to get people to visit your Website or tradeshow booth. Offering a compelling White Paper about an interesting aspect of your business or market often generates substantial numbers of downloads.

As you go after new leads, don't forget about your existing customers, your partners and even your employees! Offer the White Paper to everyone who might make use of it, not just the sales prospects. And offer the White Paper to journalists. The media loves White Papers.

But in all cases, don't just send the White Paper unless you've got permission first. People don't like receiving a big file unless they've asked for it. Ask permission first; then get contact information from the people requesting; send the paper and follow up later.

TIP #5 -> Your public speaking calendar belongs to you

Many companies devote extensive resources to their speaking programs. They might have several people who "work the circuit" and present 10 or even 20 speeches a year all over the world. Often, they employ a PR Agency and spend thousands of dollars a month to book the appearances. And then there's the cost of travel: it all adds up to a big investment.

I'm amazed at how few organizations promote events that executives are speaking at. Many people consider event promotion to be the job of the tradeshow or conference organizers.

It's your job to promote your speaking schedule! Consider publishing an events calendar on your Website. If you do an email newsletter, include upcoming events and speeches. Make certain the salespeople know about the events and have them personally invite clients and prospects. If you get a response from someone who cannot attend, follow-up with a copy of the presentation materials after the event (see Tip #6 below).

Ask the event organizer for free passes and invite as many people as you can. Often you can get an unlimited number of passes to single events on a tradeshow or conference calendar (the tradeshow organizers use this for their own marketing).

Tip #6 -> The speech isn't over until you've followed up

During your speech, offer to send the presentation materials to anyone who wants them. Collect business cards at the podium after the speech and invite people to email you for a copy. Offer to send the presentation materials to those who say they would have liked to attend but couldn't make it. Have salespeople quickly follow-up with any attendees who are likely sales prospects – but send the presentation materials first!