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The Convergence of Sales Content and Training

How marketing and sales enablement should transform their approach to delivering content in the sales process.

Introduction

In practicality, the worlds of sales content management and sales training should be symbiotic. On the one hand, sellers require a particular set of tools and content to provide a compelling experience for their buyers. They need an easy way to access content and deliver it within the context of their sales process. On the other hand, they also require a certain set of skills and competencies to know when to position those assets to better increase their chances of winning.

Despite sales content and enablement going hand-in-hand, companies often silo the functions from a process, management, and investment standpoint. Sometimes sales enablement and training sit in sales; other times it's in marketing. Often marketing creates and posts content that their counterparts in sales enablement had no idea existed, and they fail to incorporate it into messaging training.

If this fragmented approach appears like a mess to a seller, that's because it is. According to Forrester, the average sales rep has 1400 pieces of content to choose from at their organization. And even if you assume they can find the content they want, companies should worry whether it's positioned properly in the sales process. According to Gartner, more than 87% of sales training is forgotten within a month.[1] The consequence of that knowledge loss is felt in the buying process: Only 34% of buyers strongly agree that their point-of-contact sales rep is helpful throughout the buying process.

This is a rude awakening for marketers and sales enablement pros who viewed content as a core piece of their enablement apparatus. Even when content adoption is strong, it may not mean it's making the impact you want on the sales process.

In this guide, we'll discuss three steps to bridge these silos within your organization to bring sales enablement and content together into one cohesive strategy. In doing so, you will make life easier for your sellers; you can also consolidate redundant systems within your tech stack.

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1. Unifying content and training starts with one question: what is content?

When you point out that you have a fragmented content environment, this can be an annoying statement for people who worked hard to try and make sense of it. More likely than not, projects have been executed already to tag content, build rich taxonomies, create recommendations, or provide better search technology.

But those technical levers usually won't address one larger issue: what is considered a piece of content at your organization? The answer is often in the eye of the business stakeholder. For someone who works in marketing or product marketing, a large percentage of the content they create is meant to be consumed externally by prospects and customers. For someone who works in sales enablement or training, much of the content is internally facing to drive knowledge transfer or skill development. For sellers, it can be all of those things, plus all of their interactions with buyers, such as email threads and call recordings.

Most organizations store externally facing content in one repository, while the training material gets stored in whatever system used for sales training.

This is where the trouble begins.

A seller may have been certified on a piece of messaging a week earlier in the training systems, and feels ready to deliver that content, but finds a different version when they log into their sales portal to download it.

Here are a few ways to address this issue of sales content fragmentation and silos:

Identify content owners. Marketing, sales enablement, and sales management all have content they generated.

Perform a content location audit. Look where different types of content exist, and broadly categorize them into internally or externally facing camps. Also, examine what systems they live in.

Commit to one content data model. Do you have a system that can not just house your externally-facing content, but maintain clean fidelity with what reps are trained on? For example, if you train them on a company overview presentation, will the link they click on in the training module be the same exact one they share externally?

Assess systems environment. Evaluate sales enablement platforms that can house training programs, as well as content sharing and management functionalities, in one platform. Most systems that started as content platforms tend to have limited functionality in training.

The simplified revenue enablement glossary

The terms below are frequently used interchangeably, which can be confusing. For our purposes, this is how we use them:

Enablement -
The creation and distribution of content intended to make reps more skillful and successful in the field. This includes both informal and formal training content and content resources they use to engage buyers as part of the sales process.

Readiness -
A rep's state of preparedness for success in the field. Enablement efforts are designed to improve overall readiness.

Training -
The formal and informal learning paths that are designed to build the skills and knowledge reps need to be successful, whether provided in person or virtually. One of the two main components of revenue enablement.

Content Management -
The organization and distribution of content for on-demand access by reps throughout the sales process for either just-in-time learning or buyer engagement. One of the two main components of revenue enablement.

2. To be effective, sellers must truly know and understand your content

In sales and marketing, it's become an almost hackneyed statistic to point out that the majority of content, 60-70%, goes unused. By all measures, it's a costly miss: it's estimated that companies invest nearly $500B in content assets globally. But the bigger problem may not be how many assets your sales team uses relative to the number of assets generated: For the ones that are used, they're often not used properly.

This ability to utilize content properly can be measured by seller interactions with buyers, and the data here is even uglier. Forrester's Sirius Decisions has cited that the number-one inhibitor to sales achieving quota is an "inability to communicate a value message." In addition, in a survey of prospective buyers in the executive ranks at companies, Forrester found that a mere 15 percent of sales calls add value.

Your content is only as good as your sales team's ability to understand it, personalize or customize it to the buyer, and pick the right time to use it. There are technologies that can aid that process, but it won't change the fact that most content problems are as much a sales readiness problem.

Here are a few steps you can take to address the issue:

Co-locate training and content together. If a seller finds a piece of content that they think may be relevant, you must ensure they have the ability to gain more context, and, if necessary, training on how to use it and when.

Coach and certify around the content. Before someone can effectively leverage assets, do you have a mechanism in place, whether automated or with their manager, to ensure they truly understand the content?

Recommend content based on individual seller strengths and weaknesses. Some sellers are good at discovery and early deal mechanics; others are better at negotiation and closing. You need a sales enablement platform that can understand the depth of those skill sets, and empowers you to recommend what content will support them in those stages. Artificial intelligence can also augment the curation your teams do here.

3. The deal dictates the content; not marketing journey maps

Many marketing teams are effective at creating a glut of top-of-funnel content aimed at generating awareness and helping prospects gain a baseline about their products or services. In most organizations today, this campaign content is served up in marketing automation platforms (email), organic web content, paid advertising, and social channels, to name a few. After that flurry of engagement, however, there's a major drop off in terms of that content's utility for sales and their buyers. In fact, around 80 percent of salespeople find this demand campaigns insufficient for their needs.[2]

As companies see buyers move down into the middle and bottom of their funnels, sales enablement and marketing need to partner together to put more of the orchestration of content delivery in the hands of the sellers. This will create some trepidation from marketing as they'll want to ensure the content delivered is on-brand and on-message, but it needs to be addressed.

The advent of digital sales rooms potentially offers the best opportunity. A digital sales room provides a centralized place where a seller can have an almost a point-and-click, drag-and-drop experience to choose what content they want for each individual buyer. A Digital Sales Room (DSR) should enable the following:

Buyer & seller group collaboration. Depending on the length or size of your sales team, you may have multiple stakeholders involved in a deal, including the rep, pre-sales consultants, sales managers, and marketing.On the buyer side, it's not uncommon to have 10 or more stakeholders involved in an evaluation. They should all have persistent access to the DSR.

A buyer-centric view of content. Content isn't just a PowerPoint deck or PDF whitepaper. It's also the call recordings with the company or the brand. A DSR capability should give sellers the ability to sort by all these content types, such as meeting recordings, product demos, customer references, proposals, contracts, and other supporting materials.

Easily personalized. The seller should be able to clone existing rooms or use templates to quickly launch new DSRs while providing necessary customizations for the buyer and their brand.

Create a place for action and next steps. Passive delivery of content over email doesn't help propel buyer action. By having clear calls-to-action embedded in the experience, the seller can accelerate their deal cycles. DSRs can also include mutual action plans to align all parties around each step in the sales process.

Insights on engagement and deal health. A DSR should gather granular engagement data for all room visitors on an asset, page, or slide level. Engagement with key content by key stakeholders shows you where you really are. If a procurement team has viewed a contract or proposal five times in the last three days, your closing projection is much stronger than if it hasn't been viewed at all.

Conclusion: Consolidate training and content as one strategy

No matter where sales-focused content and sales training lives and which team owns it, leadership should strongly consider having them both live in one system. Sellers need to easily access and share it and know exactly how and where to use it. You also need to empower them to curate it as they see fit in their deals. In doing so, you can not only ensure the content sales delivers resonates with their buyers but grows revenue predictably and sustainably for quarters and years to come.