

# Improving Sales and Marketing Collaboration

*A Step-by-Step Guide*

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## Abstract

In any company, sales and marketing are the two primary business functions that are focused on creating satisfied customers. Because of their complementary orientations and objectives, these two functions are ideally positioned for a fruitful, synergetic collaboration. Unfortunately, the practical reality in many companies is far removed from this utopia. Sales and marketing personnel fail to communicate effectively, resulting in misunderstandings, lack of communication, frustration, and sometimes even downright anger and sabotage. Instead of supporting each other in creating superior value for customers, sales and marketing fight tiresome internal battles that are a drain on profits, efficiency and customer satisfaction.

In this book we offer the first comprehensive perspective on the functioning of sales-marketing interfaces in business to business (B2B) companies. We explore the complementary roles of sales and marketing in creating superior value for customers, the problems that occur in sales-marketing interfaces, the underlying causes of these problems and potential solutions to effectively deal with these problems. These solutions are accompanied by a series of tools that managers can use to diagnose their sales-marketing interface and develop appropriate approaches to improve this relationship. In addition, the book discusses a number of challenges that companies have to deal with on a day-to-day basis and how they may impact their sales-marketing interfaces.

This book is based on over seven years of research, during which we conducted interviews with hundreds of sales and marketing personnel at various organizational levels, as well as several CEOs and COOs. Our findings have been tested and refined through discussions with practitioners in focus groups and seminars. The companies included in this book cover a wide range of industries, as well as the full spectrum from small companies that just started to discover the benefits of marketing to large, established, Fortune 100 firms that must deal with significant differences between their sales and marketing groups.

As a result, this book takes a hands-on, managerial approach to all aspects of sales-marketing interfaces in B2B companies. The discussions and tools presented in this book provide managers with a deep under-

standing of this critical interface and allow them to apply these insights to improve their sales-marketing interface, which in turn helps them to create superior value for customers.

### **Keywords**

sales-marketing relationship, sales-marketing alignment, managing sales-marketing interface

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# Preface

Several years ago, independent from each other, both of us started to study the relationship between sales and marketing in business-to-business (B2B) companies. Intrigued by the observation that these two functions that appear to be so similar in terms of background and objectives, could find it so difficult to work together effectively, we felt that this warranted further examination. When we realized that our research in the United States and in the Netherlands resulted in complementary findings, it was only natural to team up and further explore this interesting area. This collaborative research endeavor, that now spans over seven years, has resulted in a large number of conference papers and several published articles in academic journals, and now culminates in the publication of this book aimed at practitioners.

Over the past seven years, we talked to hundreds of sales and marketing personnel at various levels within their respective organizational hierarchy, as well as with several CEOs and COOs on the topic of the sales–marketing interface. In addition, we conducted focus groups and seminars on this topic, as well as presented our research findings to practitioners. The sales and marketing, as well as the C-suite executives we interacted with come from companies operating in a wide variety of industries. They range from small companies that just started to discover the benefits of marketing to large, established, Fortune 100 firms that must deal with significant differences between their sales and marketing groups. The insights we derived from these conversations inform this book to a significant extent.

Therefore, we would first like to thank all those individuals who agreed to give us their precious time and participate in our depth-interviews, focus groups, and seminars. Without their willingness to talk in great detail about the relationship between sales and marketing in their companies this book would not exist. In addition, we want to thank our colleagues and students, who commented on our presentations, seminars, and lectures about the sales–marketing interface, and thus helped us to sharpen our thoughts about this subject.

We hope that this book serves as a comprehensive guide for managers, irrespective of whether you hold a sales or marketing title, to improve sales–marketing relationships in your companies and set them on a path to long-term success.

Both of us have come to appreciate the joy of working together on this multi-year, collaborative endeavor and writing this book. To us, what started as a tentative, joint academic research project turned into a valuable friendship, which serves to illustrate one of our key observations: An effective professional relationship is built on complementary skills, mutual trust and appreciation, and a strong personal bond between the individuals involved.

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