



Enabling sellers in a hybrid world



Sales enablement in a hybrid world

In a world of digital, remote, and hybrid selling, the role of sales enablement has never been more important. Visibility and trust between marketing and sales are critical for success. Marketing must talk to sales leaders, speak with customers, and invest in robust primary research to set the buyer journey foundation.

Key takeaways

Sales enablement is a team sport. Regardless of ownership, marketing must play a key role in setting the foundation. Marketers, given their skillsets and focus on account and market insight, are best suited to create value propositions and orchestrate the ideal customer journey.

The relationship between marketing and sales has become increasingly important with the emergence of the hybrid seller role; the key to success is visibility, collaboration, and transparency.

In this Viewpoint, Alisha Lyndon of Momentum ITSMA & Liz Harrison of McKinsey & Company discuss how sales enablement has evolved with digital selling, the ways in which marketing adds value, and approaches to rally all lines of business around the needs of the customer.

Alisha Lyndon: Sales enablement is a buzzword that means many things and nothing at the same time. Let's start by defining it. What do you mean by sales enablement?

Liz Harrison: For me, sales enablement is focusing efforts and resources to help sellers sell in a more efficient and effective manner. The goal is to ensure sellers can focus on effective meeting preparation and spend quality time in customer conversations. The sales enablement team does this by crafting value propositions that align to their values and needs, providing relevant competitor and company intelligence, and preparing proposal materials. Top performing sales enablement teams also have strong analytics that allow them to see what's working and what's not, but more importantly what's needed, with the ability to pivot accordingly. They also often provide a single point of contact or expertise for the sales team. It's a very targeted way to do sales capability building.

“There's increased investment in sales enablement because it works, especially during this time of rapid change.”

LIZ HARRISON

Alisha: Sales has gone from an individual sport of selling into accounts to more of a team sport and this in turn has a huge impact on sales enablement. What are the biggest trends you're seeing?

Liz: We're seeing an emergence and opportunity in team selling, which brings together the best of marketing, sales, product, and CX, among other areas, and enables teams to put together holistic, impactful plans for their customers. There's increased investment in sales enablement because it works, especially during this time of rapid change. There's an emergence of the hybrid seller role and dramatic shifts in preferences for digital and in-person engagement. Companies are investing in ways that enable sales teams to spend more time selling instead of doing administrative tasks and other process-related work.

Companies investing in team selling are seeing significant growth in both revenue and customer satisfaction. Our research and experience show that these organizations see improvements in cost-to-serve, employee morale, and retention. Selling is a team sport – it’s an important shift and sales enablement is a core driver of its success.

“Marketing should play a key role in setting the foundation for sales enablement, regardless of where it sits in the organization or what specific piece they own.”

LIZ HARRISON

Alisha:

Our research tells us the single biggest reason sellers fail to hit their revenue targets is if they’re not able to communicate their value proposition through the lens of each customer. So that’s where we’re seeing a huge amount of sales enablement investment, equipping sellers with meaningful messaging and tools beyond the brand or solution level.

In our view, five or 10 years ago, sales enablement was very much a sales training function, but today, we see it as closer to marketing.

Account-Based Marketing (ABM) has accelerated the evolution of sales enablement in a couple of ways. One, we’re seeing marketing move in step with customers and bring objective insight to sellers. Two, we’re seeing marketing and sales wanting to invest in customer-specific value propositions and this has transformed marketing’s role in equipping sales teams with the right tools to have impactful customer conversations.

Do you see sales enablement falling to marketing, is it staying in a sales function, or somewhere else altogether?

Liz:

That’s an interesting and important question. I fully agree with you that the skillset, background, and focus of the marketing team is best suited to parts of sales enablement, such as value propositions and pulling together insights and experience about the customer to craft the ideal journey.

But this does not necessarily mean that sales enablement needs to live within marketing. Many organizations continue to debate this; they’ve experimented with different options. The answer will be unique to the nuances of the organization. Marketing should play a key role in setting the foundation for sales enablement, but it’s not a definitive best practice to say sales enablement needs to live within marketing nor have permanent members of marketing within that group. As we discussed earlier, sales is a team sport, so whether it sits in marketing, sales, or client development – all efforts are centered on driving the best customer experience.

Alisha: Are there specific aspects where marketing shouldn't be involved at all?

Liz: Depending on the organization, marketing should be more involved in the strategic elements of sales enablement, versus the tactical. Activities on the tactical side would include things like preparation of quotes and spec sheets. I would reiterate that marketing is best suited to things like value propositions and defining the ideal positioning, based on unique insights about customers. Some marketing organizations, however, especially in the B2B space, do have tactical marketing departments. In this case, marketing could play a role in more tactical decisions, such as determining which of the five emails should be sent to a prospect and when.

If we take a full-funnel view, marketing plays a role at each level. At the lower end of the funnel, where there's an active opportunity and sales is actively engaged, marketing usually takes it off. However, in the middle and top portions of the funnel, marketing can be very strategic in devising an ABM approach, inclusive of marketing and client intelligence. Based on this, marketing, in partnership with sales, can customize the value proposition, content, case studies, and ROI business case. Marketing plays a key role here, as they have a pulse on the industry and can build tailored content that aligns to what the client needs.

“Marketing has a huge opportunity, and also a potential risk if they don't link their work to tangible dollar-impact or engage deeply with sales.”

LIZ HARRISON

Alisha: Given the growth in digital channels and self-serve content, it would be interesting to see how things shape up a year from now. One school of thought is that marketing's job is to engage the market, not sales. Why should marketing care about enabling sales teams? What guidance would you give to marketing leaders?

Liz: The risk of not engaging with the sales team is too high, and vice versa for sales teams not engaging with their marketing counterparts. Marketing has a huge opportunity, and a potential risk if they don't link their work to tangible dollar-impact or engage deeply with sales. In addition, marketing plays a critical role across the customer's decision journey, weaving in personalized experiences to deepen engagements.

Alisha: We definitely see the value of marketing at an all-time high, but our research tells us there's still a way to go. Even when you have a Chief Revenue Officer overseeing both sales and marketing or a CMO with a business development (BDR) team, there's still a gap between sales and marketing due to disparate goals. How should these two functions work together?

Liz: It's around the emergence of this hybrid sales role. Hybrid sellers are representatives who interact with customers via video, phone, apps, and occasional in-person visits. In our [B2B Pulse](#) research, we ask not only how many organizations have hybrid sales roles today, but also how many have launched these roles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to understand how this role is evolving. When we asked: 'What do you expect to be the most prominent sales role in your organization over the next 18 months?' 85% said that it's hybrid sellers.

Sales and marketing alignment still lags

15%

of sales and marketing teams share the same goal

while buyers demand an integrated approach

90%

say sales and marketing alignment during the buying process is critical

Sources: Momentum ITSMA State of the Marketing Profession, Momentum ITSMA How Executives Engage; The Momentum CBX™

To me, this role has been a catalyst and will continue to be a driver for incredibly powerful and strong working relationships across marketing and sales. As part of this collaborative partnership, marketing and sales can align on overall objectives and goals. This includes how to drive influence, consideration, interest, and decision using full-funnel marketing. This way, marketers drive their plan based on the objectives including the types of events, programs, and campaigns they will run.

In addition, the shift to virtual and digital creates a lot of data, which enables organizations to use analytics to measure what's working and what's not. The nature of selling and the sales team have dramatically changed because of COVID-19. Hybrid selling will grow. Because of that, the relationship between marketing and sales becomes increasingly important.

The key to success is visibility and transparency between marketing and sales. If I'm a seller and I own the account, I absolutely need to know what marketing messages the customer received and which ones they interacted with. At the same time, marketing must have the opportunity to connect directly with customers. Having both sales and marketing engaged in the setup of sales enablement, and the definition of the value proposition and proposal materials, will help reduce that tension going forward.

As purchasing goes omnichannel, sales models will go hybrid

Hybrid sales reps will soon become the most common sales role. With omnichannel established as the new buying norm, 64% of B2Bs intend to increase the number of hybrid sellers over the next six months, making this model – representatives who interact with customers via video, phone, apps, and occasional in-person visits – the lead sales role.

Introduction of a new sales rep role – the hybrid rep^{1,2}

28%

of B2B organizations have hybrid sales roles today

77%

of those with hybrid sales roles introduced this role given the switch to virtual driven by COVID-19

85%

expect hybrid sellers will be the most common sales role in their organization over the next three years

¹Q: Which of the following roles exist in your sales organization?

²Q: You said that your organization has “hybrid sellers”. Please state your level of agreement with the following statements: “Hybrid sellers were recently introduced given the switch to virtual sales due to COVID-19”; “Hybrid sellers will be the most common sales role in my organization over the next three years”

Source: :McKinsey B2B Pulse Survey, 2/12-2/2021 [n=3,498]

Source: McKinsey & Company: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/omnichannel-in-b2b-sales-the-new-normal-in-a-year-that-has-been-anything-but>

Alisha:

We’ve talked about building the foundation for sales enablement, having visibility and trust between marketing and sales as the key to success. Any other final tips for firms to drive business impact from sales enablement?

Liz:

Talk to sales leaders, talk to customers, and invest in robust primary research to set that buyer journey foundation. Marketing needs to talk to sales to develop that credibility and open dialogue. Marketers should hear firsthand from customers what they want and need, what’s working and what’s not. Marketing and sales teams together can identify premium accounts and top decision makers to influence and build long-term sustainable programs to enhance the customer experience.

Lastly, at the core of this is about understanding your customer deeply. Understand what matters to them and focus all your investment and effort on the most critical parts of the journey.

Liz Harrison

Partner, McKinsey & Company

Liz helps the world's largest B2B organizations across industries achieve sustained growth and advises on sales and marketing strategy. She's an expert on go-to-market approaches, especially through complex channel dynamics, grounded in her deep understanding of evolving customer preferences. She spends her time tackling the toughest sales and marketing challenges, such as evolving the sales motion, balancing a direct-to-customer e-commerce channel with a strong dealer network, and setting up a new marketing organization and operating model for success.

As the global leader of B2B Pulse, McKinsey's research on decision-maker preferences, Liz is at the forefront of how customer demands are changing and what the implications are for B2B sales and marketing. She leads a global team that deeply researches and understands how thousands of B2B decision makers want to interact with suppliers and how sales and marketing are changing around the globe. Liz is also a frequent speaker and content contributor, through events, podcasts, and interviews.

Alisha Lyndon

CEO, Momentum ITSMA

Alisha Lyndon is the CEO of Momentum ITSMA, a global growth consultancy and pioneers of Account-Based Marketing. She leads the group, its strategy and works with global clients to accelerate their growth.

Alisha partners with sales and marketing leaders on winning and growing high-value clients, developing growth strategies, key account management, Account-Based Marketing, and marketing transformation. She has made significant contributions to the sales and marketing field, and her transformative ideas have helped reshape how organizations around the world approach client development.

Alisha is a speaker on growth topics, hosts *The Account-Based Marketing Podcast*, is author of *The ABM Effect*, and is a regular contributor to *Forbes*.

About Momentum ITSMA

Momentum ITSMA powers client-led growth and commercial impact for high-value B2B organizations.

Our strategic insight and growth consultancy services help the world's leading firms deepen relationships, strengthen their reputations, and grow revenue.

We pioneered Account-Based Marketing, and our ongoing innovation ensures our clients consistently outperform their competitors.

[Get in touch to find out more about our services.](#)