

# Ending The War Between Sales And Marketing

**It may seem as if sales people and marketing people speak two different languages, these two elements of a business need to work in tandem like never before, writes Valerie Rice.**

From Athens and Sparta, Dublin and Kerry, to Coke and Pepsi...the list of age old rivalries always triggers more additions to the list. For many business leaders, especially in a recession, you can add Sales and Marketing. The negative impact of conflict between these two functions also has a definite negative impact on the bottom line writes **Valerie Rice.**

In many cases, the fall out is hard to measure simply because the relationship doesn't need to have public flare ups for it to be shown not to work. More often than not, Sales and Marketing ignore one another, disregarding each other's work, beliefs and so called efforts to 'help' the other side. For business, almost regardless of scale, there are three simple questions to be asked. Are the efforts of the sales and marketing functions being optimised? If not, what does this cost in real terms? And finally what can we do about fixing it?

Getting the answers to these questions and doing something about it lies at the heart of getting through tough times. Inevitably, business owners are focussed on upfront costs. Printing in black and white and turning down the heating down may help you feel you're making progress, but in the race to cut the obvious costs, you are missing an opportunity to get more out of your teams.

Even in moderately sized businesses, there's a strong chance that Sales and Marketing are like different planets. The outcome is an inevitable waste of resources and reduced profitability. Marketing produces brochures, research reports and sales aids that are stored in the reps car boot. Meanwhile sales people may be dialling the wrong call about the wrong product line to a non -decision maker. No one is making mistakes deliberately; it's just that after many years of good times, the eyes have drifted off the ball.

A Harvard Business School report confirms what many of us have known all along. The strains between Sales and Marketing fall into two main categories a) economic – when a single budget is typically divided between Sales and Marketing, and not always evenly and b)cultural -the two functions attract very different types of people who achieve success by spending their time in very different ways. Not surprisingly, meetings between the two often spend more time on conflict resolution than on business development or profitability. In the growth of many companies, marketing was originally a shared responsibility of the MD and whoever else was involved in selling. As the business grew, a marketer was hired and this aspect of the business became more specialised. As the marketing function grew, the marketers started to say brave things like '*we're going to make this a brand driven organisation*'. Except no one told sales and therein lies so much of the problem. Lack of communication highlights lack of alignment and as business has become more complex, the two functions have in many cases just drifted apart.

In many smaller Irish businesses, as long as you're certain that the teams get on and have a sense of shared commercial objectives, there may be no need for too much concern. However, if your business has grown with now disconnected functions and you're dwelling on missed opportunities and wasted initiatives, then change is definitely required.

The smart thing to do is to look at how you might either align the teams to a greater degree, or in more extreme cases how you might integrate the two functions. There is no 'one size fits all' solution.

### **Change Your Mindset**

However there are certain indicators that are amplified in a downturn. For example, if the market has become commoditised or the product life cycle is shortening. If, despite your best efforts, you still witness duplication or waste, then you should consider your options. Aligning your teams typically means talking more and setting some ground rules as to who should be involved in decision making – say above certain spend thresholds. Get your marketers out with the sales team on sales calls – you'll be amazed by what they learn from one another. Perhaps take it further and do some job rotation. Consider this. It's a recession and you have to sell more, maintain margin and makes every cent count. You can't do this without the right people and you'll never get them trained or working together if you're not prepared to try new things and see who responds best.

In larger companies, where the issues may be more complex and the stakes even higher, you may consider greater integration. Firstly – are you working to a plan? In many organisations there are two plans – one for marketing and the other for sales and there is no connection between them. Consider combining them into one business plan and having everyone work towards the same business objectives. It's also worth getting the tactically minded marketers to work on sales issues with the sales force, developing and qualifying leads, producing relevant materials and using sales feedback to track down new opportunities. Get the marketing people involved in segmenting the market into areas of greatest profitability and have them work with the sales team on their now shared objectives. On the basis of 'what gets rewarded gets done' consider a greater level of reward based on sales success for both the sales teams *and* the marketers. Finally, don't delay. If there's one thing a sharp downturn is teaching us, it's that commercially focussed people don't hang about. If something isn't working and you need help fixing it then get cracking. Because while you're reading this, at least one of your competitors is doing something about it.

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