

Sales and Marketing: Is there a difference?

You bet. And understanding just how different they are will help you be more effective at both.

At their very core, sales and marketing have as much in common as apples and dump trucks. Sure, they sometimes share similar goals (increase sales, generate better margins, boost share, etc.), but hardly ever do they approach those objectives in the same way.

Why? Because sales and marketing types fundamentally think in opposing ways. Let's take a look at what distinguishes sales from marketing. First, a disclaimer: the following definitions aren't absolutes. Maybe you'll agree. Maybe not. What's important is to understand the differences and apply that understanding to your company's sales and marketing efforts. Now for the differences...

Marketing: *Why?*

Marketing folks get consumed with figuring things out. "Why does a certain market segment buy while others don't? Why would our target audience pay more for a competitive product than for ours?" (They even spend a lot of time figuring out how to figure things out.)

Sales: *What?*

Sales people get consumed with action. (It's the very nature of their jobs.) And so, they ask themselves lots of "what" questions: "What do I do next? What will get her to pull the trigger on this deal?" You get the idea.

Marketing: *General*

Generalists make good marketers — and vice versa. They must look at a pile of diverse facts (market research, sales data, customer demographics, etc.) and generalize it into strategies and tactics.

Sales: *Specific*


But imagine the sales person who generalizes with his customers: "On the average, customers tend to prefer the Platinum Service Package, so it should be perfect for Joe Tightwad at No-Frills, Inc." Not exactly a winning approach. Generalize too much at the sales level and prepare to find yourself with few specific sources of income.

Marketing: *Searches for "no"*

Consider the following rule of thumb for being a successful marketer: You get one "yes." Everything else is a "no." This means you can say "yes" to only one idea, (strategy, position, market, etc.). For every other idea, you must say "no," as in: "We won't sell into that market. We refuse to sell below this price. We choose to ignore these types of distribution channels." Marketers know that every time they say "no," they build their marketing power. Saying "yes" far and wide is like spreading out a glowing pile of embers. They quickly extinguish themselves and die. Saying "no" keeps the embers piled, where they can ignite into a roaring fire.

Sales: *Searches for "yes"*

Sales people look for yes. They say yes. And they want others to say yes. That's usually how they win.



Sales people don't think like marketing people, and vice versa. Their differences often lead them to head in opposite directions, despite sometimes sharing similar goals.

**Sales and marketing mindsets:
Two different directions**



Although sales people and marketing people often come from different directions, they can merge their efforts to arrive at a common destination—*ahead of the competition.*

Marketing: *It's about change*

Change: the one thing marketers count on (and secretly love). Nothing makes them so valuable to their companies (nor makes their jobs so secure). At the top of most marketers "to do" list is an implicit directive: "Figure out what to do about all the change going on in our marketplace. And be quick about it." Challenge yourself to find a marketing plan that doesn't deal with change or seek to create change. (Save your time; you can't.)

Sales: *It's about consistency*

Now for sales people, nothing throws a monkey wrench into the gears like change. You know... the customer gets taken over by a competitor. The other guy introduces a new product that tramples all over your technical superiority. The buyer who loved you yesterday finds a new job (and gets replaced by a guy your company once fired... ouch!) Sales is a game of consistency. The more you can make things consistent—from retaining clients, to keeping prices, territories, and successful product lines the same—the more you win. "New" (the most powerful word in marketing) has a curious way of turning into something that you as a sales professional end up trying to explain away.

Marketing: *Intangible*

Can you see a market segment? How about a pricing strategy? A satisfaction rating? Of course not; they're intangible ideas. And you know what? Marketing people take comfort in them—the world of ideas, concepts, strategies and philosophies.

A sales person can become frustrated trying to get the marketing guy's attention about a specific customer. Marketing types like to think big picture, blue sky. They don't want to think about a single customer. They want to think about a market, a demographic segment, a price/value continuum. And the truth is, they have to.

Sales: *Real*

Sales, on the other hand, deals with the tangible, the real. Can you see a customer? A truckload? A product feature, like titanium bearings? Sure you can. Sellers (and buyers) know how to cut through the "smoke and mirrors;" they take stock in real things. Imagine a sales person who doesn't know the facts—model numbers, sizes, prices or SKUs. We're talking about a sales person who needs to get real... real fast. (Or get out of the business.) Sales people (and their managers) want, need and thrive on reality.

Marketing: *The future*

To illustrate this point concisely, imagine a director-level sales manager (who also happens to be the company's marketing director). Talk about a split personality... Dr. Jekyll (not his real name) may even argue with himself over the inherent future/today time frame conflict between marketing and sales.

First, he may think he needs to totally change the way they market over the next three to five years.

Sales: *Today!*

Next, he might rant how he didn't dare upset the apple cart or take the time to develop new approaches, because they absolutely needed to focus on today (as in making this quarter's numbers). He might even catch himself saying, "We need to redo our entire marketing approach... as long as we don't change anything." No wonder marketing and sales rarely see eye to eye on time frames.

Conclusion: sales + marketing = better performance

Sales people (and sales managers) who rely solely on a "sales" mindset leave out a powerful tool from their arsenal—a tool known as marketing. At a macro level, corporations almost never go to market using marketing only. Many, however, try to make it on sales alone. Through the years, in case after case, these "sales only" companies become much more successful (greater revenue, higher margins and more profit) when they add marketing to their mix.

Now, here's the important point... added together, sales and marketing multiply each other's effectiveness. Why? Because sales is aimless without marketing; and marketing powerless without sales.