



## Four Key Principles for Sales Success with Empowered Customers

### Introduction

In today's market, customers are empowered with a great deal of information before they ever talk to a sales rep. With this body of knowledge, they expect much more from their sales experience than ever before. Rising customer expectations are making it an imperative for sales teams to meet the challenge and add value to the buyer journey with advice on solving business problems, understanding and preparing for trends and providing insights to best practices and solutions.

Meeting these rising expectations requires a new approach to sales strategies and priorities. Here are four important principles that companies need to incorporate in their sales processes to ensure success with new empowered customers.

### The Customer is King

Face it, without customers you have no business. And everyone knows it's easier (and cheaper) to keep your current customers happy than to acquire new customers.

Getting laser focused on your customers starts with your company culture and ensuring your customer support team is empowered by and shares your focus on providing an amazing customer experience. Think about your business model and how you can best service your customers.

In today's market, no organization can avoid coming to grips with the rapidly evolving behavior of consumers and business customers. More than ever before, both B2B and consumer customers are empowered to make themselves heard. The voice of the customer is more powerful than ever before in leveling the competitive landscape – making it more important than ever to have a strong customer engagement strategy.

### Think Customer Engagement, Not Sales Cycles

Customer engagement is about encouraging your customers to interact and share in the experiences created for them as a business and a brand. When



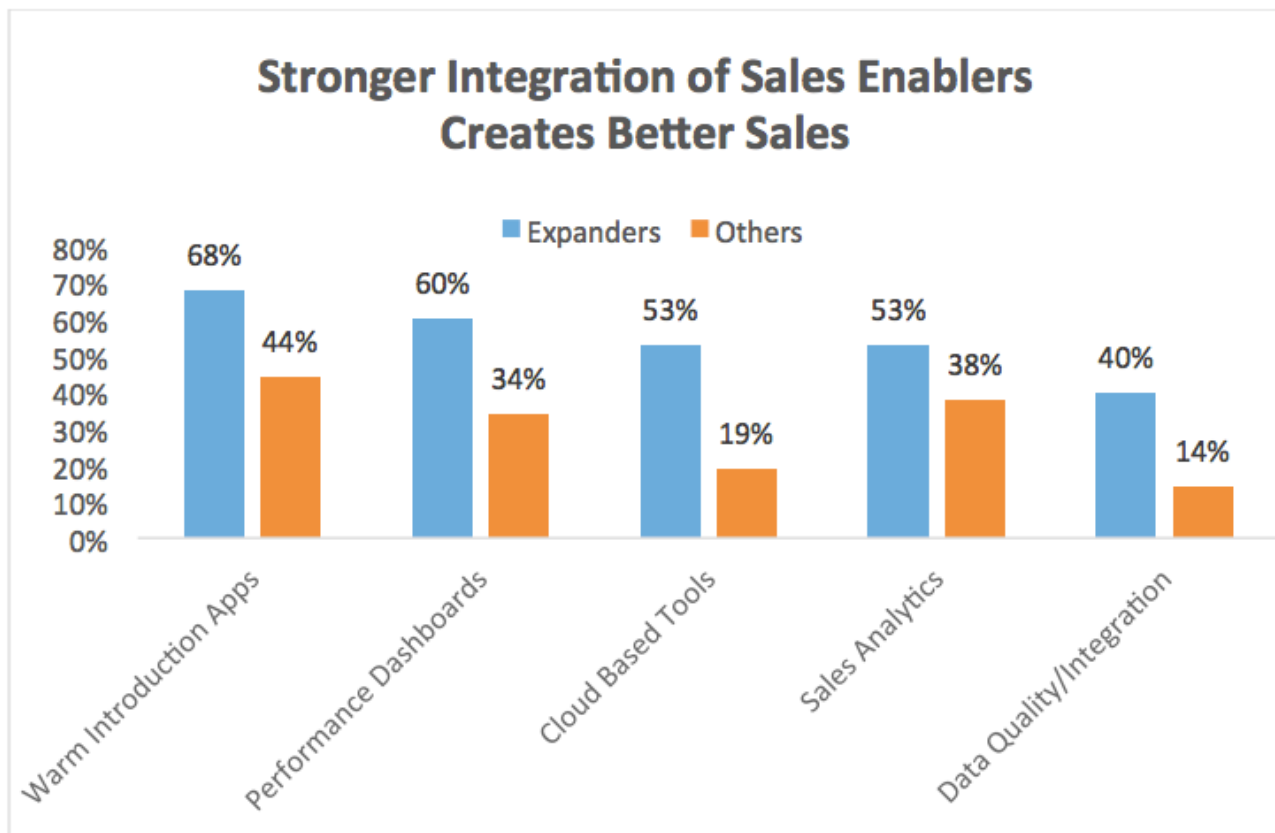
executed well, a strong customer engagement strategy will foster brand growth and loyalty.

Here are a few insights on customer engagement as you consider strategies to strengthen your customers' experience with your company:

- Social media is no longer a trend or a phenomenon – we've all acknowledged it's a part of our everyday lives. Savvy businesses, whether consumer or B2B focused, are developing strategies for creating shared experiences that involve frequent online interactions that keep customers interacting with them, rather than focusing on "touch points" during the marketing and sales process. When it comes to engaging your

customer, you need to create content that educates customers on trends, best practices and solutions that meet their needs through regular blog posts, webinars and email updates with great insights that they will look forward to each week. It is important to engage your customers where they are in the buying journey versus where you are in the sales cycle, with meaningful content and advice. It's their process, not yours.

- A recent article in Inc. Magazine, suggests that this strategy will pay off: Companies that engage with their customers with valuable content via online channels and social media have more loyal customers.



Aberdeen Group, November 2014



- Ultimately, whatever customer experience strategies you employ, the key is to be consistent with the experiences you create and you'll be rewarded with customer trust and loyalty.

## Get Your Sales Team in Sync with Your Marketing Team

Sometimes marketing and sales can seem worlds apart, but that should not stop you from striving for tighter integration. A 2013 Marketo Sales and Marketing Alignment Study shows that when sales and marketing teams are in sync, companies become 67% better at closing sales deals and generate 208% more revenue from marketing activities. Also, consider that the Corporate Executive Board has found that 57% of the buyer's journey is complete before that buyer talks to sales. Clearly, the responsibility for driving revenue is shared by sales and marketing, and alignment of the two functions is an effective strategy for driving revenue.

Despite their different outlooks, it is imperative that marketing and sales create a two-way flow of information. The way customers find and purchase products has changed—and these two teams depend on one another for success.

## Data is Your Secret Weapon

Most experts agree that “big data” is the most transformative shift to hit sales and marketing teams in decades. That's because more than any other profession, salespeople have long relied on the art of the deal, relying on relationships and other soft factors to target and close business.

Similarly, marketing professionals have had little to no empirical data to support their spending. Big data and predictive analytics makes both marketing and sales processes more predictable, measurable and effective.

With customers more empowered – and more demanding – than ever before, marketing and sales teams must work together to simplify the complexity of data, processes, marketing channels and insights. Providing the tools needed to not only streamline internal workflow, but also to interact with customers and prospects in innovative and personalized ways across wide array of channels, enables companies to measure effectiveness of marketing spend more precisely and also holds promise for sales, including:

- Adopting data-driven methods to target high-value prospects, keep existing customers on board, and expand existing opportunities.
- Improving accuracy of sales forecasting with more sophisticated algorithms as the weapon of choice for predicting sales.
- Leveraging real-time sales data visualization to empower better and quicker decision making for sales managers.

A recent research report from Aberdeen Group (From Lead to Close: Best-in-Class Sales Acceleration Techniques That Win, November 2014, [www.aberdeen.com](http://www.aberdeen.com)) outlines several sales enablement tools that best-in-class sales organizations are investing in to improve performance. Their research shows that these best-in-class strategies result in 32% higher team attainment of goals than all others (84% vs. 54%).



Key technologies in the Aberdeen research include:

- Warm introduction applications (social graphs) overlay the contact records in CRM with social media connections (for example, who knows whom via LinkedIn) to help sales reps and managers more clearly determine the path of least resistance towards specific prospects and customers.
- Performance Dashboards provide real-time updates for the sales team and leadership on progress against goals.
- Cloud Supported, Fully Mobile Accessibility allows access not only to the CRM from any device, anywhere, but also the ability of sales reps to create data entries and leverage the other enabling technologies discussed.



- Predictive Analytics help leaders not only better predict which deals are more likely to close, but to coach their team members toward goal attainment as well.
- Data Quality and Integrations provides a “360° view” of the customer. Best-in-class systems bring together CRM, ERP, marketing automation, social media, help desk and other systems that contain valuable information that are often siloed or disconnected.

## Conclusion

Sales teams who want to excel in meeting the expectations of today’s customers, need to stop thinking about sales cycles and start thinking engagement. Customers will engage with companies who meet their needs – their changing needs – for different information and options during the buying journey. To remain relevant in today’s market, sales organizations need to provide higher-value engagements that meet and anticipate customers’ current and future business

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