

BY MICHAEL KRAUSS

✉ michael.krauss@mkt-strat.com

## Sales Enablement Is a Marketing Priority



**Michael Krauss** is president of Market Strategy Group based in Chicago. To read past columns, go to [MarketingPower.com/marketingnews](http://MarketingPower.com/marketingnews) and click on "featured contributors."

**M**arketers have to make their mark. To advance in our organizations, we need to be associated with projects and programs that move the business ahead. One pretty solid bet for career advancement is to take charge of introducing and aiding the adoption of sales enablement processes and technologies.

Regardless of the size of your organization, the gap between marketing and sales, between headquarters' forecasts and field execution, needs to be closed. To make that happen, as many B-to-B marketers know, you have to be willing to make sales enablement a priority in your marketing strategy.

What exactly is sales enablement? I define it as a set of processes enabled by computer hardware, software and well-aligned personnel that assures that sellers have the right messages, information and tools to advance the sales process. More formally, Forrester Research defines sales enablement as a "strategic, ongoing process that equips all client-facing employees with the ability to consistently and systematically have a valuable conversation with the right set of customer stakeholders at each stage of the customer's problem-solving life cycle to optimize the return on investment of the selling system."

Why sales enablement? Why now? Allow me to answer that with a personal anecdote: As a young packaged goods product manager, I prepared glossy, multicolored sales folders containing all of the messages and plans that our marketing team developed for a promotion. I would walk over to John Rossier in the sales administration department, a kind fellow who worked to get our brand a slot in the sales calendar. Rossier and my sales kit were the only sales enablement tools we had at Swift & Co. in the 1970s.

Each month we would make our forecasts at headquarters, projecting sales volumes and profit. Each month we'd miss our targets and have to go to the woodshed and explain ourselves to the executive vice president of marketing. Of course, we would blame the sales organization for a failure to execute. We would bemoan the lack of sales alignment. Then I would wander down to see Rossier to start the process all over again.

Despite CRM investments, the gap between headquarters sales expectations and field sales execution is still a big one, just as it was when I was a young product manager. Mark O'Connell, president and CEO of SAVO Group, a Chicago-based provider of sales enablement software and solutions, says that CRM systems are increasingly common in organizations looking to track and manage leads as they mature into customers and on into profit, but they don't go far enough. "There is nothing in a CRM system that is providing



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Blackboard

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TIM RIESTERER  
Corporate Visions

any value for the person who has to execute your revenue strategy: your seller. The idea of sales enablement is to turn that paradigm completely around," he says.

Executives like Tina Latuga, global vice president of CRM technology at UPS; Brian McKenzie, director of sales enablement at Blackboard, a technology provider for the education market; and Tim Riesterer, chief strategy and marketing officer at Corporate Visions, a marketing and sales messaging provider, believe in using sales enablement to align messages, reduce distractions and build common ground between marketing and sales. As these executives demonstrate, the impact can be significant regardless of your organization's size.

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Why stake your career on sales enablement initiatives? "It addresses the single largest business problem that CEOs face today: revenue growth. It's

where future growth is going to come from. It's the one major area that has never been tackled—until now," SAVO's O'Connell says.

At UPS, Latuga's C-suite appreciates the impact that sales enablement tools can have on revenue growth. "I knew our organization understood sales enablement was critical when our COO said, 'This is not just a sales and marketing problem; this is an organizational problem.' That's when I knew that we had the buy-in and support to execute on sales enablement," she says.

At Blackboard, sales enablement tools have allowed the sales team to get a handle on a previously unwieldy product portfolio. "We have seven business units each with their own complex products. Our sellers just couldn't find anything," McKenzie says. "Sales enablement has turned around the product discoverability issue."

And at Corporate Visions, sales enablement sweetens the value proposition. "We've wrung all the costs we can out of our companies. Prices are becoming commoditized. There's less differentiation. Where are we going to compete if not on the front of sales enablement?" Riesterer says.

Latuga, McKenzie, Riesterer and even O'Connell are betting their careers on bridging the gap between marketing and sales by empowering sellers. Sales enablement just might be the place for you to make a difference, too. **m**