

WHO'S LEADING YOUR MARKETING PROGRAM?

Entrepreneur-driven companies often struggle with sales and marketing leadership.

This may seem an odd statement, since in most entrepreneur driven companies the entrepreneur is the clear leader. However, when the entrepreneur is inexperienced or not inclined towards sales and marketing, who takes the lead? Unfortunately, the answer is often no one.

It's not that entrepreneurs don't seek help, they do. However, it can be challenging to get effective help in an area you lack experience in. The tendency is to engage people you think you can work with and hope for the best. While this problem is not unique to marketing, it seems marketing challenges more than its fair share of entrepreneurs.

To make matters worse, the vast majority of marketing suppliers are specialists. They specialize in things like identity development, graphic design, copy writing, advertising, websites, programming, search engine marketing, social marketing and so on. Typically, their role is to contribute to marketing projects lead by a marketing director. They don't anticipate needing to coach entrepreneurs through their requests to determine if they're appropriate. They work with what they're given.

The communication breakdown occurs when entrepreneurs expect critical feedback and direction from suppliers, and when suppliers assume entrepreneurs know what they need. Projects proceed without anyone questioning their appropriateness relative to the needs of the business and no one requests clarification on performance constraints necessary to make the project viable.

Here's how the situation plays out.

1. We Need Marketing Help.

We need a logo, business cards, brochure, website, advertising campaign, tradeshow display or whatever the immediate need seems to be.

The business owner does a little research and engages a company to help. The resulting product is functional and attractive, and everyone is happy. However, when the client uses the new marketing materials, the results are disappointing.

What happened? The materials look great, everything functions, so why the pitiful results? Upon review, and with very few exceptions, what was produced was a description of the business, and its products and services. There is virtually no relevance to customer need, no keyword relevance, no discernible competitive positioning, no clear offer, no call to action, and generally an awkward purchase process.

Did the business owner get what he asked for? Yes.

Did the business owner get what he needed? No.

Is anyone happy with the results? Rarely.

2. We Want To Invest In Sales And Marketing

The next misdirection is the intention to sell or market instead of focusing on earnings growth. When we set out to market or to sell, we take on sales and marketing activities. The problem is, sales and marketing activities are not what we want. Typically, what we mean to say is we want to drive earnings growth.

We want to increase profits by selling more or increasing our margins. So why don't we ask for what we want?

My guess is, if we asked suppliers for results, few would know where to start. They know how to design a logo, brochure, write copy or build websites etc., but most don't know how to increase earnings.

If a supplier is results-focused, they will consider their proposal in context of your front-end processes, they will ensure alignment and support for your strategic objectives. Once it's clear how your business works, constructive change can occur.

3. No One Knows Our Product As Well As We Do. We're Going To Do Our Own Marketing.

Ever made this claim? Most of us have at one point or another. Problem is, most of us are poor communicators. We tend to speak about ourselves and assume people care. We hope people will bridge the gap between what we do and their needs. We tend to be ambiguous, weak and contradictory, and we generally confuse our would-be clients.

As a result, we take our unclear ideas to the market. Our advertising amplifies our confusion and we bewilder a larger audience.

Thankfully, most people only partially listen to marketing conversations, so we mostly present irrelevant noise which gets ignored. We waste our time and money and we have little to show for it, besides a lesson learned.

4. We're Not Confident, So We're Not Spending Any Money.

A lack of confidence leads to under investment in sales and marketing. We are reluctant to commit resources because we lack confidence we'll get results.

We tend to spend to the limits of our risk tolerance and stop. This is unfortunate, since this approach stalls a lot of good businesses.

Why is this? We often lack a business or marketing plan worthy of investment. If we had invested in developing a workable, defensible plan with solid marketing fundamentals, we might have developed the confidence to invest.

To Summarize:

- The blind lead the blind into high-risk marketing investments.
- We complete marketing to-do activities, rather than investing in earnings growth.
- We present as self-centered, confusing, and irrelevant to clients.
- We lack the confidence to invest in earnings growth.

These factors work together to compound costs and increase the risk of failure.

As entrepreneurs, we need to take charge of marketing investments.

The way to ensure marketing investments deliver reasonable returns, is to own the process.

The real need is for clear, specific, confident and committed marketing leadership.

How do we proceed?

We need to shift away from a project and tactics focus to a client-need and earnings growth focus. Develop a plan that includes processes and projections. Gauge performance at key steps in the sales process.

Once we're clear what's working and not, we can reorganize and optimize for performance. Once sales and marketing performance is proven, we can invest in earnings growth with confidence.

The most important step is realising we don't have to be an expert at sales and marketing. We do however, need to become savvy investors in our earnings growth program development.

About the Author

John Watson is the president of Accrue Performance Marketing Inc.

He started consulting in 1994 and now serves as Sales and Marketing Coach or as Fractional Chief Marketing Officer to companies who can't yet justify a full-time marketing executive. He is the author of Being Profitable - The Earnings Growth Program.

John was the VP strategy at Rare Method Interactive, President of Advanced Information Marketing, and Manager at Komex International. John is a serial entrepreneur who lives in Calgary, Alberta Canada.

To speak with John directly call (800)860-0026 or (403)818.8151.

About Accrue Performance Marketing

Accrue Performance Marketing is a Calgary-based marketing, coaching and consulting company founded in 2006. We're your coach and partner in business development.

We work with you as trusted members of your leadership and production teams. We are responsible for guiding strategic investments in sales and marketing program development and working with you to accomplish business objectives, such as earnings growth.

Learn more about us at AccrueMarketing.com