

Brainwave series | No.6

Purchase Cycle Acceleration

- It's time for closer collaboration

There's a grey area between sales and marketing where leads have a nasty habit of stalling. Marketing blame sales and sales claim it's a marketing problem. Either way, the board want to know why those leads don't turn into customers. Okay, we've got sales automation systems, lead generation programmes, customer relationship management solutions. All great in their own way, so where is it all falling down? Why don't prospects make a smooth transition to customers? It's time for closer collaboration, time for Purchase Cycle Acceleration.

Purchase Cycle Acceleration is most effective as part of a comprehensive sales and marketing programme aimed at a relatively small group of key prospects.

Introduction

As technology marketing companies look to reduce the purchase cycle and close more deals, the gap between lead generation and closure has become a critical focus of attention.

For many companies, the marketing process has traditionally stopped at lead generation. The lead then moves to the sales team and the result is that sales and marketing are often acting as two separate organisations with closure rates that clearly leave room for improvement.

Purchase Cycle Acceleration, developed by Wilson Miller, places a far greater emphasis on integrating the entire sales and marketing process as a means of delivering exceptional results. It is an integrated approach to sales and marketing that gathers intelligence through a planned research, education and socialisation process, using the data to optimise customer acquisition programmes.

Purchase Cycle Acceleration is most effective as part of a comprehensive sales and marketing programme aimed at a relatively small group of key prospects. It exploits hybrid offline, online and experiential techniques and tools to complement and support sales activities by prioritising opportunities, maintaining the momentum of customer acquisition and accelerating the purchase process.

In that sense, it mirrors Customer Relationship Management by enabling effective prospect relationship management throughout the initial purchase cycle.

Purchase Cycle Acceleration offers marketing departments of technology companies 10 important benefits:

1. maintains the momentum of customer acquisition by addressing the gap between lead generation and sales closure
2. provides better intelligence that can lead to higher sales conversions
3. reduce sales cycle and close more deals by engaging effectively with decision makers throughout the acquisition process
4. develops a collaborative, interactive sales process in which customer feedback plays a role in fine-tuning communications that are relevant and engaging
5. creates highly-targeted messages that engage key decision makers
6. promotes productive collaboration between sales and marketing
7. reduces cost of customer acquisition by improved communications and prospect relationship management
8. improves profiling as a basis for future relationship marketing.
9. integrates online, offline and face to face channels
10. marketing medium selection responds dynamically to campaign success

In this collaborative model, marketing can drive a bigger impact on sales by choreographing marketing communications to the time that is right for the sales process, rather than the marketing process.

Closing the gap

The IT sales and marketing environment is growing increasingly complex, requiring a go-to-market model that matches. In a typical scenario there may be 6 - 9 key influencers and a purchase cycle that could last 12-18 months.

To maintain momentum, it's essential to manage all prospects dynamically throughout the process and that requires ongoing research and collaboration between sales and marketing to define and refine the role of the influencers, their concerns and levels of awareness.

The established tools of Customer Relationship Management and Salesforce Automation will continue to play an important role in the sales process. However, organisations are moving away from a simple linear model of prospect, qualify, present and close to a more integrated, dynamic process in which sales and marketing teams engage in a collaborative process focusing on all prospect influencers and decision makers.

Purchase Cycle Acceleration is at the heart of this new model, closing the gap between sales and marketing, and enabling organisations to deal with the complexities of considered purchases involving multiple influencers and decision makers.

In this collaborative model, marketing can drive a bigger impact on sales by choreographing marketing communications to the time that is right for the sales process, rather than the marketing process. That gives the marketing department a greater stake-holding interest in target revenues and closed customers, enhancing its visibility and accountability in terms of return on marketing investment.

Gathering intelligence

Changing roles, responsibilities and priorities within a decision-making group can impact on the success of a sales and marketing programme, so it is essential to maintain detailed insight into the key targets. The inherent intelligence gathering potential of Purchase Cycle Acceleration can help sales and marketing teams improve their understanding of objections and sales hurdles, get better up-to-date insight into the role of influencers and decision makers and build clearer sales profiles as a basis for focusing sales effort on the most appropriate prospects.

This requires an intelligence plan that gathers and builds essential insight throughout the sales and marketing process, covering key prospect data such as:

- estate
- contracts
- competitors
- objectives and goals
- recognition
- challenges.

The intelligence plan should have realistic outcome targets for every stage of the programme with an analytics platform that records and scores all activity.

By using the right intelligent media, organisations can also identify propensity to buy at different stages of the campaign.

Intelligent communications

The key to success in Purchase Cycle Acceleration is using intelligence to fine-tune communications, ultimately leading to a capability to personalise message delivery to each prospect.

As a very basic example, a customer acquisition programme might begin with an email campaign to a database of 1000. Problems such as out-of-date email addresses could give around 200 hard bounces, with soft bounces accounting for another 200. If 10% of the remainder click through, then 60 emails will have been successful at the initial stage.

The company can use a combination of online, offline and experiential techniques to reach the 200 soft bounces, as well as the 540 who received the email but did not click through. The 60 initial respondents can now move to the next stage of communication with a segmented follow-up driven by the response or action taken by the recipient.

One way of assessing the success of that type of email content is by a series of red, amber or green filters which correspond to the type of response. By using the right intelligent media, organisations can also identify propensity to buy at different stages of the campaign. Communications can then be modified to move all prospects along the campaign track, with messaging refocused to reflect individual interests and concerns.

Although this is a basic example, many companies treat this type of project as just an email campaign, accept the results and do nothing else. Purchase Cycle Acceleration can help to ensure the overall success of the campaign and improve return on the marketing investment.

The right agency

Purchase Cycle Acceleration is a powerful technique for improving sales and marketing performance. However, it takes an agency with the right skills, experience and services to achieve the optimum results.

Marketing agencies need to deploy the optimum mix of online, offline and experiential communications. Often they can do all of these, but mapping activities to a sales process and intelligence gathering map may be beyond their capabilities. Online agencies do not understand the technology purchase process and psychology. Direct marketing agencies often lack the relationship publishing experience and online applications available to help sales teams accelerate the sales process.

Wilson Miller has found that working with ICT companies who want to implement Purchase Cycle Acceleration takes a combination of communications skills and an ability to advise, coordinate and support the work of both sales and marketing teams. The result is a coordinated effort that can maintain momentum of customer acquisition and accelerate the purchase process.

A 10-point reality check for information and communications technology companies

Here are 10 points that should help technology organisations achieve Purchase Cycle Acceleration.

1. Robust segmentation, with clearly-defined interest groups, concerns and challenges. Develops your capability to personalise message delivery to each prospect.
2. Data validation and augmentation plan, qualifying the accuracy of existing data at the same time as a committed plan to obtain additional contact data. An essential action to improve the quality and reach of your direct marketing.
3. Engaging value propositions for each segment and response group, built on an understanding of the objectives, concerns and potential objectives of different influencers.
4. Flexible creative proposition that unites all communications, ensuring consistent messaging throughout the sales and marketing process.
5. Integrated set of communication and education assets with a truly agnostic approach to sales marketing planning. Built on the principles of intelligent direct marketing which enhances online, offline and experiential tools and techniques.
6. Sales process plan informed by a knowledge of the evolving roles and relative importance of influencing and decision-making groups. The plan should be flexible enough to adapt to changing sales and marketing needs identified through intelligence.
7. Realistic outcome plans for every stage of the programme with measurable targets and results.
8. Intelligence plan that gathers and builds essential insight throughout the sales process, enhancing response levels and improving the relevance and impact of sales and intelligent direct marketing programmes.
9. Analytics platform that records and scores all activity, informing the sales effort and improving the precision of marketing communications.
10. Personalised Purchase Cycle Acceleration framework that accommodates all the above.

Purchase Cycle Acceleration

– It's time for closer collaboration
is part of the Brainwave series published by
Wilson Miller, one of the industry's leading
technology marketing agencies. This series
of white papers provides innovative solutions
to serious business issues for ICT businesses.

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