HOW TO ALIGN YOUR SALES PROCESS TO THE B2B BUYER JOURNEY FOR INCREASED SALES

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The rise of the biggest change in selling over the years correlates with the rise of the internet and the information age. It has everything to do with the fact that the buyer now plays a greater role in researching on their own, before ever speaking to a sales person to help them make a decision.

Ultimately, it means that ***your sales reps have less opportunity to influence your prospect's decisions.***

How can sales teams facilitate a smoother sales process, remove friction and close more sales? Simply by understanding today's buyer journey, how it's changed in recent years, and knowing how to align the buyer journey with their marketing and sales process.

It starts here:

1. First, map your buyer journey.
2. Second, align your sales process to each stage of the journey

Companies who are careful to map the client's buyer journey can more ***easily see how to align their efforts to sell with the way their prospects and customers prefer to buy.*** This includes *understanding how* a prospective buyer finds you, learns about you, engages with you and purchases from you.

This document shows you how to do that.

There's no question:

You will see improvements in sales effectiveness if you can align your sales process to the buyer journey.

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OVERVIEW

1. MAP THE B2B BUYER JOURNEY FOR YOUR CLIENTS

Understanding the buyer journey of your clients, and how they move through it empowers sales and marketing to provide the right kinds of content and touchpoints at the right time.

There are some specific questions you need to be able to answer in order to begin to map the buyer journey of your prospects and make the shift from a product and brand sales focus to a buyer focus process.

The Three High-Level Stages of the Buyer Journey:

1. ***Awareness*** **-** this is where potential buyers are aware of a problem, possibly the industry to turn to to fix that problem, and perhaps - though not necessarily - even aware of your company.
2. ***Consideration*** **-** the buyer begins to research options to solve the problem, comparing and considering different solutions and companies.
3. ***Decision*** **-** the buyer has completed their research, they have buy-in from the decision makers, and have selected a vendor.

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2. IDENTIFY & ALIGN YOUR SALES PROCESS TO THE BUYER JOURNEY

Ok, let's break down how each of these relates to each phase of the buyer journey and what it actually looks like to align to your sales process to it...

Awareness

From Stranger to "Suspect"

At this stage, our sales team considers the buyer a "suspect" because the suspect is aware of a specific pain and will start considering their options. The buyer is still a stranger to you, or maybe a "visitor" to your site but they are far from making a decision. Here is a good place to remember the shift - marketing and sales really need to move from a "product or brand" promotional standpoint, to more of a focus on the pain points of the buyer. Your teams must expose the "suspect" to their pain - while creating an awareness that your company exists - and can help them with that pain.

How do they do that? Marketing and sales at this point are producing content that talks about the pain - and potential solutions to the problem. This may include inbound marketing, advertising, content marketing, 1-to-1 outreach, social media marketing and more.

As the primary focus is to simply get on the radar of the "suspect" and really bring the pain to forefront, if you can, it will help to get them on the phone and actually talk about what they are dealing with (and to really turn the knife, talk about what might happen if they don't fix it appropriately).

Consideration
From "Suspect" to "Prospect"

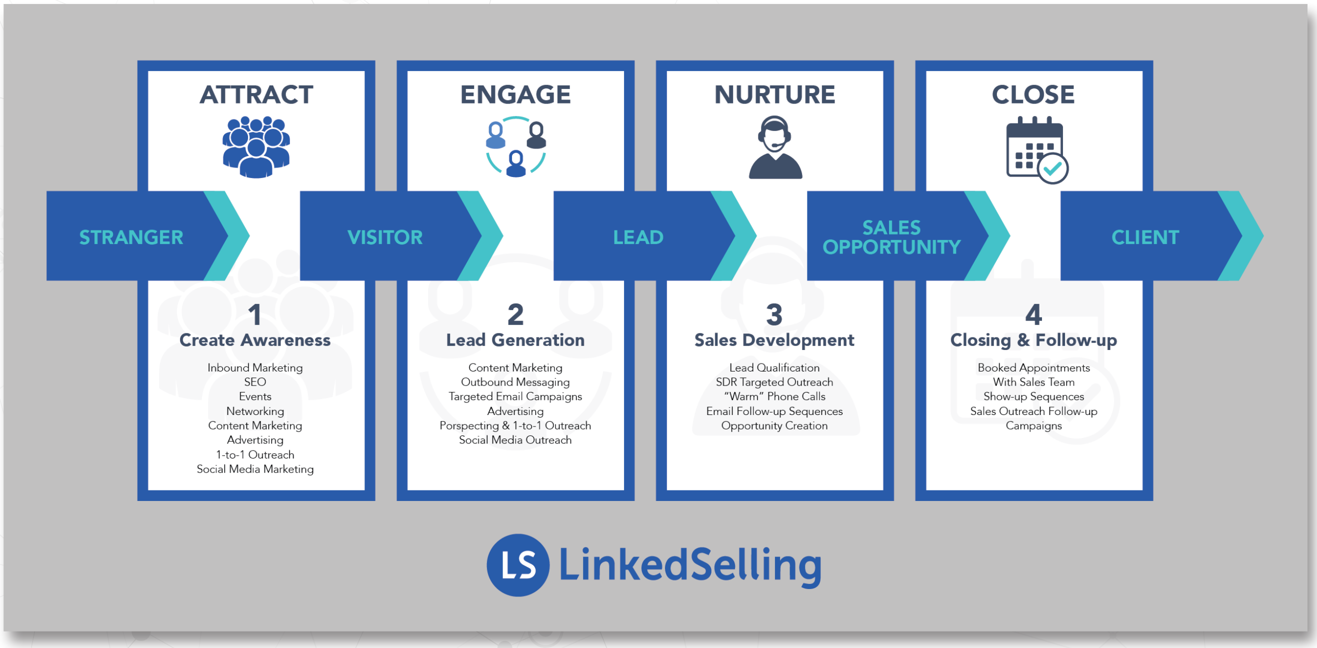
As the "suspect" starts to investigate their options, they may move on to become a "prospect" as they dive further into the research. What does their research look like and how can you make sure you're part of it?

At first the research will be broad. The potential buyer will look for more information that educates them about the problem and start diving into case studies and reviews. They'll begin to recognize and develop the criteria that really fits their needs as they pursue different options available to them.

At this point, your sales and marketing needs to keep this in mind with very specific educational materials and case studies that will address the "prospect's" questions. Here lead generation and the beginning of your sales development efforts need to come in strong, again, especially as the buyer is doing a lot of this research on their own...

The data shows that prospects are researching vendors now more than ever and they rely heavily on reviews and recommendations from peers, friends and family.

- In 2016, 62% of B2B buyers were relying more on peer recommendations than on their own research.
- And, according to State of B2B Procurement study from Acquity Group, some 94% of B2B buyers report conducting some degree of research online before making a business purchase.



At this stage, besides the educational material and case studies, marketing and sales really need to be working together using a multi-channel approach. As the buyer moves from "suspect" to "prospect", you want them to be familiar with your company. A multi-channel lead generation approach increases the amount and types of touchpoints with your prospects. They're not just on one channel. You shouldn't be either.

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From “Prospect” to “Qualified”

As your prospect clearly defines their challenge and really starts narrowing down their choices, they’ll start looking more at specific offerings. Here your lead generation and sales development efforts need to move from “nurturing” and staying top of mind, to really qualifying.

This is where marketing can really utilize automation via surveys, and specific marketing funnels to help qualify. On the sales side, this is really where your sales development reps come in. They need to start talking to and qualifying these prospects. After you have conversations with the prospect, asking them pertinent qualifying questions, if deemed to be a good fit, sales can then move them from labeled “prospects” to “qualified”.

The primary goal at this stage of the sales process is to connect with as many prospects as possible, qualify them, and give them the next step.

Such next steps could be a:

- Demonstration
- Strategy call
- Assessment
- Consultation
- Technical call

Your SDR team can do this via strategic outreach sequences that include email, phone calling, and social media messaging.

One note on phone calling - it might seem that we’ll backtrack a little here because while the research shows that buyers are utilizing a self-directed research approach, studies also show that they are open to communication.

The data from Rain Group Center for Sales Research shows that 71% of buyers are open to hearing from sellers when they’re “looking for new ideas and possibilities to drive stronger results to improve [their] business.”

That’s a primetime touchpoint opportunity you definitely want to take advantage of. Once you get the qualified prospect to book a call with your closers, realize that you might need to speak with more than one person who influences the decision and that there will likely be a high focus on requirements and on ROI.

Decision

From “Qualified” to “Closable”

At this point in the buyer journey, your qualified buyer has drastically narrowed their options and needs buy-in from all the decision makers and will need materials supporting pricing, ROI, results and more.

Sales can move the qualified prospect to “closable” when they see that commitment is real and the conversation gets more serious. Here specifics on implementation, terms, and pricing will likely be a big concern for the buyer.

Marketing needs to provide materials that speak to the decision makers, providing more specific and advanced information for using your products or services more effectively. It’s the time to really focus on the value of your offerings. This will also help re-sell them on your services when it’s time to renew - or offer referrals!

Sales needs to be the consultant, who has insight, who can answer specific questions and resolve objections, and who can prove the value of your solution over that of the competition.

At this stage though, sales is looking for a decision. That means you’re looking for a “Yes” or a “No”; a “Maybe” or “I’ll think about it” is not a decision.

START HERE: Answer these questions...

Do you know exactly what they're looking for?

Do you know what the problem is?

Do you know how they describe it in their own words?

Do you know how long it will take them to buy (what's their time frame)?

Do you know their budget?

Do you know who's involved in making the purchase decision and what variables and competition they're considering?

What information do they really need to know and when?

What are their motivations and pain points?

Where are they getting their information?

Who else are they talking to?

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Questions to Map Your Buyer Journey During the *Awareness Stage*

1. What is your buyer's true pain they're looking to resolve?

2. What have they already done to alleviate this pain? (Who have they worked with, what have they tried?)

3. Identify what they need to know before moving on to the next stage, based on common questions you hear from prospective buyers at this stage.

   List questions you often hear at this stage:

   List what kind of content:

Questions to Map Your Buyer Journey During the *Consideration Stage*

1. What is your prospect's number one question at this stage?

2. What kind of criteria do your prospects at this stage typically look for at this stage? What questions do they need answered?

3. Where else are they getting information from? What kind of experience do they have working with people in your industry so far?

4. Identify what they need to know before moving on to the next stage, based on common questions you hear from prospective buyers at this stage.

   List questions you often hear at this stage:

   List what kind of content would be helpful at this stage:

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5. What is your prospect's number one question at this stage? (Likely they'll be getting more specific about the details of your service offerings)

6. Who is the final decision maker? Is your point of contact reporting to them? What is their primary motivation?

7. What kind of questions will they have about your service offerings? Objections? What else are they looking at?

8. What is the most natural way for your prospects to take the next step? (Talk to someone, send a case study?)

Questions to Map Your Buyer Journey During the *Decision Stage*

1. What do decision makers need to know? What kind of questions will they have about your service offerings? (Details, logistics, ROI, results to expect, etc)

2. What objections do they have?

3. How can you make their decision easier as a "consultant"?

4. What will it take to reach a definitive answer, whether yes or no?

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LinkedSelling helps B2B companies get sales appointments with hard-to-reach, high-value prospects through an integrated multi-channel outbound approach.

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If you’re interested in learning more about how we can solve your lead generation problems, book a 1-on-1 planning session with our Director of Client Strategy to discuss your business, your sales process, and whether or not our LinkedinMarketing Campaign Management Services would be a good fit for your needs.

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