

## How B2B Marketing Became Responsible for Everything, Including Sales (and how to fix it)

(Reading Time: 5 Minutes)

*Excerpt: "Many B2B marketers are forging ahead with social media strategies without the associated sales tie-in on their websites. This can lead to an overload of inbound activity and no way to handle it...without a clear way to split up the tasks, marketing will only be adding to its burden."*

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B2B Marketers are trying to make everyone happy. The CEO needs revenue. The sales team needs qualified leads. Customers need information. Everyone is looking at marketing to make it happen. If you're a B2B marketer, you may feel like the success or failure of your company rests entirely on your shoulders.

### So, how did B2B Marketing become responsible for everything, including sales? Is there a way to fix it?

This paper attempts to answer those questions by examining the evolution of modern marketing that has brought us to this point. Nothing happened overnight but here we are, feeling like we need to do **more** when in fact the solution may be doing **less** and spreading the responsibility. First, some background...

#### The Pre-Internet Marketing and Sales Relationship

Before the emergence of the internet, marketing and sales groups performed separate, yet complimentary roles. Marketing was primarily responsible for crafting and delivering outbound marketing messages through various channels such as magazines, trade shows, advertisements, etc. (Figure 1).

Upon viewing or receiving marketing information, prospective business customers, or "leads", would contact the manufacturer's sales organization (usually via an 800 number) and request more information. The sales group would take over and handle the entire sales process from giving detailed product information to customer presentations and proposals. All was well in the world. Responsibility was balanced and everyone was accountable for their part of the process.

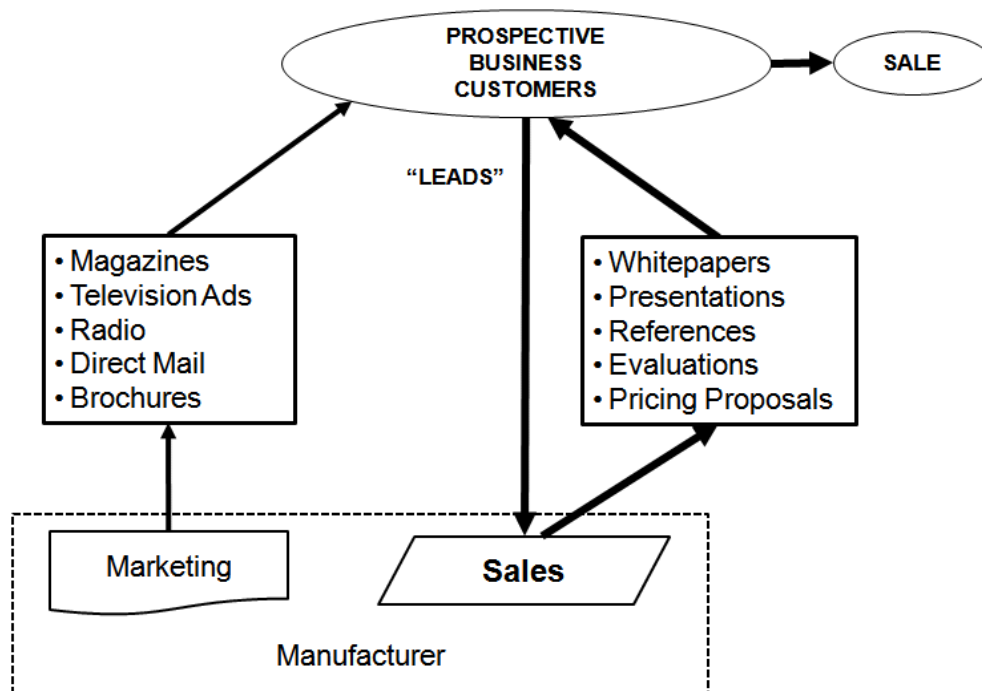


Figure 1 – Marketing and Sales had clear roles and responsibilities before the Internet

## Then Came Internet Marketing

The Internet changed things almost overnight. Since a company's website was considered just another form of media, the marketing group naturally took ownership. Early websites were not much more than an electronic brochure anyway so the sales group didn't see value in it. Sales ignored the web, marketing embraced it. Internet marketing exploded.

Today the website has taken center stage in the B2B marketing *and sales* arena. Virtually all marketing materials direct prospects to the company website where rich content awaits. Marketers, wanting to promote the company's products and services, are now publishing sales material disguised as marketing material. Whitepapers, sales presentations (called Webinars) and customer references (called Case Studies) are all published directly to the web. Even offers of free trials and evaluations are now an internet *marketing function* (Figure 2). The net result is that **marketing now owns sales functions** for the company without ever having asked for it. Think about your own situation. Is that what you're facing?

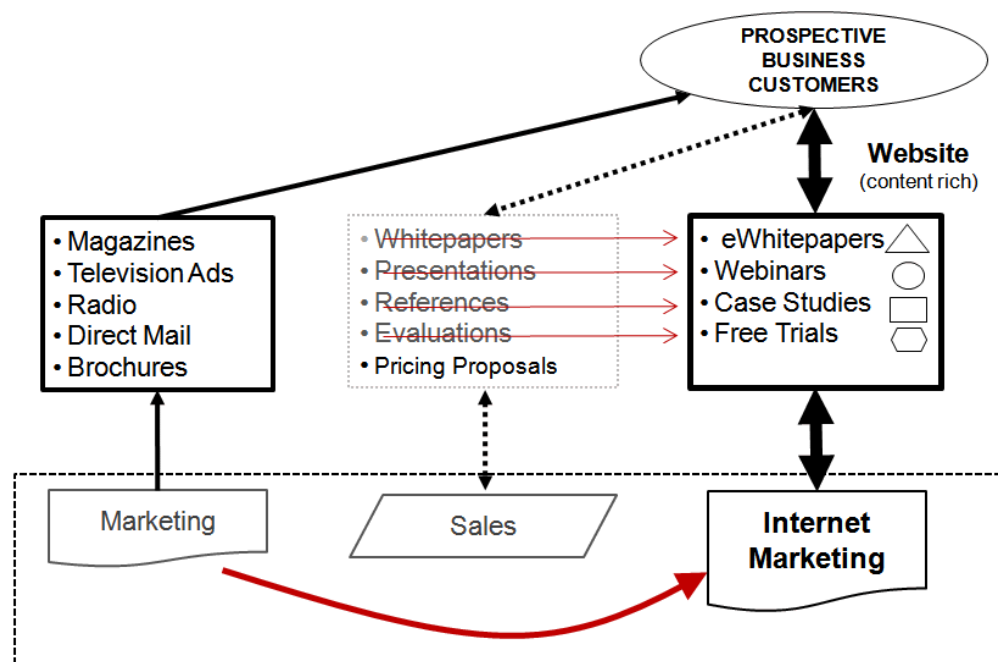


Figure 2 – B2B websites now contain rich sales information, allowing prospects to bypass sales

The sales team has also helped push sales functions to marketing. It has not only ignored this huge shift in buyer behavior, but actually accelerates it by encouraging customers to “visit the website” for any information they need. Prospective customers are now conditioned to just go get the information they need themselves, leaving sales completely out of the process and making marketing responsible.

In summary, B2B marketers have slowly assumed responsibility for not only traditional marketing functions, but many sales functions as well. Feeling pressure to generate leads, they may actually be undermining their own efforts by publishing an increasingly large volume of sales information that has no way of connecting to the sales team.

Enough about problems, let's now discuss solutions.

## Leveraging sales (and others) to achieve Company goals

Good business people know how to leverage their time and effort by delegating certain tasks to others. Instead of trying to do everything themselves, they look for areas where they can bring in other team members to help them achieve the overall goal.

Think about how the sales organization operates. In most cases there is a whole team of people that help the individual sales person reach their revenue goal including, but not limited to, marketing specialists, inside sales people, system engineers, product specialists and product trainers. We just discussed how many of the tasks that sales used to handle are now the responsibility of marketing. Why not look for a way to tie in and leverage the *sales team* to help marketing reach its goals? The result would be true alignment where marketing helps sales *and* sales helps marketing.

So, how could sales help marketing? Having seen the friction between sales and marketing for years, I can tell you that no amount of “lead definition” discussions will accomplish what you want. You want sales to take **ownership** for their own benefit and to do that you must figure out how to put some of the responsibility of whom they engage in their hands right up front.

One idea that works is to re-think the offers on your website. Is marketing responsible for the approval of all requests, even sales related ones? If so, are there ways to hand off the approval of certain calls to action to one or more of the sales team members? This actually solves two issues at the same time. First, it reduces some of the time marketing spends managing certain requests and secondly, and most importantly, it encourages **lead ownership** by the sales team. Sales owns the requests it approves.

Figure 4 shows how a *Sales Approved Website Offer* on a B2B website would work. Marketing concentrates its efforts on conveying the benefits of the product to spark interest and then creates offers that are **approved by sales** to get the conversation started. For example, marketing may implement a self-service budgetary pricing service, but sales should be responsible for approving requests. An inside sales person can view requests, do basic research and then approve the request, pulling the lead in. The net result is that the decision was made by the sales team, not marketing.

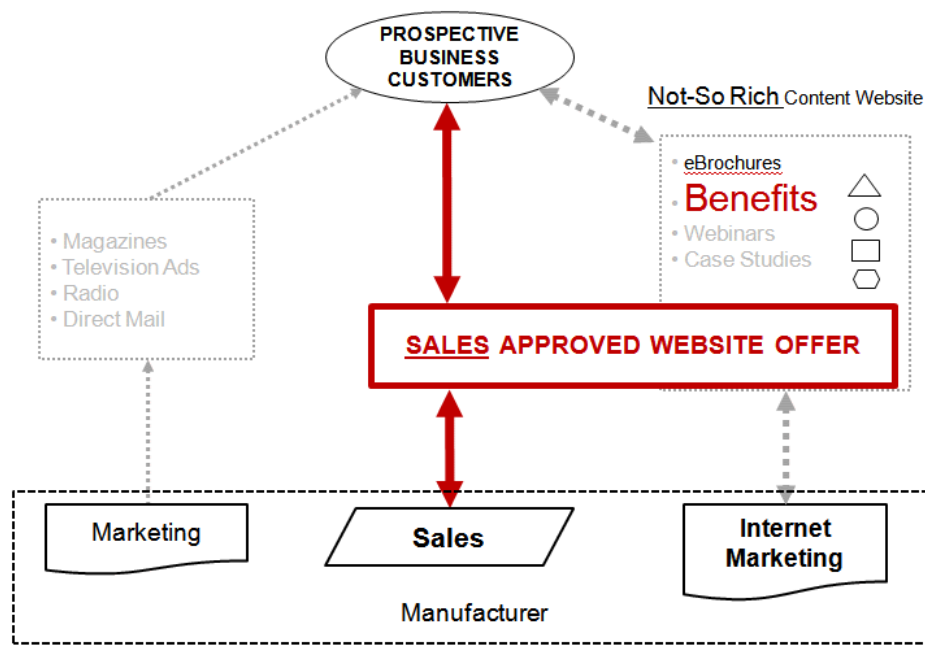


Figure 4 – Offers requiring sales approval can start the sales process and offload accountability

## Crank It Up With Social Media

Once the offer(s) are in place to tie in the sales team, it is time to step on the gas pedal by implementing social media campaigns. Interestingly enough, social media actually fits more into the traditional role of marketing; providing benefit messaging and helping with brand identity. Even though marketing is far from controlling social media (that's the whole point of letting communities interact), it can aid in providing islands of interaction for the communities.

Establishing a corporate blog and presence on the leading social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn is imperative for most businesses today. Reinforcing the previous point about potential customers seeking self-service information, these new methods of research are becoming common starting points for serious purchases. Many companies are now generating more inbound website traffic from a handful of social media sites than all other methods combined (figure 5).

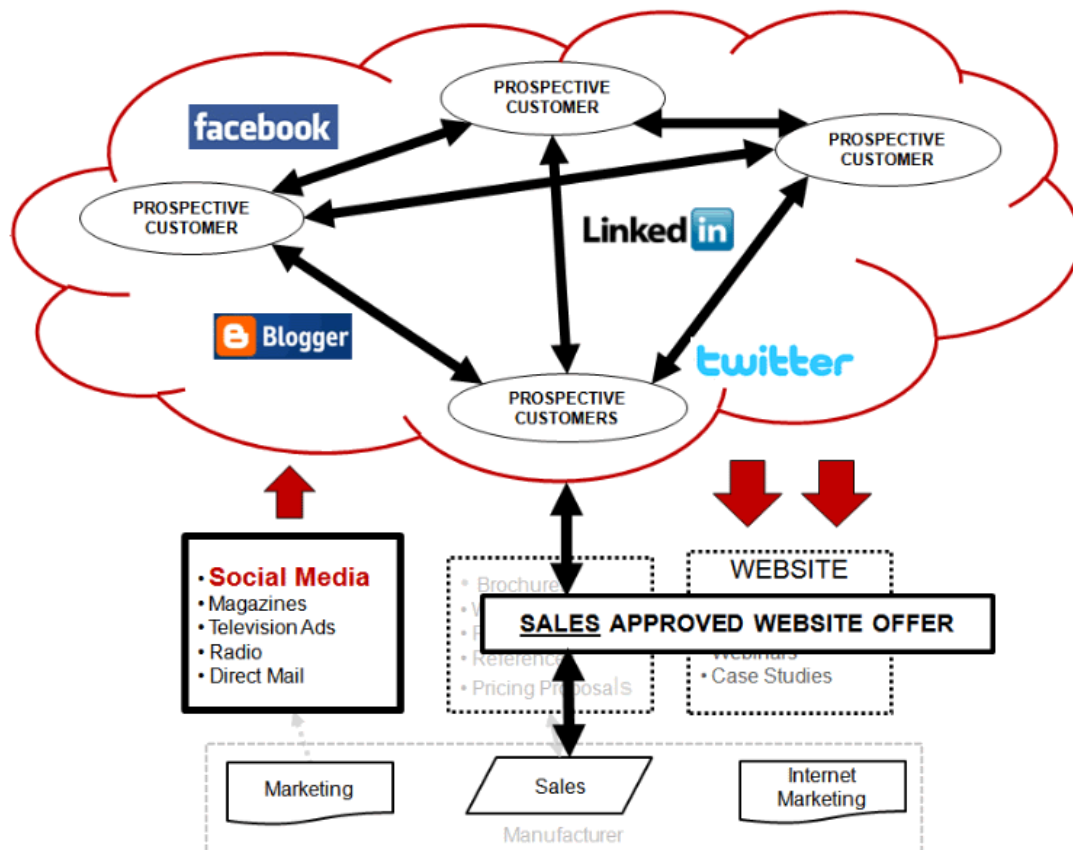


Figure 5 – Social Media drives efforts are now offloaded and effective

Caution: Many B2B marketers are forging ahead with social media strategies without the associated sales tie-in on their websites. This can lead to an overload of inbound activity and no way to handle it. Marketing automation tools that support lead nurturing are handy for non-sales oriented materials like whitepapers, webinars, etc. but it is imperative that marketing have a way to filter serious prospects and tie-in sales immediately. Without a clear way to split up the tasks, marketing will only be adding to its burden of being responsible for everything.

## Summary

B2B marketers are carrying a heavy load. It seems everyone from the CEO down depends on marketing to do it all – establish a brand, find new customers, help existing customers and measure marketing ROI. The ironic part of all this pressure is that some of it may be self-inflicted.

Marketing's job used to be to generate customer interest and channel those prospects to the sales team. By taking early ownership of the corporate website, marketing has gradually assumed more responsibility and has allowed itself to be become accountable for more than just marketing. Now, tasks that were handled by sales (presentations, customer references, etc.) are now recorded electronically by the marketing team in the form of webinars and case studies respectively. As marketing publishes more and more sales content it is only natural that sales becomes less involved **and** less accountable.

To reverse this trend, marketers must rethink the goal of their marketing programs. Since most B2B companies do not sell products directly on their sites, the first goal should be to promote benefits so interested prospects will want to engage the sales team in a conversation. Marketers must sell the conversation, not the product.

Tying in the sales team to share responsibility for the generation of potential customers is the second step. One option is to use technology to implement approval based offers where marketing still runs the programs, but the sales team has the responsibility of approving requests. This puts skin in the game for the sales team and promotes prospect ownership.

With sales being more intimately involved with the handling of website leads, marketers can unleash the next weapon in their arsenal; social media. Using platforms like blogs, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, marketers can help start social media conversations. When those conversations lead interested prospects to the corporate website, they will be much more likely to be converted into **sales conversations** if the appropriate calls to action are in place.

With the right mix of responsibility, everyone can be happy, even the marketers!

## About the author



Dale Underwood is the Founder and CEO of EchoQuote, LLC. His background includes 25 years of developing and selling Information Technology solutions to large companies and Government. Mr. Underwood is now applying his sales experience to help marketing teams within B2B companies find, convert and sell their products. He is an advocate of using an unconventional sales technique based on self-service budgetary pricing to help B2B marketers start sales conversations for their sales team.

## MarketingSherpa Case Study

### ["How \[sales approved\] Self-Service Price Quote Converts 48% of Prospects Into Qualified Leads"](#)

#### *SUMMARY*

"Price is the No. 1 concern among technology buyers through the purchasing cycle, according to MarketingSherpa research. That's why marketers might want to consider using that to their advantage, even for costly, complex sales. See how a search software vendor created an online price-quote application that emails a price to prospects within minutes. More leads are coming in, and 48% of requesters are actively engaged in the sales process."

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