

FIELD COMMUNICATIONS

The charter and focus of any sales organization is very specific - generate revenue. Product Marketing is generally responsible for providing sales with product and market information that will help them succeed. Effective communication can have a positive impact on revenue achievement. Yet, this is an area given little attention in most organizations because "it just happens". Does it really?

It is rare to find a high tech company where the level and quality of communications between Sales and Marketing is not criticized. It is often a source of continuing friction between sales management and marketing management. Sales can point to lost revenue opportunities because they didn't know or couldn't get some tidbit of information. Marketing then drags out their stack of emails sent on the subject in question.

Field Communications, by definition, disseminates a variety of "tidbits" intended to assist the sales team in the day-to-day performance of their job. Normally, product managers draft an email and broadcast it to one or several standard mail groups. The content may range from competitive blurbs learned through the grapevine, to product release announcements, to announcing new sales tools, etc., etc., etc. This unstructured approach sometimes works ok when a company is very small, but with growth, the effectiveness can diminish very quickly.

Because there are so many emails flying around companies today or because it comes across as just another email, many important messages are missed, or not read in a timely fashion. Additionally, if the content is poorly written, inconsistent with its messaging, or subject to interpretation, the message can do more harm than good. Product Marketing should take the initiative to ensure that information provided is timely, useful, accurate, and easily recognizable as something of value to sales, and if not immediately important to them, easily retrievable when needed in the future.

Put Some Process Behind It

As companies grow, both in number of people and number of products, the amount of information that Product Marketing delivers to the sales grows proportionately (maybe exponentially). To continue to disseminate this important information in an unstructured fashion via email no longer makes sense. Email is a convenient and fast delivery mechanism. However, the audience must be able to recognize that there is value associated with reading a particular email. To accomplish this, Product Marketing can implement a few simple processes that will help to effectively deliver consistent and useful information, while identifying the message as something of value to the sales team.

Product Marketing should first create a communications vehicle (let's call it the "Product Marketing Letter"). The PML should be used for distribution of all news and information that helps sales achieve their goals. Email probably remains the best method of distribution. But you need to find a way to make it stand out and say "I'm important, read me now". Have your communications team develop an HTML banner that gives your Product Marketing Letter an identity. You want sales to see the PML as something of value.

Each Product Marketing Letter should carry a unique identifier representing the source of the material (general or product specific) that can be archived for easy retrieval on an internal website. In drafting PML's, Product Managers should adhere to a simple set of communications guidelines that improves the delivery of the message, while limiting the amount of time needed to absorb the content.

- Include a title line that describes the content of the Product Marketing Letter.
- The body of the message should be factual, crisp and clear. This implies brevity whenever possible.
- When releasing documents (whitepapers, competitive reviews, etc.), use the Product Marketing Letter to summarize the importance of the document and to sell its value. Highlight key information so that sales will recognize if there is value in spending the additional time to read the entire attachment. Don't email the document. Provide a link to an internal web site where it can be downloaded (Bandwidth limitations of remote sales people)
- Product Managers should always include their name, title and contact information.



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Assign a senior Product Marketing Manager or Supervisor to review content and authorize the release of each **Product Market Letter**. This is to ensure that messages are well written, avoid editorializing and maintain a positive tone without sugarcoating negative information. There must be a process that allows for timely turnaround and release since some of the information sent to the field will be time sensitive.

A Beneficial Tool

A **Product Marketing Letter** can be a key component of an effective Field Communication program. If done right, it will be a productive communications vehicle that gives you a well-informed sales organization. If they're well informed, they're better prepared to do their jobs. It will show in their performance and your bottom line.