



Marketing is by everyone

Introduction

In tough times, companies are realizing the adage sales has to be driven by everybody in the organization. Many SME continue to flog already stretched sales without realizing customer acquisition and retention are not so easy when the sentiments have been hit and pockets are shallow. Traditional linear sales model with cold calls, qualified leads and demos may not work when customers are already “online meeting stressed” and decisions may not happen quickly. What may work instead is a marketing led sales approach that innocuously expands social reach, informs, engage, curate and influence the prospective customers without taking away the communication control from them. However, many SME business under-utilize their marketing fire power simply because they have always seen marketing as a good to have activity, rather than a strategic one.

Marketing in many SME’s is “designed to fail” simply because of the misconceptions they carry, and structural, procedural limitations they inflict on themselves. These include

1. Marketing is a departmental function and works in a “siloes” approach.
2. Perception of marketing being costly, Online tools too complex
3. Returns are low and can’t be measured, hence let’s cut now approach
4. Do not trust our employees in design, pre-sales and other with their limited English conversations to make an impact

The result, marketing

1. is reactive and patchy
2. No coherent sales and marketing strategy right from identification,

curation, closure and post-sales engagement

3. Understaffed and underinvested in terms of quality of resources
4. Limited use of expertise across different functions
5. No systematic approach for personal, product and corporate branding
6. Largely brochure and event driven
7. Employees are not encouraged to enlarge their professional network to inform & influence markets

In many SME’s marketing at best is involved in participation in one or two events in a year, creation of couple of heavy brochures (often discarded by the customers for it is too technical or too much information) and nascent online presence (manage CEO’s LinkedIn profile, website updates and company events on Facebook).

Marketing teams often involve management graduates and content writers who can polish a message once the text is created. The cost and managing a high value/high impact content funnel is a challenge for many reasons. While, content management teams can help them sharpen the language and form of the text, they may not be endowed with deep industry knowledge to build a rich story for a case study or an eBook from grounds up. That industry specific knowledge has to be shared by the frontline expertise.

A large industrial valve manufacturer serving power and water distribution markets has a marketing department that is expected to understand what the market needs are, draw out content and engagement strategies and so on. Given their sales cycle is long, tender-

based, and provides a window of opportunity to influence specs could restrict the competitive play. However, the company does not have a strategy to for its associates to engage with design consultants, EPC personnel, large OEM's, and customers to inform and influence. The company has an experienced design team which engages with the client' organization and gets involved in design verification and advisory. The sales organization may also have product managers who bring in vertical specific expertise. Unfortunately, the company does not have a systematic approach to utilize the *design* and *product managers* to involve in marketing and influence a sale.

Even though, SME management realizes the impact of emergent social media and online trends, they are unnecessarily apprehensive about involving the product and design teams because of a misplaced concern on content quality, inappropriate postings, efforts required to train and manage the content. SME managements opine that their employees may not know how to project what to say and that could affect our branding. SME are also not good at encashing personal branding of their employees. SME management is not completely privy to the impact of "authentic" comments and posts on social media by their design, product management and even delivery managers. The experience and expertise of product, delivery, support and pre-sales teams are woefully underutilized in "influencing" the market and enabling sales.

Marketing led sales

How much ever depressed the market is, there is still going to be some buying from the customers. While sales can reach the gates of customers and knock, the closure may happen for reasons beyond price alone. Feature richness, functional advantages, comfort of a team behind a product are key to clinch the small trickles of demand that flows during tough times.

Primary role of marketing, for every season, is to inform, influence and build strong user communities. Marketing is all about authenticity and communications. Even in tough times, "authenticity" sells. Even in pandemic times, demand exits, how much ever depressed it is from historical times. With markets down, customers would like to work with a company they can trust. Marketing is all about sharing the experience, expertise and credibility of the company and its people.

For SME with large sales cycles and multiple levers for procurement, we believe involving design, product management, pre-sales, delivery and aftersales services teams to connect at different levels within their client organizations is a must. Involving these professionals to network, inform, engage and build relationships where they move from transactional to reliable sources of advice is what works best for SME. Enabling professionals across different areas would help the company in identifying influencers, gatekeepers and decision makers across the client organization. Armed with a marketing approach of sharing and building engagement these resources could help expand communication and advocacy for their products and services as shown in figure below.



Marketing by professionals across different functions within a SME happens through various stages. First, is increase the reach of these professionals, on both online and offline platforms. Support them to register with different online professional communities within LinkedIn, attend many free offline professional communities' sessions including IEEE, IEE, and other professional bodies where client-side decision makers and influencers are expected to participate. Participation in local industry association events like CII, Assocham or even NASSCOM forum will help your subject matter experts to understand what matters to customers and competitive trends. One major impact of the pandemic is that many closed door, exclusive meetings have now become more open and

inclusive. Encourage professionals across disciplines to engage with Special interest groups (SIG), Communities of Interest and professional bodies leading to influence and sales.

Once they are on any physical or online platform, each professional can enhance their personal and corporate branding through likes, comments, and product/service comparison in online forums and by active participation in an offline committee or a group. Beyond initial networking requests and introductions, SME require white papers, tip sheets and checklists, Videos, Infographics, guest posts, blogs, and publications by its internal experts. These assets are required to inform and educate their clients about their product and services, but more importantly drive a personal branding of their subject matter experts, whether it is a designer or an after-market specialist. Smart SME's use corporate accounts to campaign and establish the experience and credibility of their internal resources.

Encourage Product managers, designers and others to publish and seek out senior folks in prospective customer for their comments and feedback. Many engineers and other professionals will create good quality content, post it on some platforms and expect branding and relationship to happen automatically. For anybody who has seen the impact of content marketing, it is not just good quality content that helps you reach more eyeballs, but also how many key people "critiqued", or "commented" or "helped" in the content creation and shared it. Professionals must be encouraged to seek out

feedback and suggestions from key people from the targeted organizations so that relationships blossom beyond professional networking. People appreciate others who value their opinions and more likely to contribute when there are no strings attached except sharing of knowledge. Non-sales interaction opportunities encourage people to network without any fear of anxiety or fear of being exploited. Case studies, ROI calculators, Industry and analyst reports, and Product- or ROI-focused white papers are some of the marketing assets that work best to seek out comments and suggestions.

To make “marketing led sale” happen SME companies need to invest time and some efforts. For internal resources to emerge as experts, a little nudge and support from the companies is a must. Professionals across different functions may require some training to understand who they must target, how to discover the needs, and how to network without coming out as too prickly and pushy. Implementation notes, thought leadership articles and one-sheets geared toward decision-makers is what required to influence the decision makers. While, professionals across design, pre-sales and other functions can bring in depth insights, the content may need some polish. Marketing team can conduct simple “How to Do” sessions on LinkedIn connections, how to use different styles (informatory, recommendatory or comparative) of communications, simple templates for requesting to connect, requesting for a connection, etc. There is a ton of material available, including on GitHub** for engineers and other professionals to know how to market themselves. Finally, a word of caution. Some SME try to measure the value marketing and their continued support in

“quick wins” or spend too much time looking at “no of visitors” or “page rank”. Marketing led sales is not a quick steroid intervention. But if SME companies have to sustain medium-term growth, they need to keep investing in marketing to realize medium-term goals. SME management must realize marketing is to build a personalized network within client organization and its associates.

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*** <https://github.com/LisaDziuba/Marketing-for-Engineers>*