Sales enablement

SNACKBOX

A collection of 5-minutes reads to align content with the needs of your sales teams and channel

Contents

Editor's Ingredients

Search engines have changed the world. There. I've said it. But that's no big reveal now, is it. And it's certainly not enough to lure you into the pages of this magazine in search of insight. Stay with me.

Search engines have made it incredibly easy for your prospects to research companies, products and services; to find out what other users think; and investigate the pros and cons that accompany alternative approaches. It means that your sales people are faced with well-informed and savvy buyers – often thanks to the success of your own content marketing.

How do you catch your sales people up? And ensure they are equally well informed (if not better), seen as trusted advisors and able to add real value to the customer's journey?

This is something that's prominent in everyday thinking here at HN and where we've built up expertise we're keen to share in the 5-minute reads we've packed into this Snackbox.

What's inside

Every edition of Snackbox is packed with nutritional value. In this issue, we've gathered a smorgasbord of recent blogs covering: aligning content with the buyer's journey, making sure sales people can make good use of it and creating content especially for sales – helping them adopt and share best practices and have productive, profitable conversations with prospects.

And there's more

There's plenty more opinion on our **blog site**. Please visit frequently to see what's new or sign up for **Reload** and get all the best bits delivered straight to your inbox.

Also, look out for other Snackboxes, filled with goodies for when you fancy something different to nibble on. Try munching on **content strategy** or dipping in to **customer references** when you next get a break.

We'd love to hear what you think, so if one of our blogs has particular appeal or applies directly to your business, be sure to let us know!

Catch up soon!

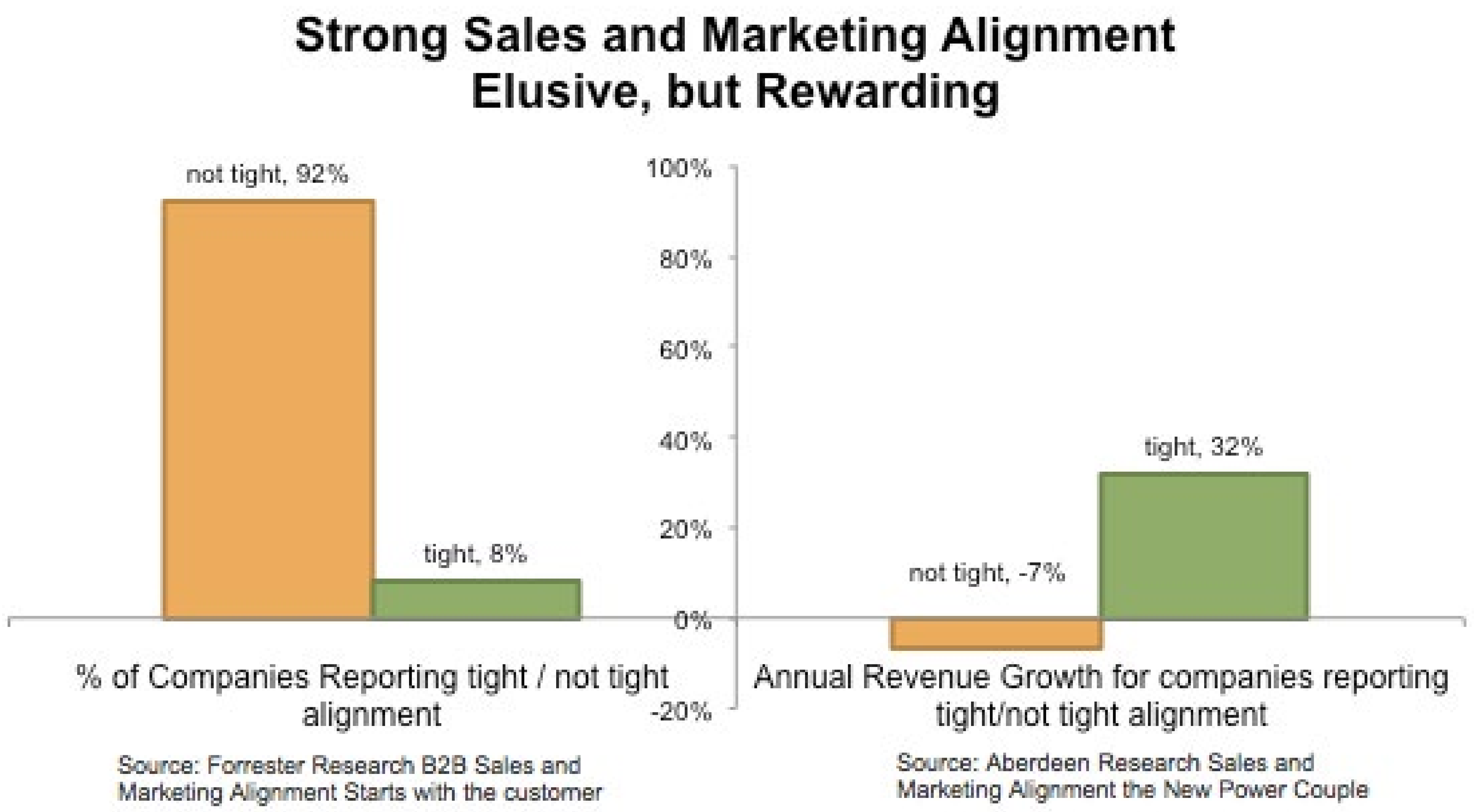
Carey Hedges
Editor

Sales and marketing working together. How does your garden grow?

One of the best times in my career was working as the marketing leg of an integrated sales and marketing team. I got to see the results of our marketing effort up close and personal as we opened doors for the sales guys and worked hand-in-hand to close the deal. A recent survey by Aberdeen Research highlights that job satisfaction isn't the only benefit.

With sales and marketing all in a row

Companies reporting close alignment between the two functions saw significantly more revenue growth than those that thought alignment was loose. This is about more than agreed targets and the definition of what makes a quality sales lead. Sales and marketing mindsets need to be aligned so that everyone is pulling in the same direction. When there's a sense of team work there's little need to enforce a regime where marketing scuttles around every time sales is on a deadline or sales is forced to trudge through the list of whitepaper downloads looking for a lead. There's a fertile exchange of ideas that blossoms into a successful sales funnel.



But how do you align sales and marketing?

Alignment demands strong communications to build a shared perspective and open communication that makes essential information readily accessible at every stage of the buying process – before and after a sales person gets involved. It's two-way – not one-way – traffic between sales and marketing experts: both parties have a huge amount to gain by learning from the other. Social tools like salesforce.com, Chatter, Yammer and Microsoft Lync help spread the word; wikis create a shared repository, rich in information; and you can build communities of interest and social intranets where initiatives can flourish using the likes of Igloo, Huddle and SharePoint.

This is a developing area with new players and functionality emerging all the time. Harness the right ones for your business and the benefits can be great. But all too often the "shiny object syndrome" hits and organisations find themselves on all the major platforms forgetting that the way we share ideas and bring about close alignment remains rooted in the perennial principles of best-practice communication.

You can lead your sales team to content — but can you make them use it?

I love the autumn, and not just for all the vibrant leaf colours and bright blue skies, but because it's planning time for many of our clients. There's something exceedingly uplifting about talking about the future and developing the concepts for new programmes that are going to do even more than the ones we've been working on this year. Yup. Love it.

As I've been doing the rounds, it's clear that content marketing is really taking hold as an approach. I've seen a recurring challenge emerge, however and — if you're feeling it too — an add-on we've been delivering for some of our clients could well have mass appeal. It's a simple little gizmo but really gears up the value of your content: conversation starters for the sales team.

Conversation starters: tried and tested

This is a well-proven technique for campaigns and account-based marketing where, from the outset, sales is considered an integral part of the process. For thought leadership and content marketing, on the other hand, sales are not often a primary channel for the materials you are creating and, consequently, not much thought goes into how they might use it to support direct conversations with customers.

> *"If your content is a case study or a paper that includes the opinion of analysts, specialists or industry commentators, pull out a sound bite onto a slide."*

Conversation starters: ready to use

It's simple to fix this with a short piece of communication speaking directly to sales and pointing to the lovely new content that is now available.

Tell them the point of view the content puts across and how this supports a conversation about your company's skills and capabilities. Suggest the opening gambit for a phone conversation or provide the text for a covering email that the salesman can personally send. If your content is a case study or a paper that includes the opinion of analysts, specialists or industry commentators, pull out a sound bite onto a slide so that it can easily be incorporated into the next sales presentation.

Making it easy for your busy sales teams to draw content into conversations can make a big difference to the calibre of conversations they're having and also to your customer's perception of you as a joined-up organisation.

The buyers are taking over

There's a lot of talk, or maybe it's just the stuff I'm reading, that says it's a buyer's market; that buyers are in control; and that the role of the sales person is no longer tenable. Is that true?

Over here in marketing land, we have seen a shift to buyers being better informed and sceptical of hype. But that isn't inconsistent with tough economic times and the need to spend frugally. And that certainly doesn't undermine the need for canny salesmanship. I do think it's true that technology has made information very accessible and the ease with which you can seek out the opinion of your peers a breeze. So buyers typically do more research online before they engage with sales and that gives us two challenges to address.

"Online content should be aimed at providing a compelling and persuasive point of view."

Online content needs to work harder

There really is very little point investing in an outbound direct marketing campaign to drive traffic to a landing page, only to lose visitor with trite arguments and overly complex navigation; or to work hard to build a following on Twitter and LinkedIn only to announce Edna's brought doughnuts into the office. Online content should be aimed at providing a compelling and persuasive point of view that convinces prospects to take the next step as well as a winning experience that builds strong relationships and reinforces all the good reasons to remain a loyal customer. This is as much about engaging with the visitor on an emotional level as it is about providing the facts and figures that appeal to logic. A robust content and publishing strategy will make sure you hit all the right buttons.

Sales people need information too

And not some weighty tome to wade through, but succinct and easily accessible nuggets that get them up to speed swiftly. They need to be one step (or as many as they can manage) ahead of the customer, understanding the vertical context and the business drivers that are shaping decisions and how to map the solution sets to address these needs. They also need presentation materials to support their conversation with the customer, access to demonstration facilities and references to prove the success of this approach. Making sure your intranet has the right news feeds and is refreshingly easy to navigate, is integrated with salesforce.com and can push information to Windows, Android and iPhone apps is key. Oh, and a robust content and publishing strategy will make sure you hit all the right buttons.

Have you asked the right questions?

When we sit down with salespeople we always get to some valuable insight – especially when we're chatting to the ones who are more successful at their craft. In one such intercourse, I was told a story that shines a bright light on what separates the winners from the rest. It's well worth sharing.

More speed, less haste

Imagine your customer comes to you to place an order. Great. That's a good sign that you're doing something right. But your next move could make a ten-fold difference to the outcome.

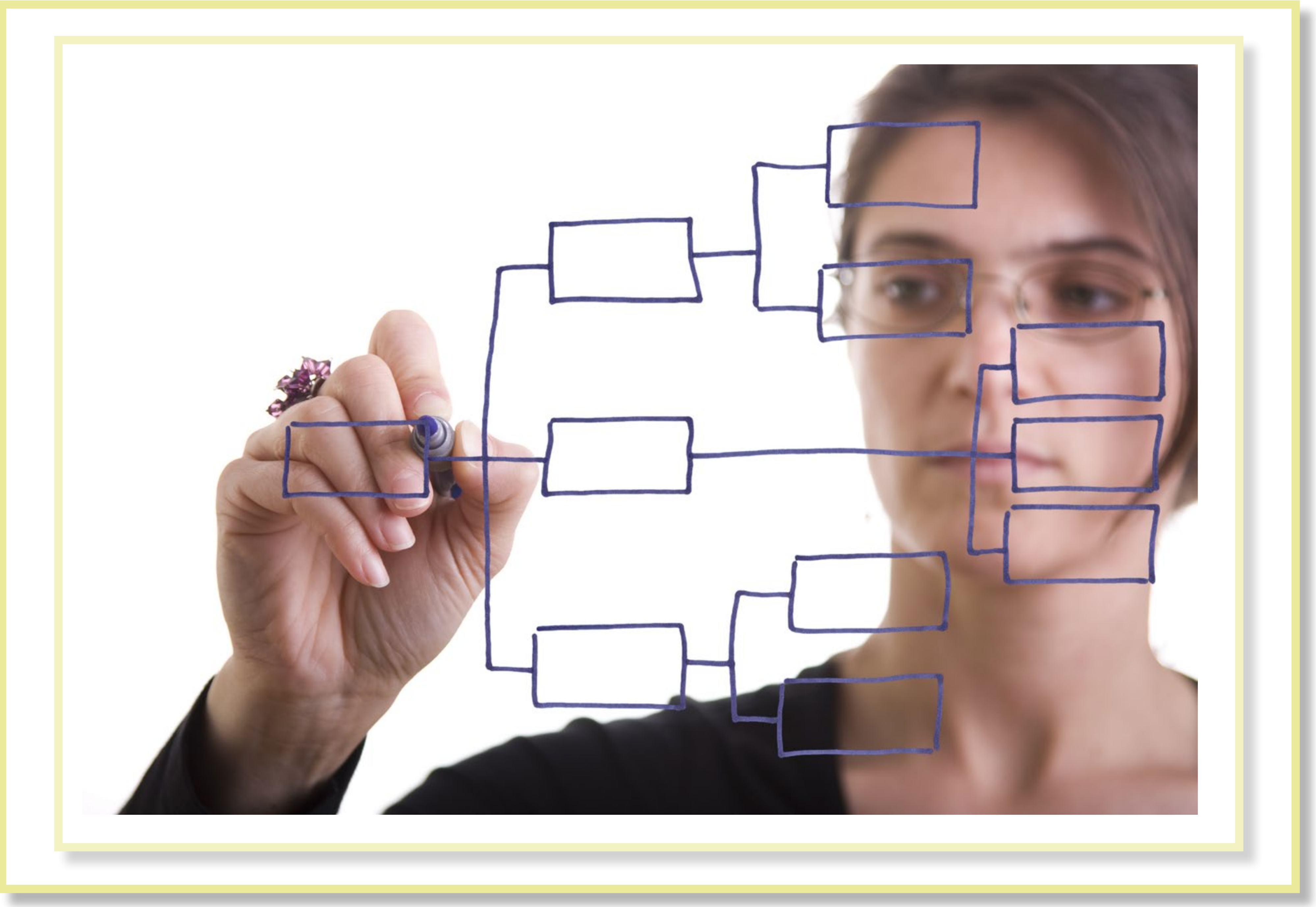
Since most of our clients are in the technology sector this order might be for a server, or some bandwidth or a number of user licences, perhaps even a services contract. The overwhelming urge at this point is to qualify the solution and get the order processed… what speed or capacity do you want? What features do you or don't you want included? Impressed with your efficiency the customer agrees the spec and hands over the purchase order. The deal is secured – but, unfortunately, the opportunity is lost.

Delivering more value

Instead, imagine you simply ask 'why?'

What's the bigger challenge or issue your customer is trying to achieve? By understanding the context you can validate that the solution proposed is the best fit; you can explore ways to deliver more value and get the customer to where they want to be faster – things that your customer may not have thought of or may not know that you can help with.

For the successful sales person I was with, this simple step had made the order ten times bigger – great for him and for the company he represented. But also great for the customer who reached his goal more effectively than he could have imagined.



"By understanding the context you can validate that the solution proposed is the best fit."

The importance of internal marketing communications

“explaining change and all the thinking that has gone into it will make it all the smoother when it comes to implementation.”

A client came to me last week to discuss a channel communication strategy revamp – how they wanted to break down silos in communication, develop clearer and more consistent messages for channel partners, and support them further with the right sales enablement tools. My question: how are you managing this change with your internal channel teams?

Change management

Just because rapid change is a feature of modern business activity, doesn't mean it's any easier for people to swallow. It's all too easy for organisations to trip up when it comes to facilitating change.

Employee engagement lies at the heart of meeting this challenge. This is particularly pertinent in uncertain times, when the company has embarked on ambitious growth plans or economic conditions are tough just when companies most need their employees to be engaged and productive.

How to keep employees engaged

So when you're implementing a change in your marketing or sales strategy, or a new marketing programme, don't forget to communicate openly and clearly about it with your own people. That isn't to say that the decision-making process should be opened up to one and all, but explaining change and all the thinking that has gone into it will make it all the smoother when it comes to implementation. Transparency, good dialogue and some clarity about the future engender trust and reduce anxiety.

Case studies: not just for customers

Clearly you need to publicise your case studies internally if you want others in your organisation to be aware of them and use them to build credibility with potential customers. But there are other good reasons to put some effort into marketing your case studies within your own company. Here are four; let us know in the comments if you can think of any others.

One: Building connections and knowledge

It's easy for different functions within an organisation to fall into the trap of becoming separate 'silos' of skills, knowledge and even loyalties. By sharing your customer successes across teams you can make disparate working groups feel more connected to the wider aims of your organisation, and generate knowledge about, and interest in, what others are up to.

Two: A little competition can be a good thing

While 'collaboration' has become the buzzword in organisations today, there's nothing like a little competitive one-upmanship to spur people on. If one of your teams is generating loads of positive feedback through your customer reference programme, it can encourage your other teams to pull their socks up and show themselves in a better light by nominating potential references in their own area.

Three: Reinforcing the message

Sharing case studies is also a way to highlight and fix your organisation's brand values and key messages in the minds of your staff. If it's not too cheesy to say so, one of the key ways to make sure your people are the best advocates for your company is if they truly 'live the brand'. If your case studies clearly illustrate how your successes fall in line with your brand values, this reinforces the message with your staff.

Four: Pride and motivation

And let's not forget pride. If your people feel they are connected with everyone else in your organisation and all working towards common goals, they'll be proud of what they do and feel a communal sense of achievement in your successes. This makes for better motivated individuals and more synchronised teams.

Going even further

There's one other reason to share case studies internally, but it would usually require them to be adapted and extended with additional information. Every case study represents a successful interaction with a customer. If you want your people to be able to replicate that success, you can create an internal case study that captures all the best practices and lessons learned in the project, so that others can repeat (and improve on) your success.

Like what you read?

Then be sure to get in touch and see what else we can offer you!

+44 1628 622 187
hn-marketing.co.uk