

Marketing and Sales in an Ultra-Busy World

By Ron Black

More than 65% of professionals surveyed last year reported they were “unable to complete their assigned duties”, frequently “took work home”, “multi-tasked too much”, and generally felt “overwhelmed” at work. As this trend steepens, every function in your business is impacted—critical activities required to keep your business healthy and growing are likely being crowded out by the daily chaos.

Important and urgent tasks predominate our day, while those important, but seemingly less urgent are pushed aside, often ignored, and sometimes completely forgotten. Which is more likely in your typical day: finding and cultivating new, high-growth prospects... or working customer service issues for the guy leaning on your counter? Problems and issues predominate much of our day.

Whether you have a dedicated sales and marketing team or do it all yourself, everyone fights the daily battle: Prospect or respond? Plan or react? Sell or service? Grow or... ?

Rule 1: Don't confuse marketing with sales. Both are essential and closely connected. They share common objectives: profitability, strength, and growth. But to confuse the two reduces your ability to prioritize and execute with limited time, attention, and budgets.

The sales function consists of three primary activities, skill-based and tactical by nature: contacting, communicating, and closing new business. The marketing function is largely strategic and addresses these key points: What markets should we dominate? What shall we be known for? How do we get found?

Just as we allow urgency to crowd out the important, we also are at risk of allowing tactical (sales) activities to crowd out the strategic (marketing).

Rule 2: Get focused on your marketing and sales imperatives. You've neither the time nor the budget to do everything, but keep an active, prioritized, visible list.

A white board, with one side titled “Sales” and the other “Marketing” does the trick for me. Add a few sticky notes (that can be easily repositioned), write one key objective or goal with a thick marker on each, and position them in order of current priorities.

On the marketing side, list your major targeted market segments. Know where the money is. Know where the growth potential resides. Think of these market segments in terms of buckets of opportunity.

By focusing on activities, objectives, and opportunities your thinking will naturally flow to “How can we make this happen?” Capture your how-to ideas one per sticky note (I prefer a contrasting color) and place them next to your prioritized imperatives. Good ideas start as wisps of inspiration. Don't let the crazy day kill your ideas before they can take root.

Rule 3: Get a handle on success with control-point thinking. You've listed and prioritized your intentions. Now is the time to take action. There's nothing like a deadline to motivate people to action, so place a control-point deadline on each of your top priorities.

Finish-no-later-than (FNLT) deadlines probably come to mind, but I recommend you use a different kind of deadline: start-no-later-than (SNLT). If you identify and control the moment you can start and still get done in time, your world view will radically change. Indeed, it is the start-no-later-than deadline that is easiest to control, and provides the greatest benefit.

Here's a quick example: what's the last minute you can leave your home and get to work on time? That's your SNLT control point. How do you feel if you leave ten minutes later? How's your stress level? How's your ability to cope with urgent tasks that pop up? How's your attitude, creativity, willingness to communicate...? Now start ten minutes earlier. Ask yourself the same questions. Do you see the power in SNLT control-point thinking?

Make sure your top three sales and marketing imperatives have clarity of purpose, measurable results, and a SNLT control point. You'll never let an imperative slip by again.

Rule 4: Keep your marketing and sales objectives visible. Your white board system provides a visible point of reference that can enhance your team's collaboration and focus. Take a few moments every week to review and refresh it. Engage your team's conversation regarding the why and the how of your intentions. Harvest their wisdom. Engage their energies. Bring the best out in your team.

Secondly, place an annual calendar next to the white board so that you can track and monitor all your promotional activities on a SNLT and FNLT basis. Trade shows, email messaging, direct mail campaigns, market segment campaigns, ads placed, website updates... everything that can slip through the cracks needs to be visible, scheduled, and honored.

Don't let today's urgency erode your profits, strength, or grow. Marketing and sales are both imperatives. Got a white board? The SNLT is up to you.



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About the author: Ron Black helps business leaders and sales professionals transform their intentions into lasting results. As the founder of nine businesses, a former Fortune 500 marketing VP, a four-time turnaround consultant, and advisor to over 250 new companies and product launches, he delivers real-world strategies and skills that leverages resources, disrupts competitive forces, and builds long-term profits, strength, and growth. For questions or comments our readers may freely contact him at RonBlack@TheMentorGroup.com or 800-381-8686.