Research Brief

Sales Playbooks: How the Best-in-Class Connect Marketing and Sales through the Entire Selling Lifecycle

Corporate marketing and sales teams have long been tasked with very different responsibilities, and yet the same ultimate goal: identifying, approaching, nurturing and closing new business relationships that drive additional revenue. Often required to focus their technology foundation on disparate platforms – marketing automation and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – that are only occasionally well-integrated, leaders of these intertwined business functions often search for a common technology enabler to help better align their activities, flow of data, control of assets, and ultimately their mutual ability to succeed. This Research Brief will focus on sales playbooks as an effective solution which both marketing and sales executives can deploy toward optimal overall corporate results.

Research Brief

Aberdeen's Research Briefs provide a detailed exploration of a key finding from a primary research study, including key performance indicators, Best-in-Class insight, and vendor insight.

Setting the Stage: Benefits of Sales Playbooks

Aberdeen research recently published for _Lead-To-Win 2012: Managing People, Process and Technology to Optimize the Last Mile of the Sales Cycle_ (March, 2012) determined that Best-in-Class companies (the strongest performers around

Figure 1: Current Performance Stronger Among Sales Playbook Users
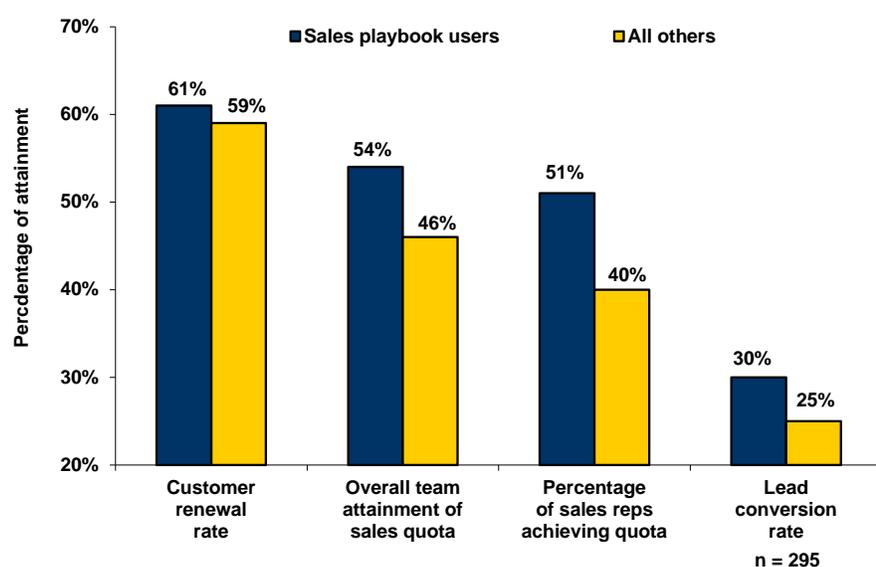
Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2011

sales quota attainment, proposal output and sales cycle reduction) were nearly twice as likely as Laggards (43% vs. 22%) to deploy sales playbooks (see sidebar definition) as a content management enabler supporting marketing and sales efforts. Moreover, an analysis of a number of performance metrics comparing sales playbooks users with non-users reveals a striking difference in a variety of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) – Figure 1. This study presented findings regarding how sales organizations most effectively "seal the deal" on opportunities in the pipeline that have already been presented to them by the marketing team. It is worthwhile, however, to look at sales playbooks for more holistic standpoint that begins earlier in the overall customer acquisition lifecycle.
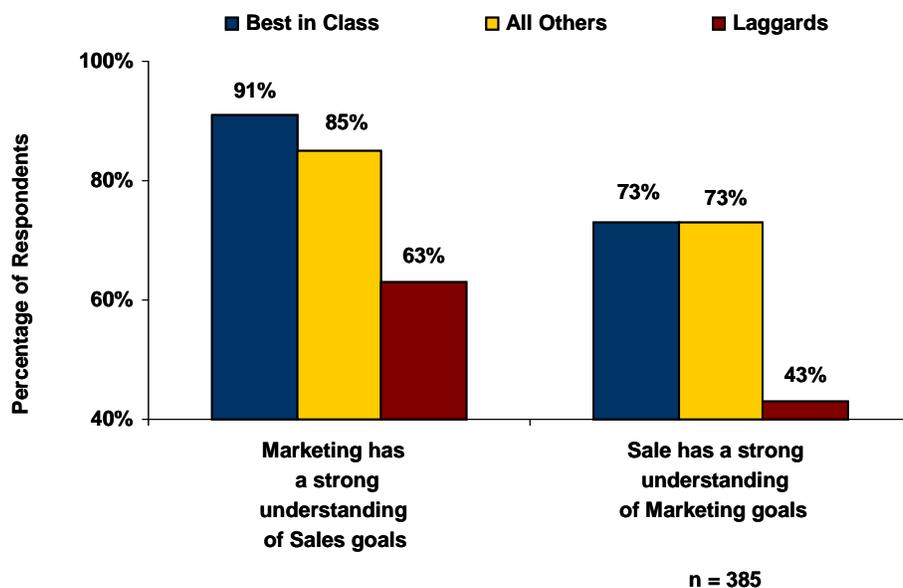
Sales and Marketing: Playing from the Same Sheet of Music

While marketing and sales professionals have not always collaborated as effectively as they should, Aberdeen research published in _Sales and Marketing Alignment: The New Power Couple_ (December, 2011) revealed a number of best practices and technology enablers that could help both parties unite for the greater good. The first step toward progress was determining where sales and marketing leaders shared common ground, and the most common theme here focused on culpability: marketers being held accountable for the quality and relevance of leads added to the pipeline, and sellers demonstrating ownership of and adherence to proper corporate branding. Indeed, the number-one

Definition: Sales Playbooks

Sales Playbooks are technology-enabled tools and processes that provide "guided selling" assistance to various selling job roles such as inside, field and/or channel partners. The foundational content in sales playbooks is generally developed by the corporate marketing team, in order to maintain consistency around a company's brand and messaging. Sellers can then customize and configure their presentations, collateral, proposals or contracts using selected assets that will best support each individual prospect, account or customer. User-generated content such as ratings or comments can also be captured over time, providing peer-driven guidance regarding the most effective marketing and sales messaging.

Figure 2: Relative Depth of Sales/Marketing Mutual Goal Awareness

n = 385

Source: Aberdeen Group, October 2011

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business pressure (see sidebar) expressed by survey respondents was that of measuring the return on marketing investments, with "aligning marketing deliverables to customer/prospect needs or demands" and "inability to quantify Marketing's impact on business" as additional top-five pressures. These barriers were most effectively overcome by Best-in-Class companies who focused on ensuring that the sales organization had complete access to all marketing-produced collateral (85%, vs. 74% of Industry Average and 63% of Laggard firms). The utilization of sales playbooks provides this capability very clearly: it enables marketing to support the goals of the sales team by ensuring that they have the right messaging, collateral, and tools in hand to support their new customer acquisition, up-selling or cross-selling initiatives. Indeed, we see in Figure 2 both that Best-in-Class companies demonstrate a higher awareness level of mutual sales/marketing goals, as well as a somewhat stronger overall sensitivity on the part of the marketing team.

Figure 3: Better Process = Better Results
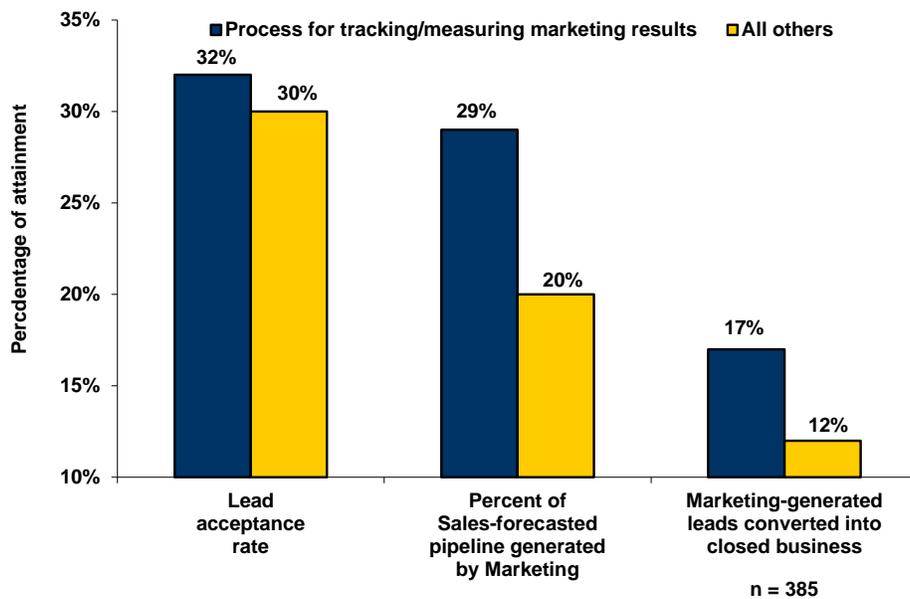
Source: Aberdeen Group, October 2011

While marketing and sales leaders cite measuring return on marketing investment as a top pressure, only 45% of respondents have a process for tracking and measuring marketing results. Fewer still (35%) have defined performance metrics for measuring marketing effectiveness, and neither capability correlates with performance. The use of sales playbooks, however, can provide specific data regarding the extent to which marketing materials are used by the sales team, as well as correlating the use of individual assets with actual account wins or losses. The ability to track and assimilate sales user feedback regarding marketing assets, too, further enhances the ability of playbook users to continuously improve the targeting and effectiveness of marketing output. As a final result, Best-in-Class companies not only achieve better business results than others but also report a more synchronized and sophisticated marketing/sales alignment, with 79%

Aberdeen's PACE Methodology

Aberdeen applies a methodology to benchmark research that evaluates the business Pressures, Actions, Capabilities, and Enablers (PACE) that indicate corporate behavior in specific business processes:

√ Pressures — external forces that impact an organization's market position, competitiveness, or business operations.

√ Actions — the strategic approaches that an organization takes in response to industry pressures.

√ Capabilities — the business process competencies (process, organization, performance and knowledge management) required to execute corporate strategy.

√ Enablers — the key functionality of technology solutions required to support the organization's enabling business practices.

reporting a "good" or "strong" relationship, compared with 64% and 55% respectively among Industry Average and Laggard organizations. Conversely nearly three-times as many Laggards indicate a "combative" or "weak" relationship status as the Best-in-Class (16% vs. 6%). As this report concluded, "Best-in-Class performance is most strongly correlated with the ability to share collateral, best practices and case studies across marketing and sales and to pursue the "voice of the customer" jointly." In fact, analyzing the current performance of end-users reporting a "well-defined process for tracking and measuring marketing results" against non-adopters reveals, in Figure 3, the fruits optimizing sales/marketing alignment.

Enabling Faster and More Frequent Sales Wins

With a clear understanding of how top-performing companies align their sales and marketing operations, now let's return to the *Lead-To-Win* research, which more specifically addresses the use of sales playbooks. The Competitive Framework findings in Table 1 (see Aberdeen's PACE methodology, sidebar, page 3) reveal a significant number of best practices which Best-in-Class companies (sidebar, page 5) adopt more frequently than others.

Table 1: The Lead-to-Win Competitive Framework

	Best-in-Class	Average	Laggards
Organization	Executive-level sponsorship for initiatives aimed at shortening the sales cycle		
	71%	57%	52%
	Replication of "A players" by identifying and sharing their winning documentation		
	56%	42%	38%
Knowledge	Centralized repository for sales proposals or contracts		
	83%	76%	67%
Enabling Technology	• 90% Sales forecasting/ analytics • 82% Sales intelligence • 79% Sales performance management (SPM) • 43% Content management (incl. sales playbooks)	• 76% Sales forecasting/ analytics • 62% Sales intelligence • 48% Sales performance management (SPM) • 35% Content management (incl. sales playbooks)	• 58% Sales forecasting/ analytics • 47% Sales intelligence • 36% Sales performance management (SPM) • 22% Content management (incl. sales playbooks)
Performance	Performance analytics against agreed-to objectives (metrics) are reviewed regularly		
	74%	60%	39%

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	Best-in-Class	Average	Laggards
	Defined metrics for analyzing the sales productivity impact of changes in our sales cycle		
	54%	45%	41%

Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2011

Executive-level sponsorship for initiatives aimed at shortening the sales cycle. Companies with this level of C-suite support yield a 14% higher overall team attainment of sales quota (54% vs. 48%) than organizations that may recognize the obvious value of a shorter cycle, but have not actively pursued high-level ratification of the practice. It should be of little surprise, too, that adopters report a 5% shorter average sales cycle (3.7 months versus 3.9 months). This margin takes on significant value when we understand that survey respondents reported an overall average deal size of $194k ($213k among the Best-in-Class), and think about the ramifications for overall company revenue if the sales cycle shrinks by even a week or two.

Replication of "A players" by identifying and sharing their winning documentation. Aberdeen research published in *Sales Training 2011: Uncovering How the Best-in-Class Sustain, Reinforce and Leverage Best Selling Practices* (October 2011) found that Best-in-Class firms (those with the most reps achieving quota and yearly improvements in average deal size and lead conversion rate) were more likely than others to identify this approach as a top-three strategic action (28%, vs. 24% among the Industry Average and 21% for Laggards). While the author has blogged that "traditional salespeople were absent from kindergarten the day they taught about sharing," the fact remains that their employers more objectively value the need for sustained, enterprise-wide best practices being both collected for the greater good, as well as documented –and available within the sales playbook application – as winning strategies for current and future team members.

Similarly, a **centralized repository for sales proposals or contracts** guarantees less friction as well as less "re-invention of the wheel" when it comes to the highly predictable activities involved with creating the customer quotes, proposals, and contracts that are often generated through playbook functionality. While the majority of companies adopted this knowledge management capability, the Best-in-Class are 14% more likely to do so (83% vs. 73%) than all other firms. Companies supporting this kind of "tribal knowledge" capture outperform others in a number of key metrics:

- 10% shorter average sales cycle (3.9 months vs. 4.4 months)
- 4% higher overall team attainment of sales quota (53% vs. 51%)
- Annual revenue growth of 7.9%, vs. 1.6%

Sales forecasting is the crucial process through which sales leaders – as well as marketing executives – help both senior management as well as other lines of business understand the near-and long-term health of the company. New Aberdeen research published in *Better Sales Forecasting Through Process and*

Technology: No Crystal Ball Required (July, 2012) highlights how top performers better deploy process and technology to achieve not only more accurate forecasts, but better business results. Forty-one percent (41%) of Best-in-Class firms within this research (defined as superior customer retention and sales quota attainment metrics, as well as shortening the sales cycle) support "integrating interactive sales playbooks/content into the CRM to inform forecast with sales activities executed during the selling/buying cycle," while 21% of Industry Average firms and only 12% of Laggards do the same. The heavier adopters of sales playbooks within this research understand the value of more accurately predicting which marketing assets will be more effective in certain selling situations, thus enabling a better understanding of which deals are likely to close, and when, supporting an overall more effective forecasting environment.

In *Sales Intelligence: What B2B Sellers Need To Know Before the Call* (June, 2012), Aberdeen explores how the most effective marketing and sales teams collect, analyze, and deploy both institutional and user-generated knowledge of their prospects, customers and markets. Marrying **sales intelligence** utilization to the deployment of sales playbooks is an effective way to ensure that prospects and customers are receiving the right message, at the right time, with a high degree of relevance to their own everyday concerns and needs. Here, too, the Best-in-Class companies (those with the highest success rates and customer retention and annualized improvement in quota attainment and growing average deal sizes) report a 36% higher sales playbook adoption rate than other firms (38% vs. 28%).

Finally, the performance management capabilities highlighted above in Table 1 speak directly to how contemporary marketing and sales teams need to be analytical and objective when it comes to determining how well they are performing. Nearly twice as many Best-in-Class firms as Laggards indicate that **performance analytics against agreed-to objectives (metrics) are reviewed regularly**, which enables a better opportunity to determine return-on-investment (ROI) on the kind of marketing content and assets captured by sales playbooks and deployed by the frontline Sellers. Similarly, with the dramatic impact that even small changes in the sales cycle can have on enterprises success (defined above), **defined metrics for analyzing the sales productivity impact of changes in our sales cycle** can make all the difference when it comes to justifying the cost of, and intrinsic value in, sales playbook deployments.

Case Study: CA Technologies

Consider the case of global IT services company CA Technologies. According to Gerard Sample, Senior Director, Sales Enablement, the company in 2010 had in place strong sales operations and sales education functions to handle the technology and knowledge management foundations for the company's 3000+ sellers, but not a mature sales enablement practice. "We did not have a standard approach across all business units for enabling sellers," Sample explains, and as a result, "the content that the sales team leveraged at each stage of the buyer's journey was often focused on our technical benefits as

opposed to business value metrics." This realization also provided an opportunity to improve go to market efficiencies given that, "sellers were tasked with locating the right sales tools and customer assets in multiple locations for each stage of an engagement. These administrative tasks reduced the time available to positively contribute to our customer's business goals."
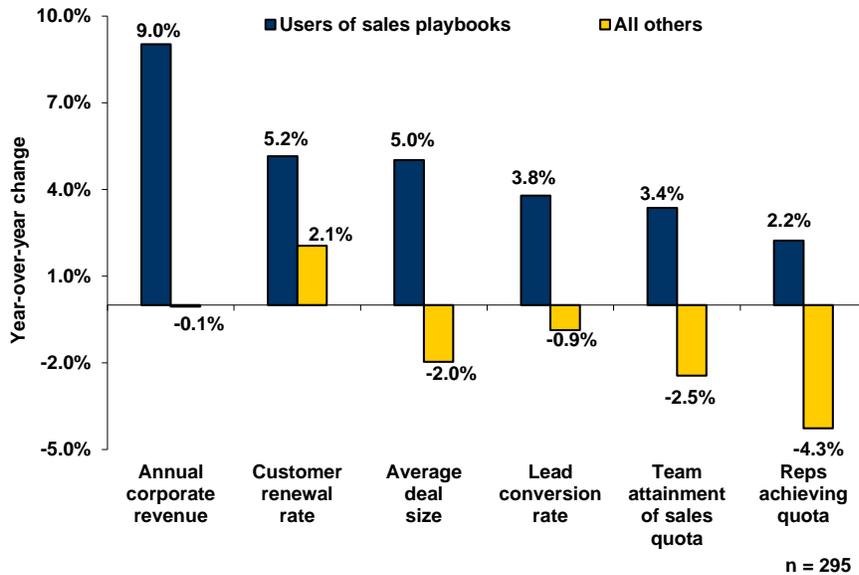
In recognition, CA Technologies decided to implement a playbook initiative across the entire sales force, consisting of a standard methodology, selling assets and training content. In addition to driving go-to-market efficiencies, the goal was "to increase win rates, average deal size and pipeline predictability," explains Sample. Instead of 30-page sales guides and myriad other out-of-date, overlapping content pieces living in a variety of internal silos and styles, Sample explains that "our goal was to increase quality by focusing the sales tools and customer facing assets delivered through playbooks to only those proven to be well received." More importantly, the sales enablement process was deployed only when all sales leaders agreed to support a pilot effort, and to measure its ultimate impact.

These measurements showcase the value of the CA Technologies' playbook strategy: Sample reports that playbook usage correlates to a 2.5-times larger average deal size. Also, 85% of sales victories were from reps completing at least half of the playbook activities and that overall sales forecasting accuracy has improved dramatically among adopters. "The icing on the cake," he continues, "is that we're now able to 'fail faster' – the playbook process forces more transparency around the viability of every deal. If we find that our solution is not the best fit for a given opportunity, we know earlier in the sales cycle and can re-direct our energies toward better deals."

Conclusion: Knowledge is Power

In addition to the benefits of marketing / sales alignment described above, Aberdeen has shown the value of centralizing marketing materials in *Marketing Asset Management: Managing Brand Compliance in Distributed Marketing Environments* (March, 2010). In that report, Best-in-Class companies achieved better Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), brand consistency and reduced time-to-market by deploying library and digital asset management technologies, as well as a process to disseminate information on best practices in managing marketing assets to both sales and marketing teams. In the sales world, a similar capability pays off for companies more adept at achieving quota. This complements the *Lead-To-Win* research in which sales playbooks have been shown to enhance overall business results through better marketing / sales alignment. In addition to the current performance results indicated in Figure 1 above, we see, in Figure 4's representation of year-over-year playbook users' effectiveness, even more validation of the benefits of sales playbook utilization.

Figure 4: Annualized Performance Advantages of Sales Playbooks

Source: Aberdeen Group, November 2011

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit www.aberdeen.com.

Related Research	
Better Sales Forecasting Through Process and Technology: No Crystal Ball Required (July 2012) _Sales Intelligence: What B2B Sellers Need To Know Before the Call_ (June 2012) _Sales Mobility: How Best-in-Class Remote Sellers Are Replacing "See" with "Do"_ (May 2012) _Lead-To-Win 2012: Managing People, Process and Technology to Optimize the Last Mile of the Sales Cycle_ (March 2011) _Partner Relationship Management: Channeling Better Sales Results_ (March 2011)	_Sales Performance Management 2012: How the Best-in-Class Optimize the Front Line to Grow the Bottom Line_ (December 2011) _Sales and Marketing Alignment: The New Power Couple_ (December, 2011) _Sales Training 2011: Uncovering How the Best-in-Class Sustain, Reinforce and Leverage Best Selling Practices_ (October 2011). _Leveraging the 360 Degree Customer View to Maximize Up-Sell and Cross-Sell Potential_ (September 2011) _Streamlining the Top of the Funnel: How Inside Sales Teams Source, Qualify and Close Business_ (February 2011)

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