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Takeaways from Grow Boating's Marketing Summit

The smartest ways to converge marketing, sales and customer service

WANDA KENTON SMITH · NOV 1, 2019

Did you take advantage of this year's Grow Boating Marketing Summit at the International BoatBuilders' Exhibition and Conference? If you were one of the more than 175 marine marketers who participated in the immersive day of education, good for you. It was awesome.

If you didn't, you're still in luck. Grow Boating has made all the sessions available for free at GrowBoating.org (click on Research & Education). I encourage every marine marketer to take advantage of this opportunity to become better educated and equipped to improve not only your own performance, but also your company's future.

No matter the size or scope of a business, every corporate leadership team can gather with its marketing staff to listen and learn from these summit sessions. Top-performing organizations empower and enable their marketing teams. In my role as president of Marine Marketers of America, I know there is a palpable frustration about the C-Suite's lack of understanding, interest and support of marketing initiatives.

When was the last time your senior staff sat at the table with the marketing team to review internal strategies and discuss potential opportunities? There's no time like the present; use these Grow Boating sessions to help you engage in meaningful conversation.

Personally, I left the event pumped up and motivated, armed with new strategies and tactics. Two of my top takeaways included the convergence of marketing, sales and customer service; and the ongoing push for relevant video.

I've long been a die-hard fan of marketing speaker Marcus Sheridan, who wrote *They Ask, You Answer*. His return this year brought new focus to the role of customer service and how it should be fully integrated into the marketing and sales experience.

Instead of customer service being a reactive response following a sale, as it is with most organizations, Sheridan believes it should play a key role in the customer experience and encounter from the outset.

Sheridan says that organizations should "obsess over customer questions" to better understand what the buyer believes and how he thinks. Our ability to define major customer fears about purchasing our products allows us to more effectively address his or her concerns across our online platforms and retail channels.

"When prospects read 30 pages or more before the initial sales appointment, they're likely to buy 80 percent of the time." — Marcus Sheridan

As we strategically direct content and video communications to answer key customer concerns, we can orchestrate a feeling of trust and transparency long before the prospect chooses to engage.

Since 70 percent of the buying decision is made prior to retail contact, it stands to reason that knocking down potential objections and answering the most critical questions is a smart strategy.

Sheridan says marine companies often hide from divulging what buyers most want to know. Those omissions start with the cost of the product. In addition, they want to learn more about any known problems or concerns. They also want to gauge how the product compares against others in the same space. They want to read independent and credible reviews, and they want to know who is considered "the best" in a specific product category.

Our ability to position clear answers for easy access directly affects our opportunity to earn the prospect's trust and promote engagement. We need to provide the answers firsthand to the customer's most compelling questions, versus allowing some third-party site (or a competitor) to dictate or influence our buyer's perceptions.

Before jumping on the convergence and content-delivery bandwagon, however, it's important to invest time for due diligence. Gather your marketing, sales and customer service troops to discuss, debate and identify the most common customer concerns and questions, prioritizing the top seven. Then build a content communications plan from this initial list.

Prospects Demand Information

Sheridan says serious prospects will take a deep dive on content, absorbing as much material as they can find. Don't assume that people won't read much, and don't skimp on website content. "When prospects read 30 pages or more before the initial sales appointment, they're likely to buy 80 percent of the time," Sheridan says.

Video should be a critical part of that content. Video remains king of the marketing mix. By 2020, 85 percent of all online content consumed is projected to be video. We all need to be using it. This begs the question: Are you staffed or sourced to respond to this major marketing requirement? The consumer is demanding it.

In addition to addressing questions via video, consider using the medium across your website, including on the product and service pages. Identify the audience for the product or service you're offering. Communicate the specific problem your product solves, as well as what makes it unique. Sheridan also says that to establish trust, videos should communicate whom the product is not intended to reach.

Other top recommended video applications include brief sales team and customer service bio introductions, which should be embedded in email signatures (and possibly on the website), along with a landing-page video designed to allay fears about form completion and submission.

Many prospects fear filling out forms, so assuring them how their information will or won't be used should boost response rates.

While many of us use video testimonials in our marketing activities, Sheridan suggests adopting a more targeted approach to share the "customer journey." Instead of having your customer cite general satisfaction with your organization, break the video into three parts: the problem or need the customer had, their journey with your organization and how it solved their problem, and the results they are enjoying.

Repurposing Testimonials

I love this suggestion. It not only tells a story (that can be repurposed on other social and marketing platforms), but it also provides real substance and credibility.

In addition, if your company makes bold claims, use video to substantiate those claims. For example, if you claim you are different or better or the best in an area, incorporate video to back up that claim. Explain how your product or service is different. Whenever possible, share reviews or articles to reinforce your claim.

Pricing remains topic No. 1. Educate your customers about your pricing models and what is involved in making a purchase.

"When buyers don't know why something costs what it costs, through ignorance they buy the cheaper something," Sheridan says. "This leads to commoditization of products."

At the very least, use video to communicate what to expect with pricing and ranges, as well as what that pricing reflects. Your failure to address pricing can take you out of the conversation from the get-go, especially if competitors are earning trust and the sales advantage. Your transparency on pricing can keep you in the game.

A final insight Sheridan shared is the common missing link between marketing and sales at the consumer level. In some organizations, marketing has done an admirable job in producing powerful content through a website and brochures, video, blogs, white papers, customer testimonials and more. However, the sales team is often uneducated about the available arsenal, or simply doesn't understand where or how to deploy it.

Sheridan says it's critical for marketing and sales to be on the same page. Their cooperation lets them capitalize on the growing demands of today's voracious content-consumption environment.

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