

Two Mistakes that Stunt Growth

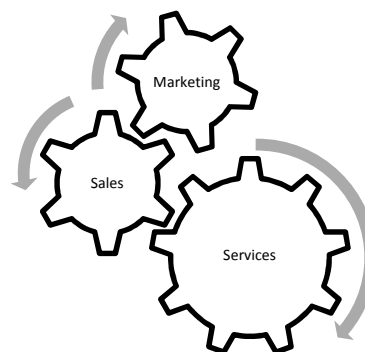
Growth is an intentional, strategic and collaborative effort. It is everyone's responsibility starting with the CEO and including sales, marketing and customer service. Growth strategy must be a function of the benefit to the client. Over the last two decades I have observed some common mistakes made at key levels in business that undermine the growth initiative. This paper addresses two of the most common mistakes.

Running Around Like a Chicken with its Head Cut Off

My experiences have revealed that a company can have good and capable people in charge of sales, marketing and service but growth will still be stunted without common objectives and focused efforts. That is the job of the CEO.

The CEO is the Chief Growth Officer which means he is **the top salesperson, the top marketer and the top client service person**. He cannot relinquish the responsibility of growth from himself; in fact, he must make sure that growth is everyone's responsibility and priority.

Growth is a cooperative and collaborative effort. As businesses age, departmentalization can creep in and blind employees to their role in the growth effort. Without proper leadership I have seen the marketing team become captivated with their own creativity and lose sight of the real objective. I have seen sales charging ahead, ill-equipped for battle and the service team withdraw to their comfort zone shutting out others.



While these tendencies may be natural, they aren't healthy. The primary role of marketing is to **find** potential clients, the sales team must **win** clients and the service team should **keep** clients. But there should also be broad channels of communication between these groups and a deliberate effort to support each other. Constructive feedback should flow freely between the groups. Sales should give feedback to marketing about the messages most helpful in sales. Services should work with sales to confirm that the expectations they set will match the results delivered.

The CEO is the only person that can bring the organization together in this way. He drives everything by providing focus, maintaining accountability and fostering healthy communication. Without this, growth is probably just a function of the market, rising and falling from the sheer force of the marketplace like a stalled boat given over to the currents and the waves.

Making Noise Instead of Music

No matter how amazing our product or service might be, **if it does not deliver value by the client's standards, it is worthless.** Nevertheless, I watch this mistake being made repeatedly by sales and marketing alike. The message is not about the client; it is about us or our stuff instead.

Getting the wrong message to the right audience is worse than getting no message to them at all.

Each interaction either opens or closes the door for subsequent interactions. Determining the target audience is sometimes difficult. Finding them and communicating to them can be even harder because once located, we must then contend with the other demands for their attention such as work activities, family obligations and social distractions. Ultimately, we have to **get the most powerful message to them when they are in the right frame of mind.**

In that ideal moment, which is probably only seconds, the message must describe the measurable benefits delivered to clients and proof of our claim. In fact, **most purchasing decisions are made in seconds**, not minutes, hours, days or months regardless of the length of the sales cycle.

Because of this reality, it is imperative that a salesperson enters into every interaction **prepared** and that every marketing outreach communicates the most effective message. **The most effective message is personal** for the ultimate decision maker, describing what is **valuable to them**, measured the way they would measure it. Going in with broad, generic statements fails to distinguish us from the competition.

In a previous role as Sales Manager I experienced this very thing. Salespeople talked enthusiastically and convincingly about us and our products to anyone that would listen. This put our chance of a sale even with that of every other vendor. But, once our message became clearly focused on value to the client, our sales began to outpace market norms and profitability increased.

Similarly, I have seen marketing teams acting in a vacuum, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on email campaigns, print campaigns, "branding" campaigns, direct mail and web designs that literally did nothing to enhance the sales efforts. Rather, the activities were full of impotent messages all too often delivered to the wrong people.

The first thing I did after assuming responsibility of this company's marketing was to stop everything that wasn't working, which was almost everything. The marketing team was exhausted and demoralized and the marketing budget had effectively been flushed down the toilet. We refocused on three things: who is our target, what is important to them and how we get in front of them.



Conclusion

Some businesses are simply riding the momentum of the marketplace. In a strong market, they grow and in a weak market they shrink. Without any thrust of their own they will ultimately collapse.

The business leader that fails to understand their role in growth is operating on borrowed time. Leaders don't just provide the vision; they must lead the charge, anticipate the future and make adjustments accordingly.

Intense focus on that which is important to the client must be the heart of any sales or marketing message. This can only be developed by talking with the clients. The quest for new clients is easier and faster when our existing clients do the selling for us.

About the Author

Chuck Reeves brings 20 years of experience performing all critical business functions across several industries including professional services, IT services, accounting and operational software, manufacturing, construction, hospitality and retail. Mr. Reeves founded True Growth Strategies in 2009. True Growth Strategies is built on the principles of strategic and analytical growth strategies. Mr. Reeves helps businesses gain fresh perspectives and develop strategies to reach and exceed their growth objectives.

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