

LAPPEENRANTA-LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
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Master's Thesis

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**The alignment of sales and marketing in order to provide successful
data driven marketing to support B2B sales in the tech field**

Examiners: Professor Anssi Tarkianen

ABSTRACT

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Today's companies are facing major changes in sales and marketing. The traditional ways of doing business will be too expensive and slow phased in the future. Thus, companies must aim to automate processes and generate data-driven marketing. The working collaboration between sales and marketing functions is necessary for the successful data-driven marketing. World has faced major changes during the Covid pandemic, which has been a great evidence for companies about the urgent need to move towards digital and automated processes.

This study will look at the marketing and sales alignment as well as marketing automation level in 5 case companies in order to understand how well tech companies in the B2B field have adopted automation and sales & marketing co-operation in order to create data-driven marketing. The study was conducted as a qualitative research and multiple case study with semi-structured interviews for marketing and sales managers. These people can be seen as key persons when considering the sales & marketing alignment or adaption of marketing automation. The findings point out the diversity between case companies. The study found that two case companies had a modern and automated sales and marketing pipeline with a synergetic co-operation.

Tiivistelmä

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Yritykset kohtaavat suuria muutoksia myynnin ja markkinoinnin saralla. Perinteinen tapa tehdä kauppaa on liian kallista ja hidastempoista tulevaisuudessa. Tämän takia yritysten on pyrittävä automatisoimaan prosessejaan ja luomaan data ohjautuvaa markkinointia. Toimiva yhteistyö myynnin ja markkinoinnin välillä on välttämätön, jotta pystytään varmistamaan menestyksekkäs data ohjautuva markkinointi. Koronaviruspandemian tuomat globaalit muutokset ovat toimineet erinomaisena todisteena perinteisille yrityksille tarpeesta digitalisoitua ja automatisoida prosesseja.

Tämä tutkimus paneutuu markkinoinnin ja myynnin yhteistyöhön sekä markkinoinnin automaation tasoon viidessä case yrityksessä, jotta voidaan ymmärtää kuinka hyvin teknologia alan yritykset B2B kentässä ovat hyödyntäneet myynnin ja markkinoinnin yhteistyötä sekä automatiota luodakseen data ohjautuvaa markkinointia. Tutkimus on laadullinen tutkimus, joka sisälsi viisi case yritystä. Haastateltavina ovat toimineet myynti- sekä markkinointipäälliköt, joiden voidaan nähdä olevan avainhenkilöitä niin myynnin & markkinoinnin yhteistyötä edistettäessä, kuin myös automaation adoptoinnissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat laajan diversiteetin case yritysten välillä. Vain kaksi yritystä viidestä oli modernisti automatisoinut markkinointiaan sekä panosti tulokselliseen myynnin ja markkinoinnin yhteistyöhön.

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This project has been an excellent opportunity to deepen my knowledge in marketing and sales in the fascinating tech field. When the whole thesis project comes to an end it also means the end for my amazing journey in LUT University.

Before the graduation I would like to thank the people, who supported me from the bottom of my heart. This paper would never be finished without the support of the Professor Anssi Tarkiainen. Also, a big thanks to all the wonderful interviewees who gave their effort for this thesis by providing their insights and ideas in the interviews.

Last but not least I want to say thank you for my friends and family for their endless support with this project as any other dreams I decide to pursue.

Thank you!

List of symbols and abbreviations

B2B, Business-to-Business

CRM, Customer Relationship Management

MQL, Marketing Qualified Lead

SQL, Sales Qualified Lead

SLA, Service level agreement

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1. Introduction

The rise of technology development and digitalization are shaping the way that successful sales and marketing are done nowadays. The future of organizations that do not keep up with the demands of technological development in sales, may look unappealing. Many sales organizations are struggling with matters such as the huge amount of data, fragmentation of the demand, complexity of customer lifecycle and constant changes in buying processes. The only modern way to manage all that can be found from the automation of marketing and data driven sales. This has brought increasing interest for marketing automation especially in the B2B field. (Burka 2015; Todor 2016; Järvinen & Taiminen 2016)

Although marketing automation provides various advantages for sales, it also requires resources. In order to provide data-driven marketing with the help of marketing automation the sales and marketing functions must collide. (Järvinen et al 2016) The integration between marketing and sales is a bigger challenge than it seems at first, though it appears as a basic requirement for any well-functioning company. Besides it is obvious that the higher level of cooperation will bring benefits for companies.

The benefits of the alignment between sales and marketing functions are unquestionable. Yet many companies struggle to combine those two in order to unleash the true potential for the business. The best practices in sales has been studied for decades but in general, both marketing and sales do not unite much in theory. Even though the data driven business is a highly relevant topic in today's fast phased digital environment, the scientific research is far behind. In former literature there are no theories that would combine marketing automation with sales funnel management or lead management. The state of the literature is yet exceedingly nascent and only little is known about the way that B2B firms can exploit marketing automation in each part of the sales funnel (Järvinen et al 2016). Thus, it can be stated that there are no best practices for B2B companies to provide successful data-driven marketing to support B2B sales.

A working relationship between these two departments is crucial for the marketing automation system to be able to generate better results. Improved outcomes within the usage of marketing automation mean increased amount of superior leads, which will eventually generate higher

revenue for the company more effectively than before. (Järvinen et al 2016) Marketing automation tools are used in the B2B sector as an attempt to achieve competitive advantage and also to improve the customer experience. Both of these goals are equally matched to marketing and sales functions. When the business is based on a higher level of automation both marketing and sales are able to focus on their core competences without wasting time on routine tasks that could be done by a computer. In fact, many of those tasks could be done way more effectively with better results by a computer instead of a human. As marketing automation is daily business for most medium to large scale companies in today's world, the research and literature should reflect more on this trend.

This research is structured in a following way. First the introduction will outline the research questions and key concepts of the study to get reader on the same page with the writer. It also includes the methodology and delimitations for the study. The second part is the theoretical part which can be roughly divided into theory of marketing automation and theory of sales and marketing alignment. After theory the empirical study will be introduced and defined. The conclusions will give an answer to each of the research questions combining both former literature and results from the empirical part. In the end managerial implications and further research ideas will be discussed briefly.

1.1. Research Questions and Objectives for the Research

The aim for the study is to offer the knowledge about the benefits of the data driven marketing in B2B companies. This has to happen through understanding firstly the role of marketing in the sales processes, and secondly marketing automation as a part of the whole process. To achieve the main goal the research defines the benefits of automated marketing processes in a way that those become understandable not just for marketing people, but to anyone who desires to create a successful sales funnel for their B2B business.

Previous literature has had a focus on sales and marketing integration during last few decades, while marketing automation has been studied mainly on the last two decades. There are very few studies that have combined these two topics together. Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) have

been studying sales and marketing alignment and marketing automation adaption in order to improve content marketing strategies in the B2B field. This study does not apply the content marketing perspective, but rather highlights the overall benefits for the business.

The scientific goal of this study is to be able to understand better how the new technology adoption with marketing automation has affected for the alignment between sales and marketing functions. As marketing automation is quite blur and almost abstract concept for many sales people, it might be possible that it would not be fully understood and thereby thought to be something not worthy to use in business. However, marketing automation provides a possibility to justify each marketing action and returns on investments, which should be very tempting information for executives of the company. The managerial goal on the other hand is to prove to B2B companies that the data driven marketing is worth the investment because with it is possible to create way more opportunities for sales than the traditional way of marketing.

The research question is the following:

How do B2B tech companies align marketing and sales departments when developing data-driven marketing with marketing automation?"

These sub-questions are helping to fulfill the answer for the first research question:

What are the failure points in sales and marketing co-operation?

How do companies use marketing automation in developing their lead management systems?

1.2. Literature review

The aim of this literature review is to give reader a compendium about the former literature of the main topics of this paper (De Chastelain Library Guides, 2020). The literature of this thesis is roughly divided in two parts; first part is about the alignment of sales and marketing and second part is the theory of marketing automation. Thus, this literature review is also divided into two parts.

Marketing automation

Marketing automation is a software that increases the overall efficiency of marketing by automating the basic marketing processes (Heimbach et al. 2015, Keens & Barker 2009). Marketing automation is the base for the data driven marketing because with such platform it is possible to collect, analyze and utilize data in such efficiency which is not possible for humans (Wood 2015).

Marketing automation is relatively new topic in the literature. Marketing automation as a term was used already in 1990's. Some of the first mentions was from Buckling et al. (1998) saying that in the future some proportion of marketing decisions may be automated (Bucklin, Lehmann & Little 1998). Already then it was discussed that there is a possibility to increase the effectiveness in marketing by the help of the automation platforms (Buckling et al 1998). By that time marketing automation was seen as a part of CRM functions (Biegel 2009; Kumar 2011). The term "marketing automation" was first time introduced by John D. C. Little on 2001 (Heimbach et al. 2015)

In today's business the marketing automation platforms idea is to attract customers in each part of customer buying cycle. Within automated system it is easy to offer timely content to each and every customer no matter in which part of the cycle they are at that time. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016) While customers are consuming content the company will receive data from each and every action. It is clear that the amount of data is incomprehensible, and also something that could not be handled by humans, thus the marketing automation platform will structure and analyze the data in understandable form. This will improve the accuracy of reporting, since the huge amount of exact data available. (Redding 2015)

Marketing automation software combines the information from multiple sources, such as e-mail marketing, social media, website traffic, SEM & SEO and analytics (Burka 2015). The figure Y illustrates the combination of different sources of information for marketing automation platform.

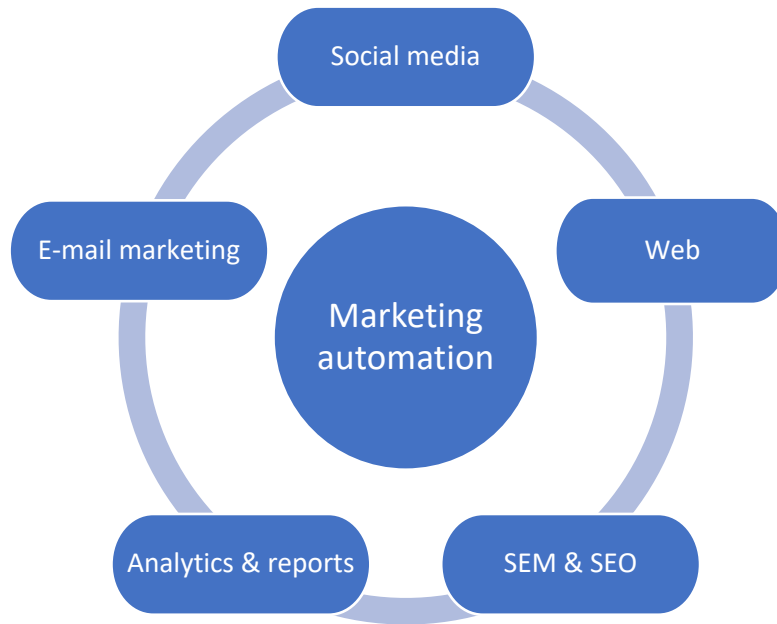


Figure 1. Combination of the main marketing automation information sources. Adapted from Burka (2015).

Marketing automation software will determine the digital footprint for each prospect and customer. After recognizing the personal path of each customer, it is easier for companies to offer timely content for each customer. (Järvinen et al. 2016) As marketing automation operates in real time within each touchpoint, the system will be able to carry out right operations in a timely matter (Heimbach et al. 2015). Marketing automation platform can be used in multiple operations such as customer segmentation, data integration, project management, lead management, budgeting, analytics and customer engagement. Also, the overall campaign management from the planning to the execution can be done by marketing automation platform. (Keens & Barker 2009)

Customer relationship aspect for marketing automation

There is no solid understanding in literature whether the marketing automation is a part of CRM or even more. As CRM is usually seen as a strategy which involves different technologies and

outlooks to improve the relationship with customers (Greenberg, 2010). Redding (2015) explains that it is very difficult to compartmentalize the marketing automation to the CRM since vendors of the software keep expanding the new features, by creating even bigger entities than CRM. Heimbach et al. (2015) describes the role of marketing automation to be more than just CRM, because it exceeds the discipline by utilizing data from various sources and establishing it in a real-time communication. Though it is argued that marketing automation does not cover the information from sales part of the funnel and is there by lacking information to become a whole CRM (Estrada 2015). In general it is recommended to integrate the marketing automation platform with some CRM software for the sales (Dworkin 2016). The integration between the two functions, sales and marketing, will be in a challenging position to carry out successful integration. Not to mention the operational IT challenges within this kind of integration. (Järvinen et al. 2016)

The alignment of sales and marketing

The co-operation between sales and marketing have been extensively studied topic within last decades. Most of the studies aim to point out how collaboration between these two departments effects on the overall business performance in a very positive way. (Meunier-Fitz Hugh & Piercy 2013) There are still some different opinions about the reasons that causes the disagreements between sales and marketing. Meunier-Fitz Hugh & Piercy (2007) have noted that there are three main types of reasons for this: facilitators, integrators and management attitudes. On the other hand, Kotler et al (2006) have divided the reasons within two categories; economic reasons and cultural reasons.

In literature it is very unanimous image that one of the main issues between sales and marketing is the lack of follow-up of marketing generated leads (Kotler et al 2006; Churchill, Ford & Walker 2003). In general, the whole interface between marketing and sales seems to be quite difficult to be well-functioning. Marketing is expected to create leads for sales, but then sales complain about the lead quality where marketing answers by blaming the poorly done follow-ups. (Homburg, Jensen & Krohmer 2008) Despite the known unhelpful impact of poor lead

management to the company's performance the former literature has not paid much attention to the causes or cures for the phenomena (Sabnis G. et al 2013).

Atteya (2012) demonstrates how the only way of bringing sales and marketing co-operation to the next level is to increase the level of alignment. This could be done by identifying and agreeing on the attributes of the sales opportunities. Both departments should centralize their doing towards the same goals. (Atteya 2012)

The sales & marketing funnel

The sales & marketing funnel outlines the B2B selling process inside the company (Kotler et al. 2006, 77). The funnel is usually seen as a narrowing funnel since the amount of companies within every stage will decrease the further they move on the funnel. By tracking the funnel process, it is possible for the company to improve their selling processes by adapting the cumulative knowledge in practice. (D'Haen & Van den Poel 2013) It is important to figure out what is the reason when a lead drops out from the funnel. There can be a better offer from competitor or change in the buyers intentions. (Söhnchen & Albers 2010) The main goal for the funnel is to divide customers during their buying process based on their purchasing stage. The funnel also usually points out the division of responsibilities between marketing and sales departments. (Kotler et al. 2006, 77)

The former literature has presented quite a few different sales & marketing funnels (Söhnchen et al 2010). Some of the best-known ones are created by D'Haen et al. (2013), Kotler et al. (2006) and Söhnchen et al. (2010). D'Haen et al (2013) proposes the idea of four-phased funnel including following phases: suspect, prospect, lead and customer. Söhnchen et al. (2010) on the other hand presents funnel with 6 steps: qualification, approach, product presentation, design of an offer, handling objections and closure. Very famous theory for sales funnel is created by Kotler et al. (2006). "The traditional sales funnel" has over all eight stages: customer awareness, brand awareness, brand consideration, brand preference, purchase intention, purchase, customer loyalty and customer advocacy. First four stages of the list above are under marketing functions and last four belongs to the sales side. (Kotler et al. 2006)

1.3. Theoretical Framework

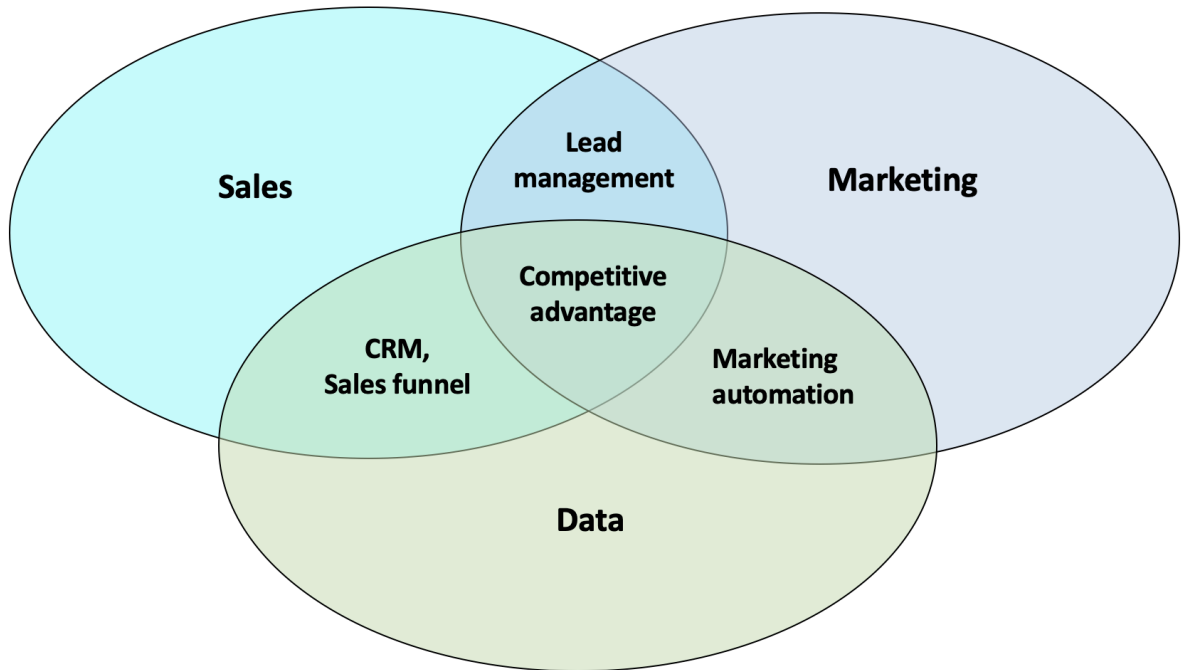


Figure 2. Theoretical framework of this study.

The theoretical framework is built upon three main factors: sales, marketing and data. In today's marketing and sales environments everything is driven on data. For example, customer relation management, sales funnels and marketing automation are heavily relying on data. Only by combining all three main factors can a company perform successful data driven marketing to support the sales. The data as a factor relies heavily upon IT infrastructures. Thus, the most important software, marketing automation and CRM platform, are very much dependent of the IT infrastructures. Marketing cannot apply the outcomes from marketing automation without the

1.4. Concept definitions

In this part the most important concepts for the study are presented in this section. One of the key reasons to write down the concepts at this point is to introduce these concepts to the reader from the author's point of view. This way it is possible for reader to understand the idea better. As this study is based on marketing and sales in B2B companies, the B2B concept will be shortly explained. Sales funnel is an important part of the study and also a part of customer relation management. Thus, customer relationship management will be also briefly introduced.

B2B marketing and sales

B2B as a term means commerce between companies (Fill & Fill 2005). B2B markets are for goods that are bought by other businesses, institutions and governments for their own consumption, use incorporation or for them to resell those. (Hutt & Speh 2013, 4) B2B Companies may offer materials, parts or services for other firms who then serve the consumers in order to make profits (Uzialko 2017). Only within the last three decades has the literature of B2B marketing started to expand. Nevertheless, since organizations were first created, trade between organizations has been around. And this of course means that for centuries, B2B marketing has already existed, but not in literature. (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca 2013)

B2B markets are generally characterized by having a smaller audience compared to B2C (Business to consumers). The value of partnerships is a core feature of B2B marketing. The formation and maintenance of relationships is a central element of the corporate strategy for B2B businesses. (Fill & Fill 2005) Firms may see customers as assets while identifying, initiating, developing and maintaining profitable relationships to them (Hutt & Speh 2013, 10-11). The buying process in B2B may be several years long while the number of resources involved in the transaction can be major. The seller is in generally encouraged to build a trustful and direct relationship with the target customer.

Some main features that separates B2B markets from B2C markets include for example the bigger purchase value, technically more complex goods, increased risk for buyers, longer time of the buying process, complex decision-making process, professional purchasing, close

relationships between buyer and seller, derived demand and reciprocity. (Minett 2002, 3) B2B markets are often distinguished by typically having a smaller audience relative to the B2C industry (Fill & Fill 2005).

CRM

There is no full consensus in the literature about the customer relation management as a definition although the word has been used already from the beginning of the 1900 (D'Haen & Van den Poel 2003). CRM is in generally defined as a cross functional and strategic approach to build profitable relations to customers (Payne, Adrian & Frow 2005). CRM is repeatedly linked into new customer acquisition and customer retention, as well as maximizing long-term customer value (D'Haen & Van den Poel 2003). CRM can be described as a business strategy which aims to profitability, increase of income, improvement of customer satisfaction and optimization of the use of customer-centric processes. CRM is also described as a combination of people, process and technology when the goal is to get closer to customers (Chen & Popovich 2003).

CRM as a term can be also understood as a CRM system. CRM systems are software that aims to improve the customer relation management. CRM systems are originated from the sales automation and relationship marketing. (Chen & Popovich 2003). If CRM is understood as a technological concept the main goal is to facilitate the contact between sales and customers (Peelen 2005). In this case CRM includes multiple software applications from sales to customer service (Buttle & Maklan 2015).

1.5. Delimitations

This study focuses on companies operating in Finnish B2B Technology industry that are currently using some kind of sales funnel in order to identify their customer journey and improve the lead management system. Each company also uses some marketing automation system or is about to implement such system for their use. The current literature is still quite broad and has

not been able to study data driven marketing and marketing automation as a part of the sales funnel in wider context yet.

This study is carried out only from the company's and more specifically from the sales function's perspective. This study does not deal with the customer's perspective of the chosen topic. It has been recognized in the literature that marketing automation and the alignment of sales and marketing are very much beneficial for the customers too. It is also clear that the topics that are handled in this paper might have very similar affects in B2C field, but this study is built on only for the B2B perspective and cannot be utilized in B2C field because of the wide differences of the sales and marketing process.

As each of the companies have their own way of understanding and defining the sales funnel, it is carefully considered that the author/interviewee and the representors of the case companies understand each other's well enough to avoid any miss communication. The study relies on the strategic side rather than the operational one. This is why there is no deeper investigation about the usage of the marketing automation platforms or any other similar platforms.

1.6. Research Methodology

This study has a qualitative research method. The research is carried out with a multiple-case study strategy in order to construct as impeccable answers as possible, but still retain the broad perspective for the whole tech field. In single case study there would have been too big risk to jump in to conclusions only based on one case. With the current research strategy this research can be implemented very extensively to the Finnish B2B companies in tech field.

The data for the study is collected via interviews for the companies' sales and marketing managers or leaders. In generally the interviewee has to have a good insight for the company's strategic decisions for sales and marketing, in order to be able to justify the decisions. The interviews are semi structured and follows the interview script where applicable. The interviews are turned in to text with Screencast-o-matic software in order to be able to study the interviews better.

2. Theory

The theory part consists of two topics that will be combined in the study. The two main topics in the theory part are the alignment of sales & marketing and marketing automation. In order to study how the alignment of sales and marketing would support the sales outcomes with data driven marketing it is necessary to combine the theories within both fields.

In the first theory part, the alignment of sales and marketing, is divided into three sections: Sales & marketing funnel, main issues between the co-operation and benefits of the alignment. In the second part the marketing automation is divided into definition, features, use of marketing automation, CRM aspect, lead management and best practices. After introducing all these topics to reader, it is very effortless for the reader to understand the empiric part of this study.

2.1. The alignment of sales and marketing

This chapter reviews literature on B2B sales and the alignment of sales and marketing functions. A functional alignment between sales and marketing functions has been described to be very challenging to create many times (Homburg et al. 2008; Atteya 2012). Thus, it is unarguable that the benefits from the alignment will have an overall effect on the business performance (Meunier-Fitz et al. 2013) Over the last few years, both marketing and sales functions have transformed rapidly. Marketing was traditionally able to rely on advertisements in order to generate leads for the sales. In today's fast phased world this is not enough anymore, and sales and marketing have to be able to own the whole customer's purchase journey. (LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, 2020a.)

*“Sales and Marketing share more than just a C-level executive – they also share goals, technologies, and processes that allow them to monitor and optimize every stage of every sale, from first touch to closed deal.” – Oracle
2020*

Salesforce (2020) highlights how nowadays the reality is that there is no successful business without a cooperation between sales and marketing. Marketing must know more of sales and vice versa, but most importantly everyone in the company has to know more about customers. (Salesforce 2020) A prerequisite for a working automation loop is marketing and sales integration. Järvinen et al. (2015) argues that the closer partnership between these departments is, it helps marketing in creating better leads and thus generating more revenue for the company with the help of automation. Co-operation between the two departments should start from the planning, in order to be able to exploit the techniques of automation in the best possible ways. (Järvinen et al. 2015)

In this chapter is described first the theory of sales and marketing funnel as it is very central concept of this topic and in many cases a key to successful alignment. After that will be pointed out some reasons for the lack of co-operation between sales and marketing. The last chapter will point out the benefits of the alignment for both functions and the whole organization.

2.1.1. Sales & marketing funnel

During the last decades there has been a drastic change in the sales funnel and lead generation processes. Digital marketing, artificial intelligence and customer relation management have developed enormously fast and allowed marketers and sales people to step up their game, while also customers have had major changes in their buying behavior. (Salesforce 2019) As the sales & marketing funnel constructs the whole B2B sales process within a company it is very crucial that the two departments are well aligned in order to create a coherent customer experience. This kind of customer experience can only arise from cooperation and departments supporting each other's. (Kotler et al. 2006, 77; Weir 2018)

It is clear that one of the top sales priorities is to improve the efficiency of the sales funnel (Pipedrive 2020). The customer has changed more in the past 10 years than in the past 100 years, which forces companies to re-think the marketing & sales processes all over again. The modern buyer is in control of the process. He/she is digitally driven, has access to an enormous amount of knowledge, socially connected, mobile and empowered. (Salesforce 2020) The changing

customer expectations and buyers increasing control means that marketing & sales funnel strategies must evolve (Salesforce 2019).

The sales funnel is typically pictured as a narrowing funnel. It is pictured in such way because the amount of people in each level will decrease within each step they pass further on the funnel. (D'Haen & Van den Poel 2013) The sales funnel can be seen as a staple of the sales culture as it shows what is the mission for each employee in the sales, starting from the sales reps until all the way to the CEO (HubSpot a2020) The amount of the steps/levels on the funnel varies a lot between different theories. To have a quite comprehensive look at the different theories three very well-known funnels are introduced below.

The first funnel is a four-phase funnel concept by D'Haen et al. (2013), which includes four steps: suspect, prospect, lead and client. The second funnel model is introduced by Söchnchen et al. (2010) and it is built upon 6 steps: qualification, approach, introduction of the offering, offer design, managing objections and closure. The third funnel is created by Kotler et al. (2006) "The traditional sales funnel". This funnel includes up to eight stages: customer awareness, brand awareness, brand consideration, brand preference, purchase intention, purchase, customer loyalty and customer advocacy. First four stages belong under marketing functions and last four to the sales. (Kotler et al. 2006) This is the only one of the funnels which very clearly divides the stages between sales and marketing.

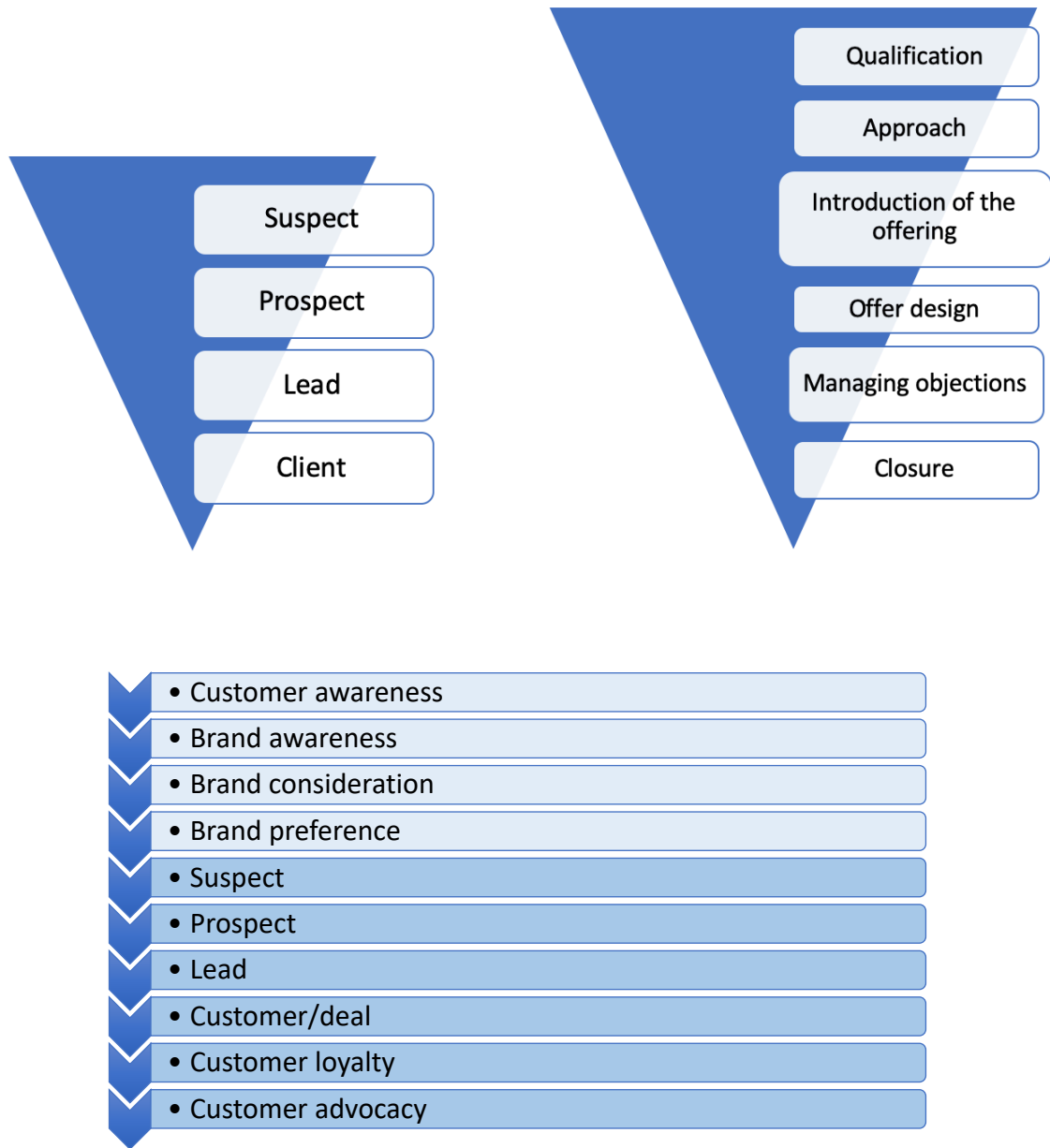


Figure 3, 4 & 5. Different sales funnels. Adapted from D'Haen et al. (2013), Söhnchen et al. (2010) and Kotler et al. (2006).

One of the key parts of the marketing & sales funnel is the lead management. Depending on the company, the requirements for a profitable lead differ and thus those should be set within each company itself (Järvinen et al. 2015). It is highly crucial for a company to acknowledge the factors needed for a lead formation, but regardless 68 percent of businesses have not yet

identified their sales funnels, and thus are unable to identify the whole customer journey or qualify leads that actually help their business (Pipedrive, 2020).

The following data may be required for a lead formation: source of the prospect, interest rate of the prospect, funds & position in decision-making, willingness to exchange information, initiator (customer or sales person) and previous business with the client company. (D'Haen et al. 2013, Monat 2011) Organizations should consider the lead management process to be a nonstop development. The new cumulative knowledge from the whole funnel process should be constantly adjusted in action. (D'Haen & Van den Poel 2013)

Many sources highlight the importance of B2B sales and marketing team's alignment in their views on lead generation as a whole (Salesforce 2019). The first step towards the common lead funnel would be to agree upon what is the ideal customer. The potential audience has to be well outlined before marketing can be profitable. In the worst scenario marketing will allocate all resources into wrong target group. (Kotler 2006) After the ideal customers are identified it is also important to figure out the reasons behind the failed sales, and by that meaning that the possible customer has exited from the funnel at some time before the purchase. The further the prospect has moved on the funnel, the more it is important to understand what the cause of it was. There might be another more tempting offer from rivals or a change in the buyer's intentions. (Schönen & Albers 2010)

The benefits of implementing a sales funnel are multifarious. One of the marketing & sales funnel's purposes is to classify people by their buying phase during the whole purchasing process. Typically, the funnel also points out the split of duties within sales and marketing. (Kotler et al. 2006, 77) This way it is easy to divide the work load with sales and marketing. Also, the information of the target prospect is open for everyone. Nowadays sales can see the whole track of a certain prospect all the way from the very first visit on the website or other contact. The see-through information available for everyone will allow sales and marketing to support each other's and thus be able to develop relevant tools, guidance and messaging to boost the company's revenue while improving customer loyalty. (Toman, Adamson & Gomez 2017)

2.1.2. Main issues between the co-operation

It is quite unanimous in literature that the lack of follow-up of marketing leads produced is one of the key issues between sales and marketing (Kotler et al 2006; Churchill, Ford & Walker 2003). Marketing is supposed to produce high quality leads for sales, but then sales complain about the lead quality in which marketing responds by blaming the follow-ups that have been poorly handled. This will put a wedge between these two main functions in a business affecting to the whole organization. (Homburg et al. 2008).

It has been studied that up to 79 percent of the leads created by marketing will not ever turn into paying customers (Pipedrive 2020). This indicates that either marketing is wasting time for non-profitable actions way more than what would be acceptable, or there is something else obstructing the successful lead management. Oliva (2006) points out that it is very common that sales reps will not investigate further the leads they receive from marketing and rather just skip them because they feel that the potential in marketing qualified leads is weak.

Kotler (2006) has explained that in the very beginning, most companies do not have any marketing operations. They might adapt ideas from sales, managers or co-operate with some marketing agency, without the systematic contribution to marketing. It has been highlighted that at that point all the marketing activities are one with the sales. As companies grow more successful and larger the need of marketing is usually recognized. The target for next level marketing will turn to segmentation, targeting and positioning (Kotler 2006).

This usually means that next to already existing sales department there is now another department with its own missions. Marketing will usually start competing with sales for funding, which will arise disagreements (Kotler 2006). Also, the sharing of workload might turn out to be very difficult since drawing the line between sales and marketing tasks is nearly impossible in some cases. Marketing will eventually grow its influence over other departments such as product development, finance and manufacturing. The influence does not usually reach up to the corporate level. Though there are some exceptions such as Coca Cola, GE, IBM and Microsoft, just to mention a few. (Kotler et al 2006)

There are still several conflicting views on the factors behind the differences between sales and marketing. For marketing automation, the problems with marketing and sales can be discussed in two categories. Those that arise from the different IT systems in use within the departments, and those that arise from the lack of collaboration. (Heimbach et Al., 2015)

IT system problems are those of integration between two different types of software, which are used in very different ways, due to the different requirements of the departments. Sales systems are built for managing the customers' information and interactions with sales people. Marketing systems are more focused on delivering the marketing (mass) message and targeting a pre-defined segment. (Heimbach et Al., 2015)

The issues that arises from the lack of collaboration are not that easy and straight forward to fix. By raising the degree of alignment is the only way of pushing sales and marketing cooperation to the next level. This could be accomplished by analyzing the characteristics of the sales opportunities and focusing on them. Both departments should base their activities on the same objectives. (Atteya 2012)

Collaboration problems are considered to be the most evident in lead generation (Churchill, Ford & Walker 2003). If there is no collaboration between departments, no amount of automation will provide better leads. The productivity of sales is improved only when marketing automation offers sales with only the highest quality leads (Grossberg 2016). If there is no mutual understanding on what is a good lead and what is not, thus the adaptation of the automation system cannot be utilized. (Järvinen et Al., 2015) D'Haen & Van den Poel (2013) argues that the sales leads are often assessed on the basis of guesswork or intuition, leading to resource waste and potential sales losses. It takes salespeople up to 20 percent of the time to choose prospects, which leads to ultimate inefficiency. (D'Haen & Van den Poel 2013)

In too many companie sales and marketing feud like Capulets and Montagues. – Kotler, Rackham and Krishnaswamy (2006, p. 68)

Patterson (2007) indicates that the lack of amity between sales and marketing could be resolved by concentrating on a customer centric approach by focusing on customer journey to align the departments strategies. Customer journey should be planned to as much detail as possible in order to achieve the highest efficiency and best outcomes. This would also help to divide the work and give a consist picture of responsibilities. (Patterson, 2007)

Marketing should learn from sales people how to better understand customers' needs and problems. In this way, both departments could evolve out of the product centricity and focus on the solution and customer-based aspects. Differences in thought worlds between marketing and sales have been found to be a disadvantage in the co-operation of marketing and sales. If one department is highly product centered and another is customer centric it will harm the overall business. It is not advisable to completely assimilate the divisions but creating the common path and working together will lead the way to success. (Homburg 2007, Patterson 2007)

2.1.3. Benefits of the alignment

Vainu (2019) has built a very comprehensive list of the benefits of the sales and marketing alignment. They saw three key points of the benefits. First, they listed the ability to gain more high-quality leads from marketing. The second part was about the sales people's higher motivation to work on the leads with improved equipment such as the data offered. Both of the first and second parts will lead to a better employee satisfaction throughout the organization. The final point in the alignment is the increased ROI within both departments, leading to higher revenues. (Vainu 2019)

According to a study companies that are best-in-class at aligning marketing and sales experienced an average of 20% growth in annual revenue, compared to a 4% decline in laggard organizations (Oracle 2020)

Studies have shown great results of the sales and marketing alignment. For example, brands with well aligned sales and marketing achieve up to 25 percent quicker growth within three

years. Also, when looking for the same period, the profit growth is up to 27 percent more. (Salesforce 2019) As sales and marketing begin to speak the same language and start the deeper level of cooperation they will be able to define the common service level agreement, and thus create way better customer satisfaction. (Salesforce 2019)

What it means to create better growth with the alignment? The growth for the business starts from a way how to set measurable goal that both sales and marketing agree upon and focuses on. The common mission and vision of the future is crucial and should always be defined. The growth comes from a well streamlined and cost-effective actions on the lead generation. The lead generation process will allow the full tracking, measurement, grading and most importantly follow up on all possible prospect and customers of the company. The success will be built upon the data alignment of the used systems. These systems include for example CRM and marketing automation with possible extensions to some other systems that can contain for example some sales or marketing materials. (Vainu 2019)

2.2. Marketing automation

The phase in the marketing departments is nowadays faster than ever and the requirements are becoming higher year by year. One of the key concepts to improve efficiency in marketing is to automate as many processes as possible. Marketing departments are driven by low recourses and yet targeted with high demands for internal accountability. To tackle that fight marketers, have to rely on technology now more than ever to perform well. (Biegel 2009)

This part of the theory reviews the former literature about marketing automation. First the definition of marketing automation is defined. After that follows the features and the use of marketing automation. Next is challenges and requirements, and the last part reviews the best practices and benefits for business.

2.2.1. Definition

Today's digitally connected world has modified the perspective how to do marketing, build brands and internationalize the business. The main driver for the digitalization and ongoing transformation can be found from the software and hardware technologies. (Vadana, Torkkeli, Kuivalainen, & Saarenketo 2019) Digitalization enables companies to offer simplicity, convenience and relevance to their customers who also will expect nothing less nowadays (Hänninen, Smedlund & Mitronen 2017). Digitalization is not only beneficial to customers, but to companies also. Kindström and Kowalkowski (2014) states that digital technologies are enabling companies to improve the service quality and by the same time reducing the operational costs. As customers nowadays will require more quality information before contacting sales, the implementation of marketing automation is nearly indispensable for big companies in order to be able to answer to the customers' needs. Putkinen (2014) states that the biggest driver for the increasing demand for marketing automation relies on the changes of the customers buying behavior.

The origin of marketing automation relies in email marketing. The rise of email marketing was the very beginning for marketers to be able to improve the efficiency in such ways that non-had seen before. Nowadays marketing automation has grown to include way more than just email marketing. For example, content creation and content management can be done in most marketing automation platforms. Also, the web analytics are usually integrated in marketing automation platform. (Del Rowe 2016)

Marketing automation's main idea is to automatically show the ideal messages to potential customers in the right time. It will allow marketers to personalize the customer journey in very personal level and so to develop the relationship with the customer. (Oracle 2020) The main idea and process behind the marketing automation is shown in the following figure.

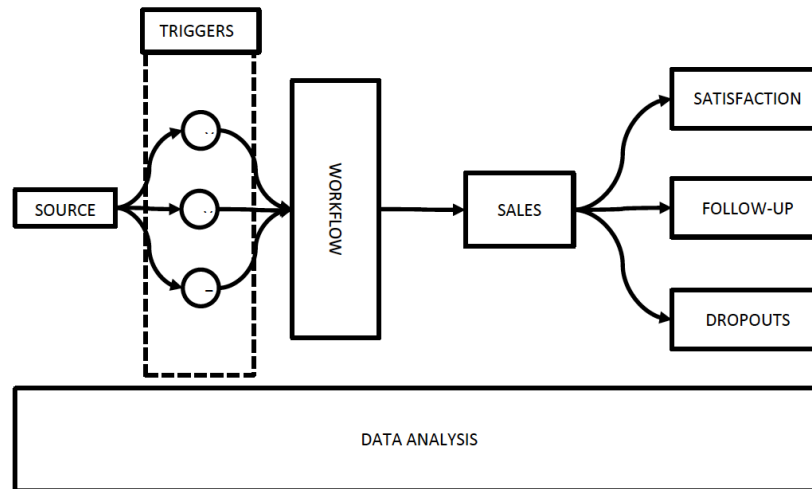


Figure 6. Marketing automation process. Adopted from Heimbach et Al., 2015.

The figure describes the basic principles within any marketing automation system. The customer journey in the system starts from the source which is providing the customer information. Next step in the figure is “triggers”. These triggers can be any kind of actions that the company desires to track. Some very common triggers can be whitepaper, tutorial or video uploads, clicks to CTA-links or newsletter subscriptions. These triggers can be individually scored, which allows companies to create lead scoring models to improve the marketing & sales funnel. After triggers comes the workflow stage. The workflow is personalized based on the source, customer behavior and trigger(s). If the company gets the wanted results from workflow they can transfer the customer to sales as a marketing lead. After investigating the lead sales department will decide whether to follow the lead or drop it. Thought the whole system there is ongoing data analysis which determines where the customers journey and provides performance analytics. (Biegel 2009; Järvinen et al. 2016; Wood 2015)

2.2.2. Features

Marketing automation software integrates multiple systems as under one platform. Those can be email marketing, social media marketing, SEO, SEM and analytics into one system (Burka

2015). Marketing automation’s capabilities constructs the key factors for nowadays companies’ marketing functions (Swieczak 2013).

This study will build the base for marketing automation features according to the classification on Buttle and Marklan (2015). Buttle et al (2015) have divided the features within five categories and multiple sub categories. The first category consists of email marketing features. Second category contains campaign management features. Third group is the biggest one including 6 different content and social media marketing features. Fourth group involves lead management features. Last group is about marketing analytics. (Buttle et al 2015) The figure below aggregates all 5 categories with 19 features.

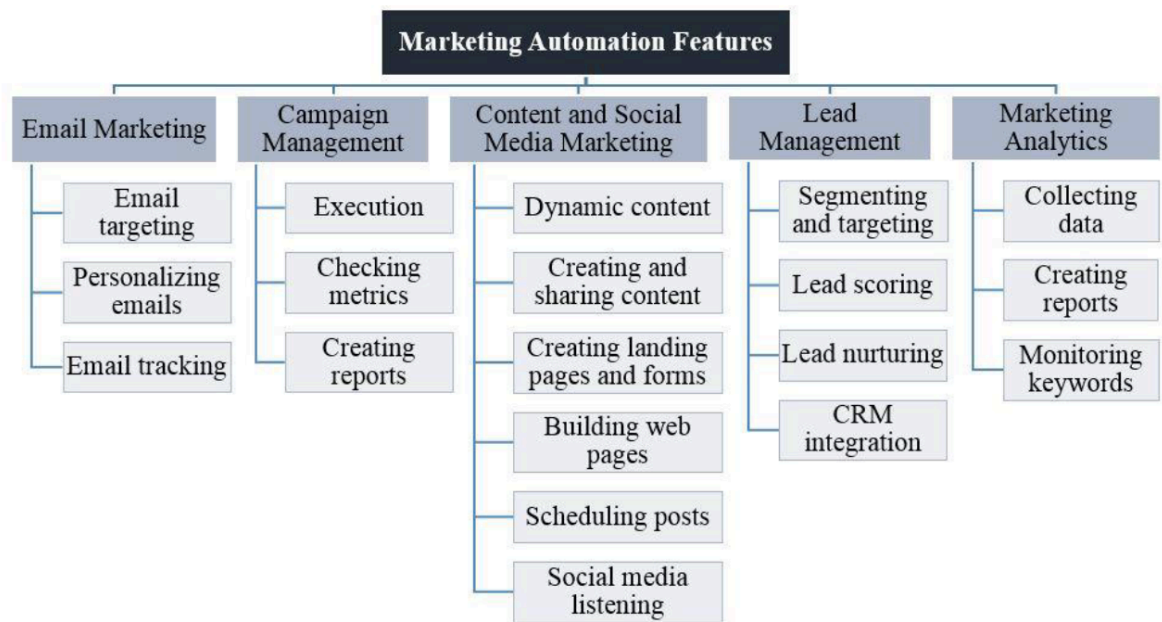


Figure 7. Marketing automation features. Adopted from Tobon 2017.

2.2.3. Use of marketing automation

By using marketing automation, companies can do way more than any amount of people could ever do. Such enormous data collection and customization can only be done with machines and can never be achieved by humans. (Linton 2012; Wood 2015) Marketing automation combines

all three dimensions of time: Past, current and future. Automation software is able to store massive datasets of the customers' history. Also, the current usage can be seen in real time. When combining the data from history and current activities, the software can predict the future intentions. This all can be track within not just current customers, but with anyone who is identified. Every action in the automation software happens in real time in each touch point the system links to. (Heimbach et al. 2015; Wood 2015) The set of rules within the system as well as the level of automation can be set by the software user (Ioana 2016).

Marketing automation comes in handy within two parts of the marketing mix activities: pricing and promotion. When considering pricing, it is clear that with the help of automation it is easier to set the price for the individual customers (Heimbach et al. 2015). If someone is constantly visiting the website and has several previous purchases, it might not be ideal to offer big discounts, but when trying to acquire new customers the big discount might be the only way to success.

The second and probably the most dominant marketing mix activity that can be based on marketing automation is promotion. Companies are able to offer individualized content for customers and suspects. Some examples of customization are landing pages, campaign pages, web banners and offers. (Heimbach et al. 2015) By individualizing the content the company becomes more customer-centric and is able to grab the attention of the wanted audience. This way the audience is able to pull the interesting pieces of content created by the company to their hands. (Wood 2015) Nowadays customers will easily get lost in the tremendous amount of content available. If the company will do marketing by pushing all the content to all possible customers and suspects, that might lead the marketing to negative results in the end.

In the basic usage of marketing automation, the software user can create multiple paths in to the system for the users by combining data from multiple sources. Aquino (2013) points out that the software's ability to operate in various channels simultaneously should be exploited. As marketing automation combines all user data together, it is possible to bridge the inbound and outbound marketing (Marketo 2018; Ginty, Vaccarello, & Leake 2012, 182).

One of the key aspects in marketing automation is to recognize the visitor in the website in order to be able to track the usage and in other words visitors' interests. Cookies and IP addresses are the key to recognizing the visitor. (Swieczak 2013) Marketing automation cannot recognize the visitor unless the visitor has already given some data of him/her self. Although the visitor data can still be collected. (Real Magnet 2016) Usually the collection of personal data will be done by gating some content behind a form. (Järvinen et al. 2016) This might be for example a registration for a webinar or leaving the contact information in order to receive a sample. This kind of approach is called active process, meaning that the idea is to directly confront the visitor and present a question (Järvinen et al. 2016). When collecting customer data in active process, it is recommended to be done by progressive profiling. In progressive profiling the form will be pre-filled for the next time the visitor desires to open some gated content. In the best practices the progressive profiling will be done gradually increasing the level of information asked and details. (Todor 2016)

2.2.4. CRM aspect

As already mentioned in literature review there is no solid understanding in current literature whether the marketing automation is just a part of CRM or in some cases the whole CRM (Greenberg, 2010). In generally today's companies tend to integrate their CRM software to marketing automation software. That approach is also the most recommended in literature during last decade. (Dworkin 2016; Redding 2015; Wood 2015)

This paper will also consider the marketing automation to be a part of CRM, but not replacing it. It has been stated that CRM and marketing automation integration is very necessary for companies to create comprehensive sales and marketing funnel (Ginty et al. 2012). Järvinen et al. (2016) verifies that the integration however is not that simple. The integration requires the integration between two functions, sales and marketing, and also an IT integration between two software. Multiple software producers offer nowadays the both marketing automation and CRM platforms as a pre-integrated solution. (Oracle 2020)

2.2.5. Lead management

Many companies are struggling with lead management and problems such as inconsistent lead quality which will lead to missed sales opportunities and lack of sales. According to Marketo (2017) lead management is a marketing process that focuses on acquiring new leads, nurturing and evaluating those and eventually giving the leads to sales. The main idea behind the lead management is to provide sales ready leads for sales department and thus ease up the workload in sales. This will happen only if the leads are high quality ones, and actually will lead to a deal. If sales people have to spend their time by following bad quality leads, their time will go waste and the sales outcomes will decrease. (Redding 2015)

Marketing automation includes several features for the lead management such as segmentation, lead scoring, lead nurturing and CRM integration. With the help of marketing automation everything can be tracked and documented, such as the customer path, and thus it results in better lead qualification and follow up. (Redding 2015)

In order to understand lead management process as a whole, the term lead should be defined first. Lead is an interest toward company's products or services, which is expressed and in generally recorded to marketing automation system (Monat 2011). Compiling a more specific explanation of a lead is very difficult since the definition varies between industries and even from salesperson to another. A prospect becomes a lead after a lead qualification process. In an ideal world each contact would also be contacted before they would transferred to leads. (D'Haen and Van den Poel, 2013)

Today's B2B companies are struggling with determining the prospects that should be transferred to leads. The meaning of a lead qualification is to understand and identify which prospects would have the highest probability for successful sales. (Järvinen et al. 2016; Long, Tellefsen and Lichtenhal, 2007) Coe (2003) has defined a four generally used parameters for lead qualification, when describing the universal attributes that are not company nor industry specified. The parameters are explained in the following figure.

Need	Budget	Authority	Timing
<p>What is the need of the buying company?</p> <p>Would the offering satisfy the potential customers' needs?</p>	<p>Does the potential buyer have budget for the offering?</p>	<p>Does the contact have enough decision power over the purchase?</p>	<p>How long time the buying process and buying decision take?</p>

Figure 8. Parameters for lead qualification. Adapted from Coe, 2003.

When looking at the figure XX it is already easy to extrapolate how the lead qualification is not as easy as one would thought. Though, Monat (2011) has highlighted that each error in lead qualification process is a waste of recourses and a loss in a sales revenue. The lead qualification should open a clear way for a company towards the most profitable leads. (Long et al. 2007)

There are two main challenges in the lead qualification process. To begin there is no consensus between companies of the characteristics of high-quality leads as the lead features may vary and be very different. After a company has discovered and defined its lead features it should be able to get the needed information (presented in the figure above). But in generally that kind of information is not available, especially before the first contact to the lead. Thus, objectively identifying the characteristics for the high-quality lead and gathering the needed information is a big challenge in B2B field. (Monat 2011)

The poor lead follow-up within sales has been identified in many studies. Biemans, Brenčič, & Malshe (2010) pointed out the dissension between marketing and sales; sales will criticize lead quality while marketing will criticize the lead follow-up skills. Sales people often think that leads are poor quality and will not generate profit enough to be worth the time they should spend (Oliva, 2006). Sales people will conduct a personal evaluation for the leads by going through

them quickly and deciding whether to continue to work with it based on just a personal feeling. This is one of the reasons why proper lead qualification process is much needed. It has been studied that customers that would be willing to buy are constantly lost due to lack of qualification (Hasselwander 2006).

It has been noticed in literature how up to 70% of marketing qualified leads will be ignored by sales representatives (Marcus, 2002). Also, multiple studies have referred to term “sales lead black hole” which represents the poor lead management from sales departments side (Hasselwander, 2006; Sabnis, Chatterjee, Grewal, & Lilien, 2013). Thus, today’s companies should pay extra effort in order to improve their lead management.

Redding (2015) claims that if marketing department would be capable to produce better quality leads the follow-up from sales would be improved. According to Marketo’s research only 25% of new prospects are ready to be contacted by sales, and 20% of those contacted ones will be active opportunities. This means that 5% out of new prospects are actually sales opportunities. (Lager 2009) At this point the better and more transparent use of marketing automation might come in handy. With the help of marketing automation leads could be qualified and then divided into groups based on the quality. Grouping between a couple of different stages would help sales to understand leads potential and the time would not be wasted with non-worthy leads.

As the goal is to create a synergistic relationship between sales and marketing functions (Linton 2012), the whole lead management process can be improved by allowing sales to see the whole customer journey from the very beginning (Wood 2015). The data from marketing automation platform will give sales a clear view of the prospect’s actions within each channel (Todor 2016). By improving the integration within sales and marketing in previously mentioned ways marketing will get more responsibility in the overall lead management process. The improved lead management will only generate from the deeper understanding and co-operation between marketing and sales functions since neither of those can improve the lead management system alone. (Putkinen 2014)

Lead nurturing is an excellent way to prepare high quality leads for sales. In general, lead nurturing means lead follow up after the company has acquired the information of the contact. In this follow up process, the leads will be targeted with personalized content, and their actions will be tracked in order to learn more about the contact. (Rose & Pulizzi 2011; Järvinen et al. 2016) Lead nurturing is connected to lead scoring as the idea is to encourage the potential customers to move forward in the buying process. As the lead moves forward in the lead scoring, the content might be different too, since the content is delivered based on the profile information and online behavior. (Järvinen et al. 2016) Michaels (2008) describes lead nurturing as a relationship-building approach supporting the buying process with timely relevant information in order to prepare the prospect to be transferred to sales.

Good leads can be created with multiple different actions. Each company should aim to find the most suitable and profitable lead sources in order to be able to allocate their resources well. The strategy should define which sources to use. Each lead source should be tracked and well analyzed with on-going analytics. This way it is possible to minimize the waste of resources in lead creation. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992) Jolson et al. (1992) have listed three categories for lead sources: prospect-initiated leads, company-initiated leads, and salesperson-initiated leads. Prospect-initiated leads refer to leads from existing customers, for example reorders or rebuys. Company-initiated leads refer to leads that are generated through marketing activities. The last group, salesperson-initiated leads, consists of leads that are results of salespersons' efforts. Usually, these leads can come from cold calls or an idea-initiated contact. (Jolson et al. 1992) For this research, the company-initiated leads are the most interesting group of leads, since data-based marketing could have the most effort to especially that group.

2.2.6. Best practices & benefits for the business

As one benefit of marketing automation is saving time when doing fewer manual tasks (Putkinen 2014), it is clear that the marketing department can spend more time with strategic planning (Biegel 2009). Heimbach et al. (2015) pointed out how the key to success when adopting marketing automation is the efficiency and creativity in the usage. Improved workflow within processes is

one of the outcomes of marketing automation adaption, which indeed lead to overall efficiency (Keens & Barker 2009). This will also lead to improved efficiency in decision making, and again save a lot of marketing departments precious time (Wood 2015, Buckling 1998). The figure 9 points out some of the most glorified benefits of marketing automation.

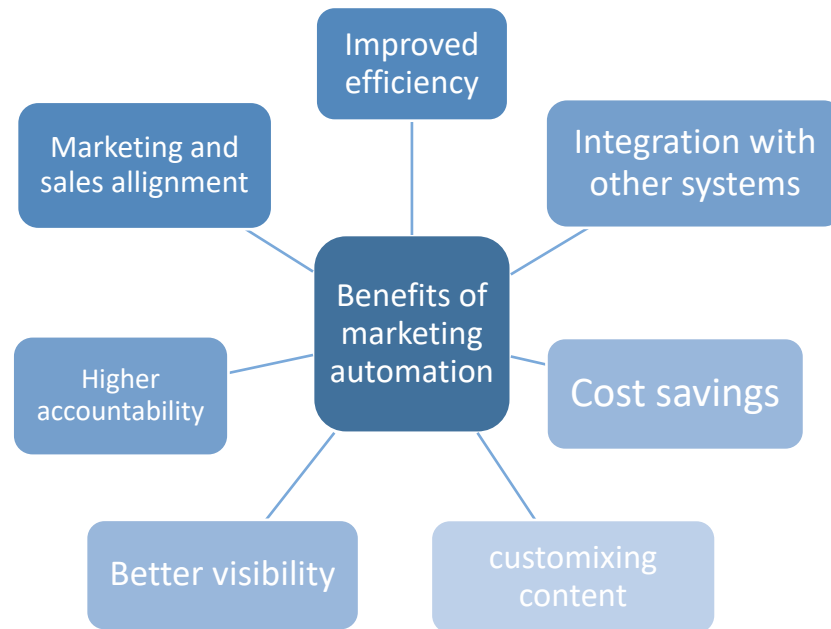


Figure 9. Benefits of marketing automation.

With the help of marketing automation multiple things can be automated and the marketing automation can be integrated with other systems (Lamont 2015). By connecting marketing automation software directly to CRM, it is possible to move leads from one software to another within no time. This will allow sales to act quicker and contact the prospects within a short period of time. When the prospects are automatically classified the efficiency of sales is increased, and each salesperson will know that the lead is trustworthy and worth to spend some time. When classifying contacts, the marketing automation system will also sort out non-qualified contacts. (Järvinen et al. 2016)

The improved communication with customers is also one of the key benefits for the company with marketing automation. When building up the processes such as lead management or

marketing campaigns, it is very crucial to understand the appropriate amount of the customer knowledge that can be used. Ginty et al. (2012) highlights how one should not be too general and bore the contact but being too detailed is not good either since the contact might be scared of that. The data collection and analytics will give marketers an access to a lot of information and the message can be highly personalized (Heimbach et al. 2015), but in every case that is not appropriate. If the contact is a loyal customer, the promotion can be very different when comparing to someone who is yet a suspect.

For most companies the interest towards marketing automation adaption increases due to the possibility to optimize marketing costs (Swieczak 2013; Bagshaw 2015). Heimbach et al. (2015) rationalizes the cost optimization based on increased conversion and retention rates as well as progressive cross- and up-selling. The system can also improve decision-making extensively. All that will lead to increased ROI in marketing hence increasing sales (Heimbach et al. 2015)

With the help of marketing automation platforms, it is possible to track every single customer's movement in web page. If this perspective of the scale of information available can be understood and utilized in the whole sales organization, the results can be beyond great. Yet many companies struggle to convince sales with the value of the marketing automation system. Ginty et al. (2012) recommend that the sales could be convinced by first implementing the system to only the top sellers in the department. This "A team" would consist of the highest performers who also tend to be highly respected within the organization. After a short testing period, marketing should collect feedback from the A team, and do required improvements to the processes. After the testing with A team, it would be significantly easier to implement the system for the whole sales department. (Ginty et al. 2012)

When integrating the marketing automation with CRM, marketers will get more visibility to sales and thus be able to improve their decision making in strategic choices. Also, marketers are able to allocate their budget better, since they can see which operations actually brings profits for the company. (Kumar 2011) The visibility between sales and marketing is very crucial since it also can result in better alignment. (Redding 2015; Kumar 2011) When building a lead scoring model in marketing automation platform, and preferably combining it to CRM platform, the adjusting of lead scoring might not be easy and simple in the beginning. For that the co-operation

between marketing and sales can be crucial. If a company is able to adjust the lead scoring model based on longer period experiences, it will be more efficient (Ginty et al. 2012). After first setting up the lead nurturing framework it is recommended to do regular follow-ups too make sure that the system is working as it is supposed to. Nobody wants to bury the sales people under low quality leads, but neither wants to let any truly potential prospects to not be contacted. (Redding 2015)

3. Research methods and data

The research is conducted by using non-numerical data. Thus, it is a qualitative study (Saunders 2009, 151). This research method was chosen to be the best fit since it has been found out to be very useful for building and testing theory within the topics with limited knowledge (Creswell 2014). The aim of this type of study is to examine the point of view of the chosen actors in the studied situation or process within the qualitative study methods. (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 136).

A qualitative approach was chosen to be best fit for this study since the theory of combining sales and marketing integration to data driven marketing is yet in very early stage with very little existing information. Qualitative study could help building theory around the topic and create ideas for future research. Qualitative research is also a good fit in case the research tries to understand complex processes around the chosen topic. (Shah & Corley 2006).

This research is an exploratory study because of the basic intent of this research is to clarify the understanding of the certain problem which is not fully understood yet. It has been highlighted that in a case there is any uncertainty of the nature of the problem the exploratory analysis is necessary. In disciplines such as marketing, the exploratory nature of this form of study makes the creation of new conceptualizations possible and offers justification for those conceptualizations. (Kapoulas & Mitic 2012; Saunders Lewis, & Thornhill 2009, 139) In the following sections the methodology for this research will be outlined with the sections of research approach, research context and data collection.

3.1. Case study

This study uses multiple case study as its research strategy. The study compares multiple case companies, and is chosen because this research uses multiple sources of evidence to empirically investigate a particular phenomenon in a real-life context and the goal is to find answer to questions "“what?” and “how?” (Saunders et al. 2009, 146). Case study is usually carried out by methods such interviews, observations or questionnaires. For this research the most suitable way to carry out the research was with interviews. Eisenhardt (1989) points out that this kind of research method is clearly a good fit when there is only little information and previous theories of the chosen topic.

Case study has been recommended for the following cases: the research would like to find answers to questions such as “how”, “why” and “what”, the researcher cannot have any effect on the actor’s behavior, context of the study is very relevant for the phenomenon that is studied, or it is not possible to distinguish the phenomenon from its context (Yin 2003). Case study style research focuses on the characteristics within the studied phenomenon and allows the researcher to go into finer details with the description. This research is carried out as a multiple-case study. The chosen strategy increases the objectivity and allows the research to consider multiple perspectives. This way it is possible to find variations or similarities within the cases. (Yin 2009) The reason to adopt a multiple-case strategy for this study is to see the bigger picture of the whole technology field in Finland. The multiple-case study also reduces the risk of the researcher jumping into conclusions with not enough evidences.

3.2. Research context

As Kotler et al (2006) already pointed out; in order to study marketing in companies we need to understand that marketing functions varies significantly from company to another. Usually small companies might adapt ideas from sales, some managers or co-operate with a marketing agency. Such marketing can be equated with selling and does not meet the definition of

marketing. To consider that, this study is focused only on companies within separate marketing and sales functions.

The sample of this study includes companies that are global but have operation in Finland. Each company is operating in the technology field in B2B sales. Most of the companies are considered to be large scale companies in Finland by having more than 250 employees, more than 40 million € turnover and more than 20 million € balance sheet. Five companies were interviewed for this study. Some companies had representatives from both marketing and sales in order to give more precise image.

3.3. Data collection

The data collection has been conducted by aiming to be as practical as possible, so the sample for the research is selected through a non-probability sampling. This is the recommended way sampling in exploratory studies. Thus, the study does not require a large sample it is sensible to limit the study for a quite small sample. (Saunders et al. 2009, 233-234)

The data for the empirical part of this study is collected in semi-structured interviews that were conducted via Microsoft Teams. This interview style allows the interviewee to adjust the questions flexibly through the whole interview. Semi-structured interview enables the freedom and flexibility for interviewee to ask follow-up questions when needed. The semi-structured interview style is recommended in exploratory studies for situations which are rather complex and fully pre-planning the questions would be very difficult. (Saunders et al. 2012, 320-320; Holstein et Al. 1995, p.41)

The questions were divided into four parts according the research entirety: marketing automation, lead management, co-operation between sales & marketing and performance. Each of the interviews was conducted in Finnish language since that was comfortable language for each respondent. No secondary data of the companies was used for this study.

Participants of the study were all either marketing or sales managers or leaders. Participants were expected to have good knowledge on the topic and occupy a strategic position within their company. Saunders et al. (2009) highlights that expert interviewing is a primary way to conduct an exploratory study. The names of the companies were changed in order to protect their privacy.

Each of the interviewees were informed about the three main themes and core questions within each theme where the discussion was built on. Also, the aim of the study was explained beforehand for each interviewee. The goal for the interview length was 20 to 30 minutes. The table 1 describes the interviewees and companies as well as the duration of the interview. Some interviews had both sales and marketing representatives.

COMPANY	ROLE(S)	ORIGIN COUNTRY OF THE COMPANY	COMPANY TYPE	INTERVIEW DURATION
ALPHA	Marketing Lead	Finland	Publicly listed	20 minutes
BETA	Marketing Lead, Sales lead	United States	Publicly listed	30 minutes
GAMMA	Marketing manager	Canada	Publicly listed	20 minutes
DELTA	Marketing manager, Sales manager	Denmark	Private	25 minutes
EPSILON	Marketing manager	Finland	Publicly listed	22 minutes

Table 1. Background information of the companies and interviewees.

4. Empirical analysis and findings

In this part the empirical research and its findings will be discussed. The chapters will start by shortly introducing the case companies. After that the findings are divided in three parts: marketing automation as an enabler of data-driven marketing, the alignment of sales and marketing in B2B tech field and the impact of marketing automation to lead management.

4.1. Case companies

Company Alpha

Company Alpha is a Finnish software and service company whose customer industries are for example the public administration, banking and insurance, social and healthcare, telecommunications and manufacturing. They have a wide range of customers starting from public sector and municipalities to all the way to the commercial business.

Company Alpha is publicly listed. This company uses Microsoft's offerings for the marketing automation and customer relation management. The company is very well known in the SaaS field, and their goal is to create digital advantage for businesses and society. Currently they hire up to 20 thousand people and their sales have reached to 2 500 000 000 euros within last year.

Company Beta

Company Beta is a diversified industrial company with long history full off acquisitions that have been a major reason for the big growth over the years. Its products include electrical equipment and systems related to power supply, hydraulic systems and systems related to automotive transmission.

Company Beta is a public limited company that originates from the United States. The Sales of the last year reached almost up to 20 billion US dollars. In order to make everything work within this company there are almost 100 thousand employees globally running the day to day business. It is safe to say that this company is truly global since they have operations around the globe and they serve customers in more than 175 countries. This company relies its marketing automation and CRM to Oracle's software.

Company Gamma

Company Gamma is a multinational information technology consulting and systems integration company which originates from Canada. This company is operating globally. This company operates with projects such as secure cloud computing, smart meters and smart grids, financial management and fraud detection as well as space and aviation.

The company is publicly listed and unarguably among the largest IT and business consulting services firms in the whole world. This case company describes itself as an insights-driven and outcomes-based with the goal to accelerate returns on your investments. Company Gamma has integrated marketing automation platform from HubSpot with Microsoft's CRM software.

Company Delta

Company Delta is originated from the Nordic countries and the company's offers includes a wide range of engineering products from heating products and industrial automation to frequency converters just to name a few. This company is the only one in this research which is not publicly listed. The company is relatively smaller compared to some other companies in this study. It could not still be described as a small company since they have up to 25 thousand employees and 70 factories. Company Delta is currently adopting marketing automation platform from Salesforce to their already existing Salesforce CRM tool.

Company Epsilon

Company Epsilon originates from Finland. This company manufactures products and services for environmental & industrial measurement. The main markets are national meteorological and hydrological services, aviation authorities, defense forces, energy sector and high-technology industries. This company is currently operating in more than 150 countries around the world. The case company is the oldest one in this study and founded already in the early 1900's. Despite the long history of the company they are the smallest company in this study when comparing the number of employees, which is no more than 2000 employees globally for this company. This case company has integrated Salesforces CRM software to Oracle's marketing automation software called Eloqua.

4.2. Marketing automation as an enabler of data-driven marketing

This part will handle the marketing automation in case companies from the strategic point of view. The key topics covered here are the selection of the marketing automation software, the benefits of marketing automation and the integration with other platforms. When creating data-driven marketing, it is necessary to implement some sort of marketing automation software to handle all the data and automate the functions.

4.2.1. *The selection of marketing automation software*

In generally each of the case companies had implemented a marketing automation system. Only one company was yet in the implementation stage. There was a great variety of different marketing automation platforms used. Marketing automation was seen as the second most important platform after the CRM. Also, the ability to integrate MA software with other platforms was seen as a highly important factor among the case companies.

Two most commonly used platforms were HubSpot and Eloqua. A surprising factor between HubSpot and Eloqua was that HubSpot received comments such as *“Excellent platform, which is super easy to use”* whereas Eloqua was seen as not that easy to use and as a platform which needed more experienced users in order to get the most out of it. The next chapter will outline the most important success factors for marketing automation implementation.

4.2.2. *Integration with other platforms*

One of the greatest benefits arises when the marketing automation is integrated within other platforms that are used. The most important integration to the marketing automation tool is the CRM. Other high value integrations were content management tools, analytics tools, enterprise resource planning system and reporting tools.

In this study, most of the case companies had the CRM and MA platforms provided by the same software house such as Oracle who offers MA system called Eloqua which can be integrated to

their CRM software C360. The integration gives huge benefits for the user as it literally integrates marketing and sales data together. There is no need to exchange the data via separate excel sheets or such which allows the processes to run smoothly and be trustable. Case company Alfa defined that they aim to achieve the highest possible integration between all the sales and marketing programs. This would allow them to vision the whole purchase path from the customer's first touch to the company.

Case company Epsilon had integrated Salesforce CRM and Eloqua MA in order to open a window for sales to have a clear view to the marketing activities. *“Sales people can anytime check the status and latest updates within their industry or clients. This allows them to see the activity behind the lead. This has been a huge benefit especially in new customer acquisition as well as in cross selling.”* This is a good example how well integrated platforms will allow companies to achieve great data flow as well as open environment.

Case company Beta highlighted the importance of the integration to the analytics platform Microsoft Power BI. That allowed anyone in the company to access the analytics such as the average open rates of e-mails or webinar registrations. The disadvantage in this was the lack of visibility in a customer level. The data was structured only in the country or industry level. Thus, sales representatives did not see this as important tool for them.

4.2.3. The benefits of marketing automation

Clear benefit of marketing automation implementation was the ability to divide resources better and invest the marketing budget with reasonable explanations to the most productive marketing activities. With the analytics from marketing automation the case companies were tracking their customer data, (GDPR) marketing permissions, campaign statistics, stats from mass mailing. Analytics from each of these parts is crucial in order to create data driven marketing.

One of the main functions in marketing automation is the lead generation and nurturing. Most of the case companies also pointed out that the lead generation is one of the most important part in the marketing automation and also great possibility to work with the sales team. The better the teams are aligned and supporting each other's, the better the outcomes are, meaning that the

sales and marketing funnel will grow regarding the quantity and also quality of the leads. This will be explained in more detail further on.

As formerly stated, the integration with other platforms will create a clear view for people outside the marketing team. If anyone in the organization can have a general overview to marketing, it develops transparent base for the decision making. This might also improve opportunities to increase marketing budget as the benefits are openly demonstrated.

One mentioned benefit of the marketing automation is also the data management. Marketing automation systems generally holds in enormous amount of data about suspects, prospects and customers as well. Case companies had utilized their MA systems for example to collect the data of the marketing permission regarding the GDPR. This is something quite new as this kind of consent for marketing has not been needed for many years yet.

To conclude, the marketing automation system can in the best case offer a way for high quality lead management as well as enable clear view for sales about the marketing activities and how customers react upon those. The management will be happy to read the analytics when making budget decisions for the future. In the end, marketing automation system will do the job quickly and minimize the human errors.

4.3. The alignment of sales and marketing in B2B tech field

This part will handle the failure points in the alignment of sales and marketing and also outline the current state of conversation between sales and marketing and the need for co-operation development. In the end the strategic approach with analytics will be discussed as it rose to important role during the interviews.

4.3.1. Failure points in co-operation

In many interviews most of the failure points in co-operation between sales and marketing arose from two main factors:

1. Not understanding each other's goals and objectives
2. Not understanding the other team's capabilities or limitations.

Based on these two base sources for failure it is possible to define the failure points more in details. This chapter outlines some of the basic issues that were brought up during the interviews.

In some cases, the sales representatives felt that they should somehow take part to marketing activities with the measures that would not allow them to focus on their own job well enough anymore. To be clear that is not what co-operation between these two teams should be. If the sales function is unable to provide the needed information to marketing, it might lead to the situation where both teams are working very hard but unfortunately towards different goals. Company Alpha's representative outlined how he/she has witnessed a situation where marketing team merely decided to start working with something they wanted and after a while they were able to recognize that it did not actually support business at all. There was no relevance at all, as crazy as that might sound.

Marketing is as dependent of sales as other way around too. Case company Epsilon's representative noted that *"The most current information about the market situation will be received from sales!"*. The representative explained how the sales people usually have a wide knowledge about not just customers and their needs, but many times also about competitors, partners or potential new customers. That is clearly one important reason for the ongoing conversation between sales and marketing.

When sales and marketing both offer their time for cooperation they should create synergy. Synergy means a cooperation that enables the rise to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The term originally comes from words "working together". In this case the sales team should benefit from the co-operation in such way that it would be worth to offer their time for marketing team.

The marketing on the other hand seemed to be leaning too much on the sales people personally. If the sales manager does not quite understand the ways marketing should/could be done the company might just not do marketing for those products at all, as the marketing manager will

not do the whole process alone. *“Some sales representatives will still today come and ask me only about where they can find our company presentation slide show, or could they have some copies of a certain product leaflet.”* explained company Alfa’s marketing representative with an amused tone on his/her voice. For today’s marketers that is something that they should not hear anymore. There is no strategic view behind, which should in the end be guiding both marketing and sales.

4.3.2. The conversation between sales and marketing

The conversation between sales and marketing functions were described very differently between the case companies. There was a difference between the frequency, the part which is taking the initiative was different as well as in the style of conversation.

Some of the case companies felt that there is important part for product specialists or product marketers between the sales and marketing. Company Beta described that the product marketers could be there to support sales to go through leads and also support marketing by providing deeper knowledge of the products for marketing purposes. This way the sales function could focus fully on selling.

The frequency of communication between sales and marketing in the case companies was varying between daily to weekly communication. When discussing about the frequency most companies brought out the importance of monthly meetings within the whole sales & marketing organization. To compound all the information about the frequency of the communication, it is impossible to give any recommendations based on this study. The companies thought that it is important to be available for daily basis on quick chats, but also to reserve some time for longer meetings with the whole team.

When it comes to the fact about who is taking the initiative in the sales and marketing cooperation it was many times marketing who handled the continuous meetings, but when it comes to proactive actions sales was making more initiatives. Case company Gamma told that *“Marketing arranges a monthly meeting with each sales product line where it is possible to*

introduce the new ideas as well as results from previous actions. That is also a great place for sales to point up some project they would need help with in the future.”

4.3.3. The need to develop co-operation

The first thing each interviewee said when they were asked whether the sales and marketing co-operation should be developed or not was “Absolutely!”. It was very clear that everyone felt the need to improve the co-operation. Both sales and marketing representatives felt the same way. To quote the company Delta’s representative “At the moment our cooperation is good, but it did not come for free. We put effort to that constantly. Both functions appreciate each other’s and understands the importance of team work for the better outcomes.”

The current state of co-operation in the case companies can be divided in to three categories based on the interviews: first would be somewhat immature and benighted, the second one is well thought and currently heavily transforming towards better and the third one is advanced and dignified.



Figure 10. The level of co-operation between sales and marketing.

Two case companies had reached the third and highest level of the co-operation. They were actively operating together as a one big team where everyone had their own part either in marketing or sales. Their goals were shared when it comes to the bigger picture and they understood the each other's limitations and challenges, but also were able to celebrate the possibilities and new ideas. Their drive came from the strategy and business plans, which were created together.

One case company was in the developing state. It is currently finding its way to improve the co-operation between the sales and marketing functions. The marketing function is rather small and not fully built up yet. They were able to define the failure point and the development targets with a clear vision for future. This case company will surely find its way for successful co-operation within year or two and will be able to enjoy the synergies.

Two case companies were still having a somewhat immature relationship between sales and marketing functions. The teams were not fully capable to understand each other's goals and objectives. There was also no active development to improve the cooperation since it seemed to be more a sacrifice of the time or effort rather than achievement that would improve the business overall. Yet still everyone, from both marketing and sales, in this group personally felt that the co-operation should be improved.

4.3.4. Strategic approach with analytics

Within each case company the level of strategic approach to the marketing and sales co-operation in data driven marketing varied a lot. Company Beta admitted that their co-operation projects have not yet reached the level of strategic approach they wish. Co-operation was seen as mainly a tactic mode of operation. Company Epsilon also admitted the lack of strategic operations. *"Marketing people are too often seen as a some kind of generalist inside a sales organization. Everyone should see marketing as a strategic player. None of the marketing activities should be done just out of the fact that something should be done. Each "move" must have a function and it has to play part of strategy. Unless it is not part of strategy it is not worth spending time for."* The company Epsilon's representative outlined how the marketing actions

should emerge from the business goals, which are shared with sales. This would lead to a situation where inevitably the both functions will aim for the same goal and support each other's.

The most developed strategic co-operation in marketing & sales activities was found from company Gamma. The big strategy for the whole year was planned way ahead, but as it is said there will be some changes and additions to the yearly plan during the year, they had a monthly meeting which was dedicated to improving the orientation. This time was dedicated for new ideas and improvements. Company Beta's representative combined the thought well for a metaphor: *"Following the plan is much like driving an icy road with winter tires. You must be on alert at all times and when the car starts to slide in the wrong direction, a minor change in steering must be made in time."*

Something that many marketers are struggling with is to show the correct results for the business leaders. As sales is easily showing the results from numbers as turnover, win rate or how could marketing do the same? The interviewee from Alpha outlined that marketing must be able to demonstrate their results with data analytics. That is the only way to say that marketing is actually data driven.

"If a company desires to grow its business let's say 10%, the marketing has to be able to show how the 4% of that is based on marketing activities." Outlines Alpha's representative. With that state he/she meant that the sales that originates from marketing should be clearly registered as a marketing-based sale. Other companies had very difficult approaches to this. Company Epsilon is not following the lead that comes from marketing all the way to the closed sales. They rather just count how many sales opportunities has marketing created for sales. This will put a wedge between sales and marketing functions as their goals are now different. Sales aims to close as many deals as possible with the highest gains, but marketing will not get rewarded for that.

Company Beta acknowledged that their goals for marketing are not valid, since the whole function is rather new and there is no knowledge of how well marketing should perform. The goal is more like a prediction for them. Company Delta's marketing representatives received their goals from the central marketing, which also might lead to a situation where marketing and sales within one country might pull towards different goals.

As four out of five case companies were aware of the lacks in their result monitoring and data analytics, one case company had mastered that excellently. In case company Gamma marketing had multiple goals, which were lead quantity, lead quality, lead to sales opportunity conversion as well as the final result of the whole sales organization. They outlined that the analytics they get will give direction for the future activities. As the interviewee from company Epsilon stated: *“Marketing must be interested about sales numbers and targets. Marketing operates well only if it is goal orientated.”*

4.4. The impact of the marketing automation to lead management

Marketing automation plays a big part in the lead management. In the most automated way the lead which is generated in the marketing automation program will be converted to the company’s CRM system without any human interaction. Yet still many companies have not acquired this kind of integration to their programs. This section will focus on three main parts which are: from lead to sales opportunity, what are good leads and how good leads are created with marketing automation.

4.4.1. From lead to sales opportunity

Three out of five case companies had an integrated lead management system where leads were flowing from marketing automation system to CRM. Other two companies were still handling leads very manually. Basically, marketing gathered the leads to an excel sheet and handed that to sales. This non-automated way will not be further explained or studied in this research since it is not the desired outcome due to its lack of efficiency.

Case companies Beta, Gamma and Epsilon had integrated a fully automated lead generation system. Each company had a lead generation process mapped out for sales and marketing. Each person within his/her role was expected to follow the process as precisely as possible. In the beginning marketing is supposed to somehow define the importance of the lead. This could have been done by estimating the lead within the scale cold – warm – hot or by giving points to the

lead. After that the lead is passed on sales and it flows to CRM system. After sales have received information about the lead they will evaluate whether they want to continue with the lead or not. At this point sales can give the lead back to marketing for some nurturing, create a sales opportunity from the lead or kill the lead once and for all. The lead process adopted from case companies is mapped out in the figure 11.

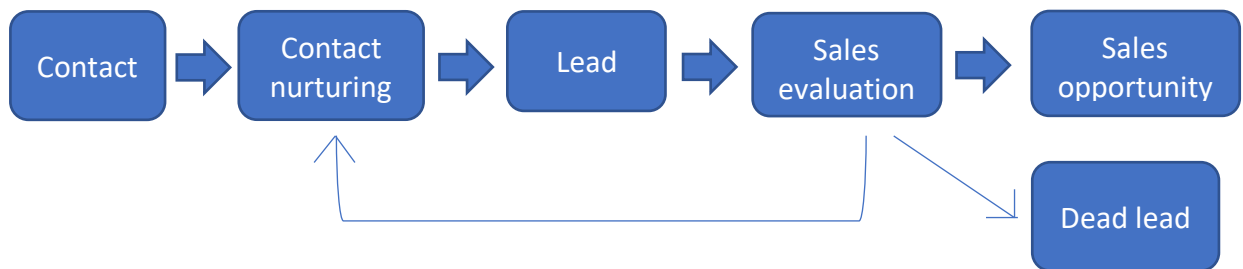


Figure 11. The lead process adopted from case companies.

The duration of the lead management process and its part is varying a lot, and not just between the companies but also between the customers and the sales “cases”. Some deals will take a longer time than others to go through the whole process and the lead time will be heavily affected by the product/service that is being sold. Case company Alpha described that the buying process might be up to few years. Company Gamma’s representative outlined that they will nurture the lead in generally from 3 months to one year. The mean time of nurturing within that company was 6 months. Nurturing is a very important part of the process, as it will allow sales to work more efficiently when in some point they receive the lead. Company Gamma’s representative highlighted that *“What we desire to be sold within 6 months, has to be marketed in a targeted manner already now. Perseverance is the key to success!”*.

As contact nurturing part of the whole process might be quite long in practice, the other steps from contact to sales opportunity should be very flexibly and promptly handled within sales and marketing. The stepping stone of the whole process seems to be the “sales evaluation” part. Each case company had determined (in global level) the time that each step of lead management process can take, and time for sales evaluation was either two or three days. Yet each company

admitted that they lack to follow the schedule at this point. When being asked whether the respondents saw the quick contact to customers as an advance, everyone agreed. Thus, companies' sales representatives' opinions are contradictory to their actions with that.

4.4.2. *What are good leads and how to create those with marketing automation?*

To separate good leads from the not profitable ones is not as easy as it sounds. The features of a good lead might vary a lot. In order to create a successful lead management system that will generate profit for the company will require a consensus between marketing and sales department about the key factors of a good lead.

First thing that was outlined multiple times during the interviews is that the lead has to have correct contact person. *“Some people interested about this field in general might visit our websites and subscribe to the newsletter, but they still have no input to the decision making in our (potential) customer company. Thus, they will have to stay as contacts instead of leads.”* outlined company Alpha's interviewee. This explains very well that in order contact would become a lead he/she has to be in a correct role in a specific part of the (potential) customer company.

Surprisingly two companies mentioned that good lead are those when the contact approaches directly with an offer request. This outlines that a lead is not seen as something that a company creates. It is rather a connection with the company and a customer. Company Beta's representative outlined that the best leads are coming from the website's contact me -form as offer requests. Theoretically these cases are very borderline cases since the offer request can be usually seen already as a sales opportunity. Thus, those deals might bypass the marketing part, and moves instantly to the sales.

Only the most advanced companies in the study noted how one of the most important factors for a high-quality lead is its traceability. This means that marketing department is able to provide sales the information why is that contact transformed into a lead. These touch points refer to any marketing activities that have been recorded about the contact to the marketing automation. Two case companies Gamma and Epsilon's sales representatives had an (limited) access to marketing

automation platform, which allowed them to see the touch points from marketing. This has been a huge benefit for improving the co-operation within sales and marketing since marketing does not have to explain why some leads are created. This has also created cross selling opportunities and improved the sales representatives results by giving them more confidence to the first touch with the customer. To sum up the benefits from the visibility of the touch points it improves the lead management process and, in the end, increases the sales.

Good leads might flow in from multiple sources. A lead can come from websites, campaigns, fairs & tradeshows, customer service or fellow worker. After understanding what a high-quality lead is it is very important to understand how to create those. The lead flow might be continuous or periodic. Case companies valued more the constant flow of leads. Case company Delta was the only one with periodic lead flow. They focused on lead campaigns a couple of times a year in order to receive multiple leads within a short period of time.

Two of the case companies Gamma and Epsilon were using lead nurturing when preparing high quality leads for sales. Also, the rest of the companies were planning to integrate a lead nurturing as a part of their lead management process in the future. Lead nurturing is used to improve the relationship to (potential) customers and process the contact to be more willing to buy. A successful lead nurturing can offer time and topic related content, which will ease the decision-making process for the customer. Both Gamma and Epsilon used lead scoring as a part of lead nurturing. Each activity, such as opening links in e-mails or joining webinars, were rated with an individual scoring. When the lead had high enough score it will be transferred to CRM system for sales. If sales yet do not think that the lead is ready for sales, they can always return it back to the nurturing pool.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter the findings are presented by answering the research questions one by one. This chapter also outlines the results of the study. Later, this chapter provides the theoretical contributions of the study by linking the findings to literature. After that the managerial implications of the study will be presented and the limitations and suggestions for the future research will be outlined.

5.1. Summary of the Findings

The following part outlines the summary of the findings in this study by answering the main research question, “*How do B2B tech companies align marketing and sales departments when developing data-driven marketing with marketing automation?*”, through two sub questions: *What are the failure points in sales and marketing co-operation? How do companies use marketing automation in developing their lead management systems?* The answers are combined from both theory and empirical part of this study, that are presented earlier as a separate part.

What are the failure points in sales and marketing co-operation?

Both theoretical and empirical parts of this study were very well aligned with the fact that the sales & marketing funnel combines the whole B2B sales process within a company, and thus is very crucial that the two departments are well aligned (Kotler et al. 2006). Literature has described multiple times how functional alignment between sales and marketing functions is very challenging to create (Homburg et al. 2008; Atteya 2012) and also in this study has outlined it. In today’s world if a company desires to create a coherent customer experience, it will only arise from seamless cooperation within sales and marketing, and departments supporting each other’s. (Kotler et al. 2006, 77; Weir 2018)

The most common issues with marketing and sales co-operation are divided into two categories: the IT based issues and those that arise from the lack of collaboration (Heimbach et Al., 2015). IT system problems are those of integration between two different types of software, which are

used in very different ways, due to the different requirements of the departments. Firstly, the IT problems were really common in the case companies. Multiple companies yet had not integrated their systems, which can be considered as a huge disadvantage. Secondly, most of the marketing and sales managers did not have any influence on the IT decisions. *“We just have to deal with the tools that we are given”* was very common explanation for the situation and lack of capabilities in IT environment.

As sales systems are for managing the customers’ information and interactions with sales people and marketing systems are for delivering the marketing message and targeting a pre-defined segment (Heimbach et Al., 2015), it would be highly crucial to combine those two platforms. The representors of the case companies outlined that the greatest benefits for the data driven marketing arises when the marketing automation is integrated within other platforms that are used. The most important integration to the marketing automation tool by far is the CRM. Other high value integrations were content management tools, analytics tools, enterprise resource planning system and reporting tools.

Case company Alfa defined that they aim to achieve the highest possible integration between all the sales and marketing programs. This would allow them to vision the whole purchase path from the customer’s first touch to the company. By doing this they could obtain great competitive advantage. In this study, most of the case companies had the CRM and MA platforms provided by the same software house (such as Oracle), which had in generally simplified the integration between the sales and marketing platforms. Other integrations were also seen to be very crucial. For example, the case company Beta highlighted the importance of the integration to the analytics platform Microsoft Power BI. That integration allowed anyone in the company to access the analytics, and thus provided deeper understanding of the marketing and sales process as a whole.

As Heimbach et al. (2015) pointed out, many issues in sales and marketing co-operation also arise from the lack of collaboration between those two functions. This was also heavily supported by the empirical data in this research. Multiple issues were highlighted in both literature and in interviews such as the issues in the lead management which builds the base

for the whole sales and marketing funnel. Issues in lead management will be further discussed later, but to sum up some main issues in the lead management, the main issues were lack of follow-up with marketing produced lead, poor lead quality in marketing generated leads and issues to find common understanding what is a good lead and what is not between sales and marketing functions. (Kotler et al 2006; Churchill, Ford & Walker 2003; Pipedrive 2020; Marcus 2002; Oliva 2006)

The better the teams are aligned and supporting each other's, the better the outcomes are, meaning that the sales and marketing funnel will grow regarding the quantity and also quality of the leads. Case company Epsilon had understood something very crucial when aiming to enlarge their sales and marketing funnel. They stated out the visibility of marketing actions to sales and vice versa. Sales people must be able to check the status of the leads or prospects. This has been a huge benefit for them especially in new customer acquisition as well as noticing cross selling opportunities. This is a good example how well integrated platforms and well-integrated marketing and sales functions will allow companies to achieve a great data flow, an open environment and eventually successful data driven marketing.

How do companies use marketing automation in developing their lead management systems?

It is unarguable that within the last decades we have witnessed a major change in the sales funnel and lead generation processes. New technologies in digital marketing, artificial intelligence and customer relation management have developed faster than ever and allowed marketers and sales people to step up their game or in some cases to drop out from the competition. (Salesforce 2019) Customers nowadays expects nothing less from digital marketing than simplicity, convenience, relevance and timelines for the content (Hänninen, Smedlund & Mitronen 2017). The change for the customers behavior is the biggest driver for the demand for automated marketing processes (Putkinen 2014).

In generally each of the case companies had implemented a marketing automation system. Marketing automation was seen as the second most important platform after the CRM. This was especially crucial for the lead management process. In theory the lead management was pictured to be somewhat more simple process. The interviews really opened up another point of view and explained the complexity in the lead management process.

Many companies are struggling with lead management and problems such as inconsistent lead quality which will lead to missed sales opportunities and lack of sales. As marketing automation combines all three dimensions of time: Past, current and future (Heimbach et al. 2015; Wood 2015) should all these three dimensions be utilized in practice. The lack in any of these will lead to decreased lead value and sales. With most of the case companies the part which needs most improvement is the past. If companies would understand the lead managements each part and learn from the previous failures and successful deals, they would be able to improve their lead management enormously. In order to be able to do this, some analytics platform should be integrated to both marketing automation and customer relation management systems.

It is highly crucial for a company to acknowledge the factors needed for a lead formation. In literature it is pointed out that up to 68 % of businesses have not yet identified their sales funnels, and thus are unable to identify the whole customer journey or qualify leads that actually help their business (Pipedrive, 2020). This was also pointed out in the interviews, as one of the case companies mentioned that they have difficulties to allocate marketing recourses to places that would actually generate sales and eventually profit.

Almost all of the case companies had integrated the marketing automation and CRM in order to create a smooth path for leads to flow through. In the beginning marketing is supposed to somehow define the importance of the lead. Either on a scale (cold – warm – hot) or by giving points to the lead. After sales have received information about the lead they will evaluate whether they want to continue with the lead or not. If a sales person will reject the lead, meaning that he/she will not work for it in order to see whether there would be an opportunity or not, it should be very carefully outlined why such decision has been done. Otherwise it is impossible for marketing to learn to avoid making that kind of leads. In this study it is clear to see that most

case companies found out that the stepping stone of the whole lead process seems to be the “sales evaluation” part. This part was also highlighted in theory. Churchill et al. (2003) outlined that collaboration problems are considered to be the most evident in lead generation.

The growth for the business starts from a way how to set measurable goal that both sales and marketing agree upon and focuses on. The common mission and vision of the future is crucial and should always be defined. The growth comes from a well streamlined and cost-effective actions on the lead generation. The lead generation process will allow the full tracking, measurement, grading and most importantly follow-up on all possible prospect and customers of the company. Also, if aboth sales and marketing functions do not agree upon what is a good lead and what is not the adaptation of the automation system cannot be utilized (Järvinen et Al., 2015). This was not that clear on the case companies. They saw the importance of the automation system, but most of them had quite vague agreement on what is a good lead.

Many researches before have pointed out the key role of B2B sales and marketing team’s alignment on lead generation as a whole (Salesforce 2019). Collaboration problems between these two departments are considered to be very evident in lead generation (Churchill, Ford & Walker 2003). Without a good collaboration, no amount of automation will provide better leads. This was also very clear in the case companies. Thus, it was not as easy to step in to the issues in lead management if they were dependent on people instead of the technology within it. It was very easy sales and marketing to find common ground when talking about the lacks in the technical side. On the other hand, the collaboration issues seemed to be even a bit of a taboo.

As Järvinen et al. (2015) argued that the closer partnership between sales and marketing departments helps marketing to provide better leads and, in the end, generates more revenue for the company, it was not that black and white in the case companies. There was a lot of ad hoc collaboration in between sales and marketing within each case company, yet the strategic co-operation was not that common. Järvinen et al. (2015) explained how the co-operation between these two functions should start from the planning, in order to be able to exploit the techniques of automation to the successful lead management.

As a conclusion, marketing automation could provide excellent lead management and enable a view for sales to the marketing activities along the way. The leadership level would be provided with great analytics to support investment decisions for the future as well as to understand the customers better. In the end, marketing automation system will do the job meticulously as well as minimize the human errors.

How do B2B tech companies align marketing and sales departments when developing data-driven marketing with marketing automation?

As previously stated, many companies are struggling with lead management process and have issues in lead quality which will eventually lead to missed sales opportunities and lack of sales. Customer has changed more than ever before within the past 10 years which forces companies to re-think the marketing & sales processes all over again. The constant development should be in the minds of the sales and marketing leaders every day. The changing customer expectations and increasing control on buyers forces marketing & sales strategies to evolve constantly (Salesforce 2019).

In theory as well as in the empiric part of the study it has been indicated that that the lack of amity between sales and marketing could be resolved by concentrating on a customer centric approach by focusing on customer journey to align the departments strategies. (Patterson 2007) The two main failure points in the co-operation within this study were: 1. not understanding each other's goals and objectives and 2. not understanding the other team's capabilities or limitations. These issues could be solved by creating more common ground for both teams and aligning them better in the first place. Sales and marketing could be seen as one when looking from the top. As in the end those department do share their goals and objectives. It is not advisable to completely assimilate the divisions but creating the common understanding and co-operating will be the way to success (Homburg 2007, Patterson 2007).

To sum up some issues that arose during this study, a couple of the most common ones are listed below:

1. The sales representatives feared that if they work together with marketing, they should take part to marketing activities so much that they would not be able to focus on their own job enough anymore.
2. Marketing team blindly works without supporting the actual goals in the business. It could be described that they kind of “shoot everything that moves”. After a while they might be able to recognize that that does not support business goals.
3. Sales people usually have a wide knowledge customers, competitors, partners or potential new customers, but this is not exploited.
4. If the sales manager does not quite understand the ways marketing should/could be done the company might not be able to allocate resources to the correct products or services, as the marketing manager might not be able to understand the whole field by him/her self. All the professionalism within the company should be utilized.
5. Marketing people are too often seen as some kind of generalist inside a sales organization. Everyone should see marketing as a strategic player. They should have a long-term plan that’s followed, as well as sales do.

The need to develop co-operation was obvious in the theory as well as in the case companies. It was unarguable. It had no difference whether asked from sales or marketing people. The answer was always yes. Delta’s representative outlined that their cooperation is great purely because they constantly work for it. It needs ongoing effort. They had reached a state where both functions appreciated each other’s and understood the importance of team work for the better outcomes.

The benefits of the alignment were defined to be very similar in both theory and in empirical part of the study. As sales and marketing both offered their time for cooperation they were able to create synergy. A cooperation that enables the rise to a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, it is fair to say that the sales team should benefit from the co-operation in such way that it would be worth to offer their time for marketing team as so often marketing constantly requests the efforts without any response.

The benefits of the alignment were for example: the ability to gain more high-quality leads from marketing, the improved motivation on the sales to work on the leads with improved equipment in the company and the increased ROI within both departments (eventually leading to higher revenues).

Also, brands with well aligned sales and marketing achieve up to 25 percent quicker growth within three years. (Salesforce 2019)

5.2. Theoretical implications

This section provides the theoretical implications of this thesis. Most of the findings in this study are aligned with the previous findings in research regarding sales and marketing co-operation as well as marketing automation. There are some issues which were mentioned in interviews but are not mentioned in the literature. This kind of situation was mostly emphasized when talking about the sales and marketing co-operation.

This study confirmed that the theory behind the sales and marketing co-operation is widely studied issue. It has been studied for decades and is still widely studied until today. On the other hand, the issues that slows down the sales and marketing co-operation are not that much on the table in the B2B tech companies. Each of the interviewees agreed that the co-operation should be improved continually. This raises up a question that should this topic receive a bigger space in the managerial discussions? This kind of change will not happen unless the management is supporting the change.

5.3. Managerial Implications

This part outlines the recommendations from the case companies' perspective for the managerial implications. The managerial implications are written considered both the sales and marketing co-operation in order to create successful data driven marketing and the marketing automation implementation in order to create successful data driven marketing.

Management has an enormous role in enabling the successful co-operation between sales and marketing. Management should align a common goal for sales and marketing functions to aim for the data driven marketing by enabling the marketing to be automated and data driven, but also by exchanging the relationship between marketing and sales. Management can create the changes within the organization with some of the following requests.

As the whole lead management process can be improved by allowing sales to see the whole customer journey from the very beginning, and the data from marketing automation platform will give sales a clear view of the prospect's actions within each channel, (Todor 2016, Wood 2015) it should be an easy decision for the management to invest to the needed IT in order to enable the marketing to be automated.

As it is proven that the improved lead management will only generate from the deeper understanding and co-operation between marketing and sales functions since neither of those can improve the lead management system alone (Putkinen 2014), should management highlight the importance of the co-operation between these functions. It takes time and recourses ad well as it need to be managed as change in the organization always has to be.

Each company should aim to find the most suitable and profitable lead sources in order to be able to allocate their resources well. The strategy should define which sources to use in order to create high quality leads, which each can be tracked and well analyzed with on-going analytics integrated to the marketing automation and CRM. This way it is possible to minimize the waste of recourses in lead creation as a part of the overall lead management. (Jolson & Wotruba 1992)

The current state of marketing and sales co-operation in the case companies was divided in to three categories based on the interviews: first would be somewhat immature and benighted, the second one is well thought and currently heavily transforming towards better and the third one is advanced and dignified. Each company should really look into their current state of co-operation and decide whether they want to make it a priority or not. Those companies that are already lacking behind of others will other ways face issues within upcoming years.

Benchmarking other companies in the field would be a great way to gain understanding of the general way of co-operation in the industry.

Marketing department are many times struggling to show the correct results for the business leaders. As sales is easily showing the results from numbers as turnover, win rate or how could marketing do the same? Marketing should be able to demonstrate their results with data analytics to the leaders. That is the only way to say that marketing is actually data driven. If there is not enough analytics implemented, marketing will never have a chance to show their accomplishments. For this the management has to see the reason to invest into analytics tools that can be utilized to define the marketing and sales results.

The sales profits that originates from marketing should be clearly registered as a marketing-based sale. Simply just counting how many sales opportunities has marketing created for sales will put a wedge between sales and marketing functions as their goals are then different. Sales aims to close as many deals as possible with the highest gains, but marketing will not get rewarded for that, but just the amount of the leads no matter the quality.

In this study only the most advanced companies noted that one of the major factors for a high-quality lead management is the traceability. Meaning that marketing should be able to communicate with sales why a contact/prospect is transformed into a lead. The traceability means the view for the marketing activities that have been recorded about the contact to the marketing automation. To sum up the benefits from the visibility of the touch points it improves the lead management process and, in the end, increases the sales. This is clearly somewhat easy step to improve the lead management process and the data driven approach. This kind of visibility could also improve the overall co-operation and mutual understanding between sales and marketing

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This research was carried out in a rather limited context in Finland. Also, the sample was relatively small. 5 companies which each had either one or two representatives. The results of

this research can be generalized to B2B companies operating in tech field, but in order to confirm the assumptions made in this study, more research in different contexts is needed.

Further research could include for example companies from other kind of industries, and not only focus on the technology field. Also, the comparison between some other industry and tech industry would be highly interesting. Tech companies are in many ways ahead when talking about implementing technology in their operations, which would be interesting to study whether that is true or not.

One highly interesting perspective for future research would be the comparison between B2B and B2C business when studying how to develop data-driven marketing with marketing automation. In some sources the B2C has been described as a forerunner when talking about marketing automation. B2C business has enormous number of customers as well as prospects when compared to regular B2B business, and that might have been a pulling factor for B2C companies to develop their automation systems faster.

As this study was carried out from the strategic point of view rather than the operative one, it would be very interesting to study this topic from more operative point of view. Then it would be also possible to provide companies some hands-on tips on how to improve their marketing and sales cooperation in order to create more data driven marketing.

In the future the studies about similar topics could be done to find either support or conflicting evidence when compared to this study. Future studies should be conducted in order to learn more about this topic, as to author's knowledge this is the first study to date on the topic.

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