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The Great B2B Divide: Sales & Marketing Alignment

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INTRODUCTION

If you are in B2B does this sound familiar ?

It's the end of the quarter. Marketing has delivered 1,200 MQLs and the dashboard is green. Down the corridor, the sales team is frustrated. They worked 80 leads, got through to 20, had real conversations with six and closed two.

Marketing thinks sales can't close. Sales thinks marketing doesn't know what a real lead looks like. The CEO wonders why two capable teams are delivering so little.

This is the sales and marketing alignment gap, and it is one of the most common, most expensive and most preventable problems in B2B business today.

In almost every case, the root cause is the same. Neither team has real-time visibility of what is actually happening across marketing and sales activity, which content is driving genuine engagement, which channels are generating pipeline, and which accounts and contacts are showing buying intent right now. Without that intelligence, both teams are working in the dark.

> "Over 40% of B2B deals stall because buying groups can't align internally. Misaligned sales and marketing teams make that harder to fix, and misalignment is estimated to cost 10–15% of potential revenue every year."

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01 — THE PROBLEM

Understanding the problem

The misalignment is structural, not personal. Marketing is measured on volume: leads, impressions and opens. Sales is measured on one thing: revenue. When these two frameworks collide, both teams can be right while the business still loses.

The MQL was meant to fix this. In practice, MQL frameworks are often built by marketing, for marketing, and optimised for volume rather than purchase intent. A contact who downloaded a whitepaper 18 months ago and opened one email last week is not the same as someone who has visited your pricing page four times this week.

The result: Sales teams call lukewarm prospects, morale drops, pipeline stalls and the alignment gap just gets bigger.

That gap isn't about better leads. It's about better intelligence: knowing which accounts are engaging, which contacts are active, what content (videos, whitepapers, case studies, downloads) is driving interest, and which channels are actually converting.

Then there is the reality of the buying journey. 70–80% of the B2B purchase decision is complete before a prospect talks to sales (Gartner, 2024), and that decision is rarely made by one person. The average B2B buying group involves 6–10 decision-makers, each arriving with 4–5 pieces of independent research (Gartner, 2024). Forrester's 2025 research puts enterprise buying groups even higher, at 13 internal stakeholders across three or more departments, and 79% of purchases now require CFO approval (Forrester, 2025; TrustRadius, 2024).

> INSIGHT
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> On average, only 1 in 5 B2B leads becomes a customer. Top-performing organisations convert closer to 1 in 4, and alignment and engagement intelligence are a big part of the difference.

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02 — THE NUMBERS

Why Alignment matters

The numbers behind the alignment gap

Why knowing who is ready to buy, and acting on it together, changes results



What the numbers mean

- Most of your market isn't buying yet. Only around 5% of buyers are in market at any one time. The other 95% are future pipeline, and need to be kept warm until they are ready.
- Conversion is the real challenge. With only 1 in 5 leads becoming a customer, the difference between average and top performance lies in knowing which accounts to prioritise and when.
- Alignment pays. Aligned sales and marketing teams win 38% more deals than their misaligned competitors.

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03 — THE COST

The real cost

The financial impact is significant. Misaligned sales and marketing teams are estimated to cost B2B businesses US$1 trillion a year in lost productivity and wasted spend (Harvard Business Review / IDC). Most businesses underestimate their own exposure.

Misalignment shows up in five ways:

- Wasted marketing spend: budget directed at audiences that don't generate sales-ready pipeline.
- Lost sales productivity: hours spent on unqualified outreach instead of closing.
- Longer sales cycles: deals that could close in 60 days drag out to 120 without nurture.
- Revenue leakage: contacts who showed interest but fell through the cracks at handover.
- Talent cost: high sales team turnover driven by frustration with poor-quality leads.

The upside of fixing it is equally clear. Aligned teams achieve a 20% higher close rate (Demand Gen Report), 30% shorter sales cycles (Forrester) and a 40% improvement in conversion rates where both teams share a common lead definition (Aberdeen Group). Aligned organisations also grow revenue 24% faster and profit 27% faster over three years (SiriusDecisions / Forrester).

> INSIGHT
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> Aligned organisations grow revenue 19% faster and are 15% more profitable than their misaligned competitors (Forrester, 2023).

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ALIGNMENT BY THE NUMBERS

Aligned teams win 38% more deals.

+38%

more deals won by aligned sales and marketing teams

Demand Gen Report / Aberdeen Group

24%

faster three-year revenue growth for tightly aligned organisations

SiriusDecisions (now Forrester)

27%

faster three-year profit growth for tightly aligned organisations

SiriusDecisions (now Forrester)

5%

of buyers are in market at any one time. The other 95% are future pipeline

Ehrenberg-Bass Institute / LinkedIn B2B Institute

04 — THE PLAYBOOK

So how do we close the gap

Misalignment is solvable. The interventions are known and the results are measurable. Here's where to start.

1. Shared revenue goal, not separate metrics

Both teams need to be on the same revenue target. When they are accountable to the same number, the incentive to blame each other disappears. Move from MQL volume to shared metrics: SQLs, pipeline contribution and influenced revenue.

2. A shared definition of a qualified lead

Build a jointly agreed lead qualification framework, effectively a service-level agreement (SLA) between sales and marketing. Define what makes an MQL, what triggers an SQL and what the handover looks like. Build it around behavioural signals, not just demographics.

3. Real-time visibility: what's working and who's engaging

Most B2B businesses run marketing on instinct. Campaigns go out and reports come back, but nobody has a live view of what is actually driving pipeline: which creative is landing, which channels are converting and which accounts are engaging right now.

- For marketing: see exactly which campaigns, creative executions and channels are generating genuine engagement (email opens, clicks, web visits, form fills and paid search), not just impressions. Shift budget towards what is converting, and cut what isn't, before the quarter ends rather than after.
- For sales: instead of a static call list, start each day with a live, prioritised target list showing which accounts are engaging right now, which contacts are active, what content they have consumed and which channel brought them in. Everything you need to make an informed, relevant call, before you pick up the phone.

The result: marketing and sales finally see the same picture. One shared view of account engagement across every channel, and no more "our campaigns are working" versus "none of those leads are any good".

4. Account-Based Marketing (ABM) - Turning accounts into measurable revenue

For B2B businesses with defined target account lists and long sales cycles, ABM is the most effective structural response to misalignment. You start with a specific account list and run coordinated, personalised marketing and sales activity against each account at the same time, so alignment is built in by design. For more, read our whitepaper Account-Based Marketing (ABM): The growth opportunity for B2B businesses in ANZ.

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5. Prioritising the target Accounts to focus on now

Most sales teams start each day working through a list based on gut feel or whoever they last spoke to. The result is hours wasted on contacts who aren't ready, while genuinely in-market accounts are missed entirely.

Account prioritisation uses real-time engagement signals to rank your entire database by buying intent, refreshed every day. Accounts that have visited your website, engaged with your emails or consumed your content in the last 24–72 hours rise to the top, while accounts that have gone quiet fall back. Each entry shows the full engagement picture: which contacts are active, what content they have engaged with, which channel brought them in and how their activity has trended over time.

Critically, account prioritisation reveals multi-stakeholder engagement. When three people from the same company engage with your content in the same week, that's a buying signal, even if none of them has raised their hand. That account deserves a call today.

6. Structured nurture: keep the 95% warm until they're ready

Not every lead is ready to buy right now. Only around 5% of your addressable market is in market at any given time. The other 95% are future pipeline, and the mistake most B2B businesses make is either ignoring them or passing them to sales too early.

A structured nurture programme keeps those contacts warm, informed and moving through the buying journey at their own pace. Done well, it is not a monthly newsletter but a sequenced, behaviour-triggered programme that delivers the right content to the right person at the right stage. And when a contact who has been quiet for six months suddenly opens three emails and visits your solutions page, that is a sales trigger, not a cue for another automated email.

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05 — IN PRACTICE

What alignment looks like in practice

Aligned organisations share a recognisable set of habits:

- Sales and marketing present to the board together, on the same revenue metrics.
- Both teams use the same CRM and engagement data: one source of truth.
- Sales reps receive a daily list of their warmest accounts, based on live engagement signals.
- When a prospect visits the pricing page, a rep knows within hours, not weeks.
- Marketing knows which content types (videos, whitepapers, case studies, email sequences) are driving MQLs by account and by channel, in real time.
- Lead handover is a defined process with agreed SLAs, not an informal email.
- Win rates are tracked jointly, and both teams celebrate the same wins: closed deals, not just MQL targets.

> INSIGHT
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> The organisations that get this right don't just grow faster. They grow more sustainably, because every marketing dollar is accountable to pipeline and every sales hour is focused on the contacts most likely to close.

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06 — THE BOTTOM LINE

Conclusion

Sales and marketing misalignment is often a structural failure, and it costs your business in wasted marketing and sales investment, lost deals, even longer sales cycles and frustrated people.

Fixing it takes deliberate effort: shared goals, shared data and a genuine commitment to treating sales and marketing as two parts of the same revenue engine.

Understanding the problem is the first step. Having the visibility to fix it is where everything changes.

Next in the series: The invisible buying journey – 70%- 80% of the deal is done before your sales team is engaged

SOURCES

Edelman–LinkedIn, 2025 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report: more than 40% of B2B deals stall due to internal misalignment within buying groups. Gartner (2024): companies with moderate sales and marketing misalignment lose 10–15% of potential annual revenue; Forrester estimates severe misalignment can cost up to 38% of B2B revenue. The widely cited global US$1 trillion figure (IDC / HBR) is a US market estimate. No equivalent ANZ-specific study has been published, although the 10–15% revenue loss ratio applies across markets.

Ehrenberg-Bass Institute / LinkedIn B2B Institute (the 95:5 rule): at any given time, only around 5% of your total addressable market is actively in market and ready to buy. 6sense research puts the quarterly in-market window at 9–11% (6sense, 2025).

MarketingSherpa B2B Benchmark Report / Salesforce State of Sales (2024): on average, 1 in 5 B2B leads (approx. 21%) converts into a customer. Top-quartile organisations reach 1 in 4 (20–25%). MQL-to-SQL conversion averages 13%; top performers reach 18–20%.

Demand Gen Report / Aberdeen Group / Forrester: aligned teams win 38% more deals across their pipeline (multiple 2024–2025 sources, including Demand Gen Report and Aberdeen Group sales alignment research); 30% shorter sales cycles (Forrester); 40% improvement in conversion rates with shared lead definitions (Aberdeen Group / The Trust Agency, 2026); 52% of salespeople identify lost deals and revenue as the primary cost of misalignment (HubSpot State of Sales, 2022).

Gartner, “The New B2B Buying Journey” (2024): 6–10 decision-makers per complex B2B purchase, each with 4–5 pieces of independent research; buyers spend only 17% of purchase time with vendors. Forrester (2025): 13 internal and 9 external stakeholders for enterprise deals. 79% require CFO approval (TrustRadius, 2024).

SiriusDecisions (now Forrester): tightly aligned B2B organisations achieve 24% faster three-year revenue growth and 27% faster profit growth. Forrester, “Customer-Obsessed Growth Engine” (2023): 19% faster growth and 15% higher profitability for aligned firms.

EngageIQ, Account-Based Marketing (ABM): The growth opportunity for B2B businesses in ANZ (whitepaper, November 2026)

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