

Efficient & Engaging Communicati

Four ways manufacturers can maximize distributor performance

By Justin Johnson

A distributor-based business benefits from having many organizations actively selling its products based on geographic location or market focus. This helps scale the business and create predictable revenue streams for manufacturers.

Getting the most out of these distributor relationships requires proactive engagement and management. Unfortunately, this often is where inefficiency, miscommunication and poor collaboration enter the picture.

Many firms rely on emails and spreadsheets to share leads and understand the stage and value of sales opportunities. Often this is one-way communication with neither a “closed-loop” approach to collaboration nor a unified view of performance across distributors.

This situation requires a process and technology reach across the “distributor divide” to focus communication and deliver a single view of leads and revenue opportunities.

The technology must support the process and provide an experience consistent with what people know (email and spreadsheets) while providing a single system of record for manufacturers and their distributors.

The technology solution in place must cover four core areas to bridge the distributor divide and produce maximum performance from distributors.

Lead Sharing

Leads generated by the manufacturer are passed to the distributor most appropriate to follow up on them. Often, these leads slip into a black hole with no confirmation

any follow up has taken place or revenue opportunity has been created. This creates a situation in which the marketing investment to generate these leads is difficult to justify and the potential for lost revenue becomes real.

To avoid this situation, utilize a technology solution that captures, manages and tracks the status of leads created by the manufacturer and shared with the distributor. Leads can be shared via an email alert that includes a link back to the system so everyone is referencing the same lead record and status. The workday revolves around email so it is a critical platform for sharing and action.

Sales Pipeline Visibility

Once a lead is followed by a distributor, the manufacturer rarely has good visibility into the size of the deal or when it is expected to close. Current systems can complicate the relationship between the manufacturer and distributor, creating a larger-than-necessary workload for both.

Create a dynamic and easily shareable sales pipeline with a solution that makes tracking lead and deal status easy, removing the need for creating custom reports and constantly trading emails and phone calls to determine the status of a deal or project.

Education & Training

A distributor’s ability to engage and close opportunities for a manufacturer’s products is directly related to the quality and frequency of training and education provided by the manufacturer. This requires a programmatic approach to education and making sure the supporting

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sales collateral and documentation are kept up to date and accurate. Simply hosting a website or providing a web partner portal that acts as a central repository of information makes these materials available but does not proactively insert them into the sales process or leverage them for training and education.

Invest in a platform that presents sales, marketing and product information to distributors right when they need it most: when they are following up on a hot sales lead. With this approach, distributors have the right information at the right time so they can close more deals.

Distributor Feedback

Simply generating leads and sending them to distributors is not enough to get the maximum return on marketing investment and performance from distributors. Without a clear definition of what makes a lead qualified on the front end, manufacturers run the risk of providing leads of little or no value to their distributors. Without an easy and actionable way for distributors to provide feedback to their manufacturers on the leads being shared, unqualified leads will continue to flow and frustration will build.

Make it easy for distributors to provide feedback on leads with an easy yes-or-no approach to scoring a lead and judging the potential for a sales opportunity. Based on the information presented in the lead record shared via email to the distributor, feedback can be gathered, tracked and analyzed over time to improve the quality of leads and performance of the distributor. The manufacturer benefits from a concise view of all lead activity across distributors, including ratings and quality, while the distributor benefits from having an easy way to continually provide feedback to the manufacturer on the leads it is sharing.

The distributor divide easily can be bridged by using technology to enable communication and collaboration. Maximizing distributor performance depends on two-way communication and having a single source of information. Technology can provide this, but it must be delivered in a way that is familiar and aligned with how people work today. **WQP**

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