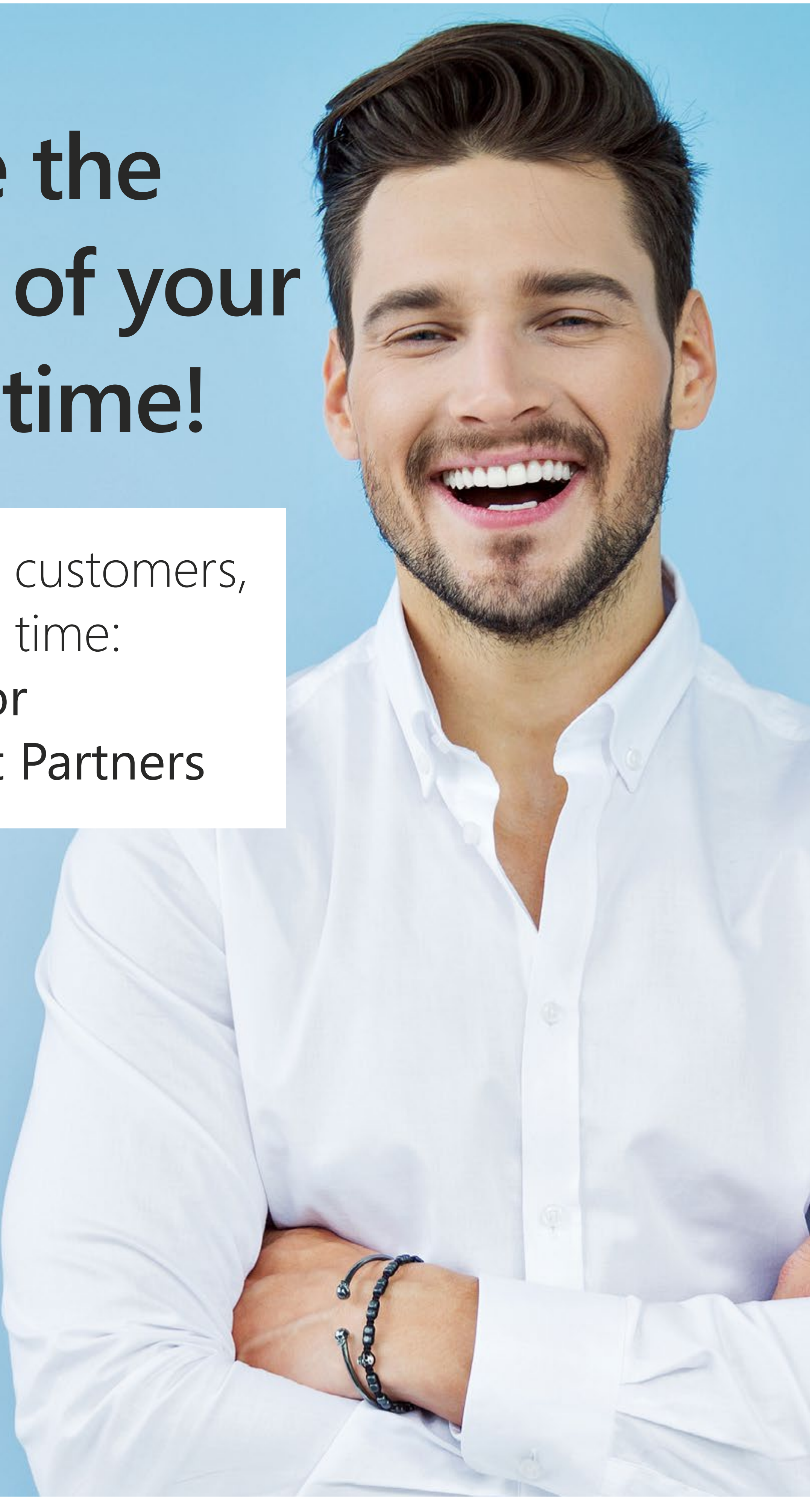
Make the most of your sales time!



Win more customers, waste less time:
9 steps for Microsoft Partners

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Your **high-spirited** account manager gets into the car to visit a potential customer. His mission: to sell your product or service, preferably today! But once he arrives, nothing goes according to plan. The account manager fails to get a meeting with the right person. Or, it turns out the company in question doesn't need your product or service right now. Recognize this? Research shows that **65% to 75%** of sales time is spent on **peripheral activities**, such as internal meetings and administrative tasks. The 25% to 35% that companies devote to 'real' sales activities – such as a sales meeting – is fruitlessly spent on people they shouldn't be talking to. It's a shame, because to stay in business and grow, you need to **make the most of your sales time.**

Effective sales: the right customer at the right time!

In this whitepaper, we'll show you in 9 steps how to make the right customer purchase your product or service at the right time. The main question: How do you make sure you only spend your sales time on the right customers?

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Many missed opportunities: no sales without BANT

Since companies waste so much time talking to the wrong person, the question is: Who is the right person? Let's put this in a broader context. Because the right person is as indispensable as the right time. To make the most of your sales time, you need the following situation: your potential customer is able to spend money on your product (Budget), your contact has the authority to spend the budget (Authority), the company has a current, specific need which you can meet (Need), and the solution should be implemented within an X number of weeks or months (Time). If this is the case, your sales people should take action. Once you have a warm, BANT-qualified lead, they can make much better use of sales time.

Focus

When you solely focus on sales, you are – in all honesty – fighting a losing battle. After all, there's only a tiny chance that you'll meet your prospect just when he needs your product. In other words, you're not making good use of your sales time when you approach potential customers haphazardly, hoping you can instantly sell something to them.

Jos Maassen, founder of Make Marketing Magic - the agency that joined forces with Microsoft to set up the Boost your Business program - elaborates this with an example.

> **"Suppose your IT company offers cloud solutions. What are the odds of a prospect saying, 'That's exactly what I need right now' during your first interaction with them? These percentages are too small. But the same prospect may want to switch to the cloud in the future. Yet you don't know a) when that moment will arrive and b) who is looking for your product or service at what time. Therefore, you should ensure that prospects remember you at such moments."**

Pitfall

Nevertheless, many Microsoft Partners fall victim to the 'short-term pitfall.' This partly stems from tradition: you're used to this approach, so whenever it's time to increase your sales, you revert to your familiar resources: you approach cold leads, hoping (in vain) that you'll quickly achieve huge results. Incidentally, the latter method is also wrong – if you only start working on sales when you desperately need it, you'll already have a commercial problem which urgently requires a solution. Then, you'll have no choice but revert to short-term solutions – such as focusing on cold leads – which will absolutely prevent you from making the most of your sales time.

To avoid such a situation, long-term thinking is a must. In our experience, the average lead-to-deal time of Microsoft Partner target groups is 6-18 months. This means you should start anticipating your company's future sales need now. It might feel a bit unnatural to work on a problem you don't yet have, but keep in mind that this is exactly how you'll prevent it from arising. Moreover, a long-term strategy allows you to work in a much more effective way.

Why?

Suppose your sales efforts are aimed at reaching 100 people. Eventually, you get to talk to half of them, and three people agree to meet you over coffee. So, where's the greatest value? Not in those 3 prospects who are immediately open to your product, but in the 47 potential customers who might also need it, albeit at a later time. In practice, however, these 47 contacts are often lost – 47 missed opportunities you could have seized. How? By turning them into warm leads.

Marketing

And that's where marketing comes in, the means for building a connection with prospects and monitoring their needs so you can act once they require your product or service. Certain activities will show you whether someone is a warm lead – they may, for example, visit lots of topic-specific pages on your website. In that case, you can talk to the prospect to discover whether they're BANT-qualified – in other words, you determine whether you can check the Budget, Authority, Need, and Timing boxes. If so, it's time for a (usually fruitful!) sales meeting.

“We’ve observed that digital marketing is still unexplored territory for many Microsoft Partners”

Jan Willem Barkmeijer,
Partner Marketing Advisor for SMB and Central Marketing Engines at Microsoft and founder of Boost your Business.

Towards a BANT-qualified sales meeting in 9 steps

"We've observed that digital marketing is still unexplored territory for many Microsoft Partners," says Jan Willem Barkmeijer, Partner Marketing Advisor for SMB and Central Marketing Engines at Microsoft and founder of Boost your Business. "Some Microsoft Partners have carefully tried their hand at digital marketing at some point. An intern once posted two blogs, or an account manager with a knack for writing penned a newsletter. But creating and sharing content on a structural basis proves to be difficult. We've noticed that Microsoft Partners often don't know how to lay the right foundation, which leads to disappointing initial marketing results. Then, they pull the plug and revert to word-to-mouth advertising."

Understandable, but not recommended. Because your network of contacts – no matter how extensive – has its limits. If you really want to grow, you will need to embrace digital marketing.

The question is: How do you arrive at that point? We've listed **9 steps** you can take!

Step 1:
Specify your objectives

Determine what you want to achieve in the coming 12 to 18 months. How many new customers would you like to attract? And how much additional business do you wish to generate among existing customers? Perform a baseline measurement and determine the reach you require to meet your goals. What figures are relevant to you?

"Currently, there are 125 Microsoft Partners among our customers," says Jos. "Their current reach is 20% to 25% of the reach they require to achieve their objectives. If, for example, you want to attract 10 new customers, you should reach at least 1,800 people at the top of your goal funnel. In other words, you need a good number of new contacts – and oftentimes, these aren't readily available. In those cases, many Partners revert to the 'classical' sales method: they use call centers to contact a group of cold leads that's way too small, thus losing time and money."

Step 2:
Select your target group

Chances are that as a Microsoft Partner, you offer a pretty generic solution. An Office cloud solution, for example, can be sold to a variety of parties. And it goes without saying that you don't really care who will become your customer. Therefore, you prefer to focus on the widest possible target group. "Understandable, but this poses an issue in terms of communication," says Jos. "For example, a stock exchange dealer and a web shop are facing different cloud challenges. Of course, it's scary to narrow your target group – to choose is to include and to exclude. But those who don't choose will not be chosen, either."

So start by defining one clear marketing target group (not two or three!) to which you'll gear your content. This doesn't mean you will stop serving other target groups. It just means you won't (yet) gear your marketing communications specifically to them.

Step 3:
Create a proposition

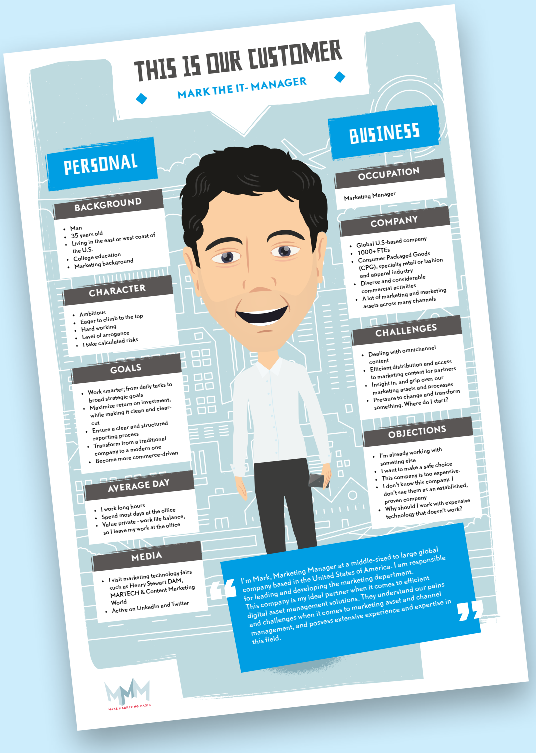
The average Microsoft Partner website literally states what the company does. Examples include 'We implement Office 365' and 'We help you realize the digital transformation.' But initially, your customer isn't all that interested in what you do. He wants to know which problem you can solve for him. That is why you should create a proposition: a document in which you formulate this in a clear-cut way.

To create a proposition that's truly tailored to your target group, you need to look into your customer's problems and state which problem you can solve for them. An example: 'We ensure that your employees actually use the software you've implemented by literally sitting next to them and truly understanding their work. This will maximize adoption.'

Step 4:
Create a buyer persona

A buyer persona is a personification of your target group. You give him a name, a job in a certain branch, objectives, challenges, and hobbies, among other things. It's important to create a buyer persona, because it helps you discover the needs, interests, and preferences of your target group. This allows you to adopt a purposeful approach and truly reach your potential customers.

But where to start? Jos recommends, "First, consult with your sales department and with the people who work with your customers on a daily basis to form a notion of your ideal customer. Then, google 10 people: 5 to whom you'd like to sell something and 5 who you're currently doing business with. Check out their social media profiles and communication style. What do they talk about? By now, we've gone through this process with 125 Microsoft Partners, and we've discovered that in 70% of the cases, they are members of several LinkedIn groups that their buyer persona is also a member of. Very useful, because this way, you'll familiarize yourself with the concerns of your target group, and you'll know exactly what developments you should respond to!"



Step 5:
Come up with a story

Here's a rule of thumb for content creation: write a story that 'imparts' something to the other person rather than a story that only says something about you. Microsoft Partners in particular need to show their added value. After all, your product is homogeneous. If, for example, you only write about Microsoft 365, you won't distinguish yourself from the vast amount of other Microsoft Partners that sell the exact same product. Your user wants to know how you, as a partner, can solve his specific problem. If you discuss such topics, you'll show that you understand him. This will make you stand out.

If, for example, your buyer persona is a primary school principal, you can write a blog titled 'How to set up a school IT environment without an IT manager.' Leave out your product's features, your certificates, and your technology. The buyer persona is only interested in himself. If you want to connect with him, talk about stuff that concerns him.

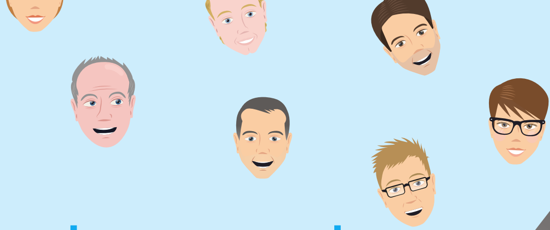
Also keep in mind that your reader is running short on time. "Make sure your blog is short and concise," says Jos. "Create an Aha! moment, especially when you use social media to spread your content! Do you have a longer story to tell? Then make whitepapers, fact sheets, or other downloads available on your website."

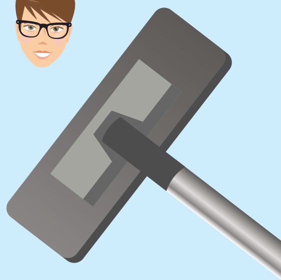
Step 6:
Share your content

You've created a solid story for a well-defined buyer persona. Time to make your content public! Make sure your blogs reach your target group through email marketing and social media. Jos says, "We've observed that many Microsoft Partners start out with approximately 1,000 email addresses and 750 social media connections. Our advice: use them! Furthermore, involve your marketers and sales people in your sharing efforts. At Microsoft Partners' companies, it's usually the system engineers and implementation consultations who communicate with customers on a daily basis. They likely have the most valuable contacts (existing and potential customers) in their social media networks. That's why it is so important they share your content."

Another crucial point: through email marketing and social media shares, people click through to your website to read the entire blog. Chances are they'll subsequently look for more information about you. "On Microsoft Partners' websites, visitors averagely spend 75% of the time finding out a) who you are and b) who your customers are," says Jos. "So make sure this information is prominent!"

A final note: of course, you can share your content with the world through the organic route, but you can also lend yourself a hand by purchasing a LinkedIn boost. Your first- and second-degree networks will always remain limited. Fortunately, you have the opportunity to expand your network on social media channels such as LinkedIn (against a fee).





Step 7: Collect data and respond to your potential customer's need

You've gone through the first 6 steps, and you now work consistently on creating awareness. You're on a roll! And then, the day arrives when you notice your potential customer clicks on your newsletters, browses your website, and visits your LinkedIn profile. The time has come: he needs your product or service. Good news: he knows you can provide it. By sharing relevant content on a regular basis, you've appeared on his radar – and now that he requires your product, you can respond to his need. This is what we call 'radar marketing.' What's the appropriate next step?

The key is to focus on 'giving' rather than 'acquiring.' There are two ways to do this. If you want to reach your external network, offer content on your website in exchange for contact details and generate traffic to the relevant landing page through social media. Additionally, you can offer your content directly to your existing network – for example, after reviewing who visited specific pages on your website. In both cases, you're not instantly trying to sell something to your prospect (that's what everyone does, and it doesn't often work!). Instead, you offer him something, such as a whitepaper, a software trial, or a seminar invitation. This is also known as 'engaged content.'

Why does this work so well for Microsoft Partners? "Simple," says Youri Kuper, partner at Make Marketing Magic. "Your product is pretty technical in nature, which makes it difficult for a website visitor to immediately understand it. If you've published a whitepaper that addresses your buyer persona's problem rather than focusing on your product, go ahead and offer it to your prospect. Tell him you've already helped his peer competitors solve this problem and you're happy to share your knowledge with him, too. Especially in the world of IT, where today's technical ingenuity will have grown obsolete tomorrow, this will spark interest." Why? "You're not the umpteenth person who calls to 'acquire' (or, sell) something this week. You're the first person who wants to give something away."

Here's an encouraging fact: the conversion rate resulting from this type of conversation is between 60% and 100%. In other words, most prospects say "Yes" to your whitepaper or invitation. Youri's final tip: "Don't forget to follow up on the call a week later. If your contact hasn't yet read the whitepaper (which is nearly always the case), discuss its contents over the phone. This way, you'll naturally lead him into the sales process!"

Step 8: Check whether a warm lead is also the right person

Now that you have a warm lead, it's time to check whether he's BANT. Why is this so important? Jos shares his experience: "After we had completed our proposition for Make Marketing Magic, we created a database using data sources. We shared it with a call center that made 150 appointments for us in a short time. 80% of the organizations were in our target group. That made us happy! But it turned out they were far from ready to start using our services. In the end, only 30 organizations represented real sales opportunities. Given that an average of 25% decide to do business with you, this would result in 7 to 8 new customers. Not very profitable."

But Make Marketing Magic didn't let a single appointment go to waste: every contact was added to the database to enable communication and keep in touch. The company went through the first 7 steps: "We sent out a blog every two weeks and a Christmas card each year, and we occasionally contacted them," says Jos. "Now, several years later, another 35 organizations of this original group have become our customers – when the time was right."

The moral of the story? Sales and marketing go hand in hand. If you solely focus on sales, you often miss the target, simply because your timing is wrong. But if your marketing efforts are consistent, you will stay on the radar – and when the right moment arrives, a customer knows where to find you, and you will sell your product or service. Incidentally, it works both ways: your marketing efforts will only pay off if you actively respond to sales opportunities. So get started now. You've already done all the prep work in the previous step. By offering a whitepaper, for example, you've acquired certain data. Moreover, you have a contact, so your sales people can easily inquire with him whether they can check all the BANT boxes!

Step 9: Hold a successful sales meeting

The moment has arrived: you are going to meet your BANT-qualified lead over coffee. How can you make this sales meeting a success? Youri shares 4 tips!

1. "Link your product and proposition to your prospect's needs. You won't benefit from them if you can't do this. What you consider to be benefits are only characteristics in the customer's eyes. Only by linking these characteristics to his needs you will turn them into benefits for him."

2. "Are you looking to link your proposition to reference points? Determine the differences between your potential customer's current and desired situations. Every difference is basically a need, which you might meet with your proposition."

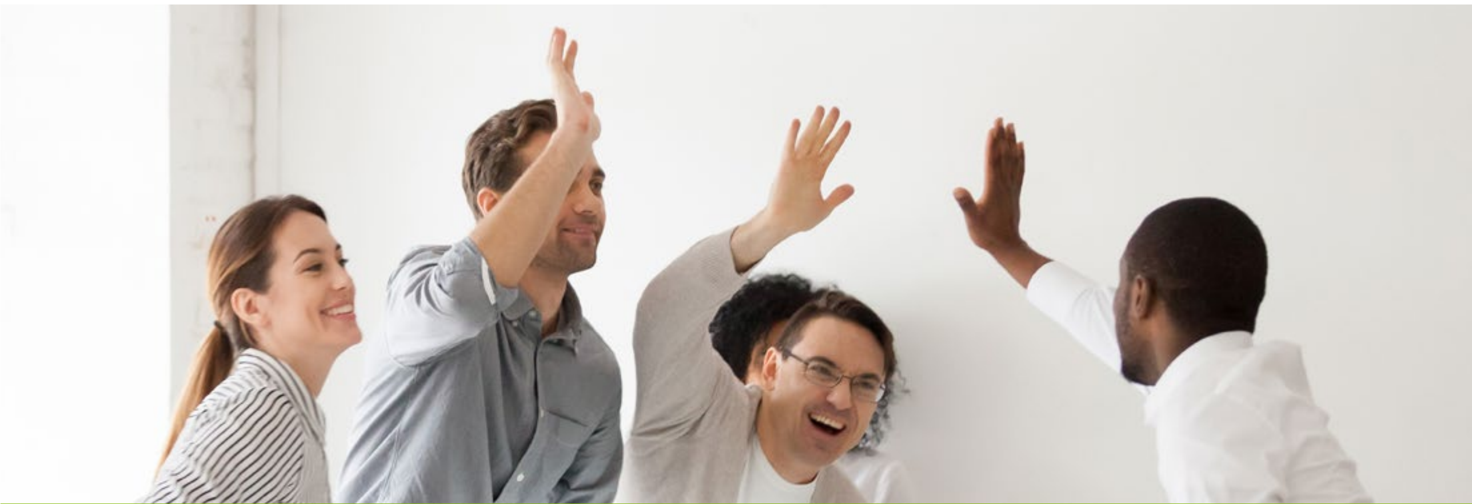
3. "Summarize your prospect's important needs and goals to stay on the same page. This way, you'll discover whether you've forgotten any crucial aspects on time. Moreover, it provides you with new 'munition' to tell your story in the best possible way."

4. "Don't end the conversation with a closed, all-decisive question, such as, 'Do you want to sign the paperwork?' Because if your prospect says "No" at this point, it's extremely difficult to turn his answer into a "Yes" later on. It's better to test things out a bit: ask a question that's only relevant once the deal is closed. If your prospect goes along with your story, he's ready to buy the product. If he hesitates, you know you'll still need to clarify and solve certain issues. Examples of such 'tests' include: 'When our van arrives, will it fit through the barriers?' 'Are the logos saved in a digital format or can we email them?' 'Can we schedule an onboarding in week 14?'

Keywords: ‘consistency,’ ‘structure,’ and ‘sharing’

For sales and marketing to be effective, you need to ensure that both processes seamlessly interconnect. To achieve this, you should consistently create valuable content and monitor who shows interest in your product, so you can follow up on prospects in a timely, effective manner. Keep in mind that sending out a blog every two weeks does not suffice. You should publish and promote additional content (such as whitepapers) and occasionally organize a seminar or webinar. And – this is probably the most important point of all – only hold a sales meeting after you’ve checked whether a lead is BANT-qualified!

A final tip from Jan Willem: “Involve the entire internal organization in marketing. If your employees understand the goal you’re working towards, they will help spread and follow up on content more actively. You will achieve success much faster this way.”



Ready to Boost your Business?

Do you want to get on your target group’s radar? The Boost your Business program is meant for Microsoft Partners that currently do little to nothing about digital marketing. Does this apply to your company? And would you like to get started with radar marketing, but could you use some help? Don’t hesitate to contact us. We’d be happy to discuss your opportunities.

CONTACT US