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Increased Collaboration Helps Sales And Marketers Get Closer to the Customer

By Pepi Sappal

The roles of sales and marketing professionals are changing. The gradual merging of these two functions, and the pressure to target the right audience at the right time from the right platform with the right message, are making these jobs increasingly complex.

According to research by CSO [Chief Sales Officer] Insights, a research firm based in Marin County, Calif., and Boulder, Colo., that specializes in measuring the effectiveness of sales and marketing organizations, the turnover of sales professionals across the U.S. nearly doubled last year to 49.3% from 25.1% in 2004, and it's expected to be even higher this year. Research also reveals it's taking longer for sales staff to become productive.

It seems the same is true for marketing professionals. Research into the changing role and required skills of chief marketing officers (CMOs) by executive search firm Spencer Stuart revealed that the tenure of CMOs has continued to decline this year to an average of just 23 months, a drop of six months since 2004.

More product variations, greater competition and an increasingly savvy and demanding consumer — coupled with an increasing number of platforms from which to reach out to them — has made it harder than ever to win customer attention, and a sale, says Jamie McCann, executive senior partner in executive search firm Lucas Group in Irvine, Calif. "When I started out in the world of advertising, the job of the marketer was easier. Back then there were only a few TV channels, now there are hundreds. And it's the same for print media."

While marketing has traditionally been identified with advertising and promotion, marketers now manage many more platforms. Online offerings, along with the trend toward "alternative marketing" techniques — such as search marketing, viral marketing, text messaging, guerilla marketing (unconventional marketing intended to get maximum results from minimal resources) and word of mouth — have further complicated the mission of marketing and sales professionals. Given such demands, it's no wonder sales and marketing are feeling the pressure.

Aaron Bare, CEO and president of the National Association of Sales Professionals based in Scottsdale, Ariz., attributes high sales turnover to a "lack of training." He says: "Sales executives used

dising are not the only skills required by sales professionals today. "As well as having consultative skills, among others, being able to develop your own leads is becoming a necessity for sales professionals," says Mr. Bare. "Sales professionals are buying guerilla marketing books, which have sold some 14 million copies, to understand what they can do to contribute to lead generation and it is working for some innovative companies."

So sales people as well as marketers need to understand the product and how to reach a target audience more effectively. "They must be able to identify customers perfectly with the right message at the right time," says Mr. McCann. "To get closer to the customer, marketers need to get closer to the sales staff. And so closer links are being forged between the two functions, usually headed by either the sales or marketing director," says Gary Klein, senior partner in the technology, media and telecoms practice of executive search firm Christian & Timbers in New York.

Sales and marketing departments, traditionally under separate functions, used to work at cross-purposes, says Mr. Klein. "But that's changing."

We are definitely seeing a blending of the two roles, says Jose Chao, vice president of travel marketing at Bacardi Travel Retail, based in Miami. "The old adage, 'stack 'em high and let 'em fly,' doesn't apply anymore. It's no longer just about sales and price, but how we give value-added to consumers and tie it into their emotional needs. To do that marketers need to get out from behind the desk and visit markets — traditionally a sales job," says Mr. Chao. "So the team I recruit have a hybrid of both sales and marketing skills — people who are calculated risk takers, innovators and can think outside the box."

Mr. Bare believes this morphing of sales and marketing into one role will increase in the future. "The marketers of the future will be high tech and high touch (messages delivered at the touch of a button). This hybrid sales/marketing professional will understand just as much about demographics as they will about neuro-linguistic programming

London. Ms. Persson is looking for three of these hybrid recruits, but because there are so few out there she helps marketers in her team get that much-needed sales experience, and sales people that vital marketing knowledge. "I'm currently putting two of my sales people on marketing courses as I believe it's up to companies to develop them and help them better do their jobs," she says.

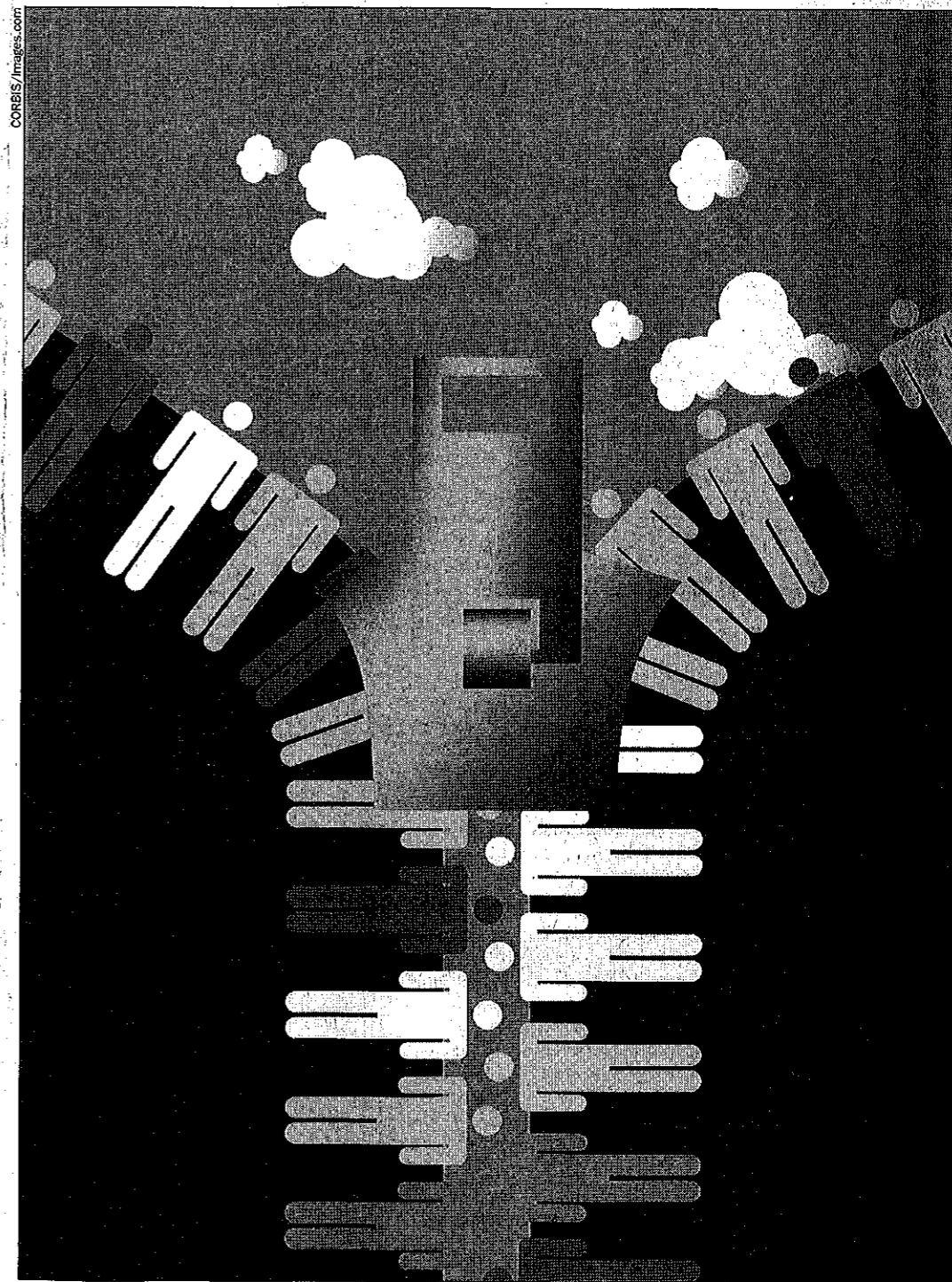
Microsoft Corp., too, has resorted to growing its own talent. "We had a real challenge in recruiting the right people," says David Hamilton, senior director of marketing at Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Wash. "We hire hundreds of marketers every year of which approximately 100 are undergraduates/M.B.A.s, and put them through a training program which includes rotation to other departments."

Microsoft hires three types of marketers: technical marketers who work with engineers on next-generation products; marketing communications generally focusing on strategy; and customer marketers who deal with customers. "So customer

"This hybrid sales/marketing professional will understand just as much about demographics as they will about neuro-linguistic programming and psychology."

marketers would spend a year or so in sales, technical marketers would spend time in engineering, and so on," Mr. Hamilton says. "This way customer marketers develop a deep understanding of customer needs. Time to complete these training programs varies depending on experience, but undergraduates would typically need about three years before they can make an impact.

"Although the technology marketers and marketing communications roles are becoming more specialized, we are seeing more of an integrated team effort between sales and marketing in customer marketing," says Mr. Hamilton. After just three years of this program, Microsoft is already



Both marketing and sales roles are more complex than ever, and so are the demands on those positions. Yet Nancy Costopoulos, CMO at the American Marketing Association based in Chicago, is optimistic. She believes the stature of the new integrated marketing/sales function is increasing. "Marketing drives growth, helps sell products and

like general managers,' says Ms. Costopoulos. "Be collaborative with everyone around you. Spend time in the field with sales to get that customer connection. You need to stay ahead of technological trends. If you make a concerted effort to better articulate your needs to IT, they can create those platforms to better deliver your messages to the right customers."