

Sales Strategy Interview

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June 18, 2023

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**INTRODUCTION**

With the rise of digital technology, businesses face intense competition and strive to remain relevant in their respective industries. This competition is fueled by factors such as easy access to resources and capital, increased customer purchasing power, market entry opportunities, and the availability of substitutes. Companies employ various strategies to provide high-quality services, foster customer loyalty, achieve short and long-term sustainability, and maintain a competitive advantage over rivals. One key strategy that sales managers emphasize is a successful sales strategy process, which involves increasing product availability and building customer relationships.

To gain deeper insights into an effective sales strategy process, I conducted interviews with two sales managers, one from the fnb industry (Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks, India) and another from the retail industry (Pankaj Jain, sales manager at Croma, India). This analysis presents their responses, highlighting their perspectives and aligning them with our coursework based on the broad topics discussed during the interviews.

**Sales and Marketing Alignment**

"Sales and marketing alignment at Starbucks ensures that we are strategically targeting the right customers, delivering relevant messaging, and maximizing sales opportunities," says Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks.

"Croma's success lies in the seamless collaboration between our sales and marketing teams, working together to create compelling campaigns, generate demand, and convert prospects into loyal customers," emphasizes Pankaj Jain, sales manager at Croma.

Both companies recognize the importance of open communication and collaboration between their sales and marketing teams. Regular meetings and discussions are organized, providing a platform for representatives from both departments to share objectives, strategies, and insights. This collaborative approach allows for the alignment of messaging, target audience, and promotional activities. Additionally, both companies utilize collaborative project management tools to ensure real-time visibility into each other's activities and provide timely feedback.

At Starbucks, joint planning sessions and a shared system for tracking leads and customer interactions enable seamless information exchange between the sales and marketing teams. This was exemplified during the successful launch of a new coffee blend, where the marketing team conducted market research, identified the target audience, and created a compelling campaign.

When it comes to measuring effectiveness, Starbucks tracks key performance indicators such as lead-to-customer conversion rates, revenue from marketing-generated leads, and customer feedback. These metrics provide insights into the success of sales and marketing alignment. Although Croma does not specify specific metrics, they highlight improved sales outcomes achieved through successful collaboration in a smartphone product launch campaign.

In summary, both Starbucks and Croma emphasize the importance of sales and marketing alignment through open communication, collaboration, and shared feedback. This alignment ensures strategic targeting, relevant messaging, and maximized sales opportunities, ultimately leading to improved sales outcomes and customer satisfaction (Philip Kotler, 2006).

**Inbound/Outbound Sales Strategy**

"In addition to inbound efforts, our outbound sales strategy at Starbucks involves proactive outreach, personalized engagement, and targeted campaigns to connect with potential customers and drive sales," states Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks.

Croma, as mentioned by sales manager Pankaj Jain, understands the significance of both inbound and outbound sales strategies and utilizes them synergistically to maximize customer reach and drive business growth.

Starbucks, with a focus on inbound sales strategy, aims to create a strong online presence through their website, social media platforms, and online advertising. They attract potential customers through engaging content, targeted advertisements, and optimized search engine visibility. Tactics such as content marketing, email marketing campaigns, and lead capture forms are leveraged to generate leads and prospects. Starbucks also emphasizes personalized communication and relationship-building to convert leads into customers, prioritizing tailored solutions and understanding customer needs.

Croma, on the other hand, acknowledges the importance of determining the balance between inbound and outbound sales strategies based on factors such as the product or service, target market, and customer preferences. They analyze market trends, customer behavior, and historical sales data to identify the most effective mix. Croma highlights the influence of factors such as market saturation, competition, target audience demographics, and the product's lifecycle stage in deciding to focus more on inbound or outbound strategies.

In summary, both Starbucks and Croma recognize the importance of combining inbound and outbound sales strategies based on their respective business needs. Starbucks places emphasis on inbound strategies to attract potential customers through online channels, while Croma highlights the need to analyze factors and strike a balance between inbound and outbound approaches. By incorporating proactive outreach, personalized engagement, and targeted campaigns, both companies aim to connect with potential customers and drive sales effectively (Miller, 2006).

**Customer Profile and Business Models**

"By focusing on customer profiling and aligning our business model with their expectations, Starbucks aims to build lasting relationships and become an integral part of our customers' daily lives," states Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks.

Croma, as mentioned by sales manager Pankaj Jain, acknowledges the significance of customer profiling in developing effective business strategies. They understand that by analyzing customer data and preferences, valuable insights can be gained to shape product offerings, marketing campaigns, and the overall business approach.

Starbucks caters to a diverse customer base, including coffee enthusiasts, professionals seeking convenience, and individuals looking for a comfortable socializing space. They utilize customer segmentation strategies to tailor their marketing and sales approaches for specific customer groups. Croma identifies target customer profiles through surveys, interviews, and data analysis, considering factors such as demographics, psychographics, and behavioral patterns. Starbucks emphasizes adaptability to different customer profiles and business models. They provide comprehensive training to their sales team members to understand the nuances and demands of each customer segment and business model.

Croma focuses on creating detailed buyer personas based on market research and data analysis to guide their marketing and sales strategies, ensuring efforts are directed towards the most promising segments of the market.

Croma provides a specific example of a successful customer profile, the "tech-savvy urban professional" segment. They developed a business model that caters to the preferences of this segment, emphasizing a seamless omnichannel experience with a strong online presence and strategically located physical stores.

Both Starbucks and Croma align with the insights of Steenburgh and Ahearne (2018) by emphasizing the importance of understanding customer profiles, training salespeople effectively, and fostering strategic alignment throughout the organization. These shared principles contribute to their success in driving long-term customer relationships and business growth (Steenburgh & Ahearne, 2018).

**Forecasting, Budgeting, and Territories**

"At Starbucks, we understand the significance of accurate forecasting and budgeting in driving our sales strategy," emphasizes Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks.

Pankaj Jain, sales manager at Croma, highlights their territories strategy, stating, "Our territories strategy at Croma considers factors such as geographic location, customer density, and market potential to ensure balanced workloads and maximize productivity among our sales representatives."

Starbucks takes a collaborative approach, involving input from the sales team, marketing team, and data analytics. They analyze historical sales data, market trends, and external factors to accurately project future sales volumes. This collaborative effort enables them to make informed decisions regarding resource allocation and goal setting. Croma, on the other hand, consider factors such as seasonality, trends, market conditions, and insights from the sales team to make informed forecasts and allocate budgets accordingly.

When it comes to allocating sales territories, both companies consider various factors to ensure fairness and maximize productivity. Starbucks defines territories based on factors such as geographic location, customer density, market potential, and the existing store network. They aim to ensure an equitable distribution of accounts and opportunities among sales team members.

Croma also considers factors such as geographic coverage, existing relationships, skill set, and expertise of the sales representatives, and sales potential when allocating territories. They aim to balance the workload and optimize sales opportunities for the entire team.

Croma emphasizes ongoing skill development and aligning sales representatives' expertise with the specific needs of their territories. By considering factors such as skill set, expertise, and industry experience, they aim to maximize the sales potential within each territory.

Although Starbucks doesn't provide a specific example, Croma highlights a successful instance of effective territory allocation leading to improved sales performance. When expanding into a new region, Croma conducted thorough market research to identify a region with significant growth potential. By strategically allocating territories based on market data, customer demographics, and the expertise of their sales representatives, they were able to leverage existing relationships, tap into new customer segments, and achieve a 40% increase in sales within the first six months of entering the new market.

Both Starbucks and Croma align with the insights provided by the authors of The End of Solution Sales (2012) by recognizing the importance of effective forecasting, budgeting, and territory allocation in optimizing sales performance. They utilize data analysis, market research, and input from their sales teams to make informed decisions in these areas. This aligns with the idea that high-performing reps focus on selling insights and engaging early with customers to offer provocative ideas, as mentioned by the authors. Both companies emphasize collaboration, continuous training, and aligning expertise with territory needs to maximize sales opportunities and achieve their sales objectives.

**Account Management**

"Account management is a key pillar of our sales strategy at Starbucks," highlights Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks. "We believe in building long-term relationships with our customers, and our dedicated account managers play a vital role in ensuring customer satisfaction and identifying upselling or cross-selling opportunities."

Pankaj Jain, sales manager at Croma, shares a successful account management initiative at Croma, stating, "One successful account management initiative at Croma involved proactively proposing a customized product bundle to a customer based on their evolving needs. This resulted in increased sales and a deeper partnership, highlighting the effectiveness of our account management strategy."

Starbucks emphasizes the role of account managers in overseeing customer accounts, nurturing loyalty, and identifying opportunities for upselling or cross-selling. They prioritize active listening, responsiveness, and regular communication to understand evolving customer needs and provide tailored solutions. Account managers also serve as the primary point of contact for customer complaints or issues, working closely with internal teams to resolve them and improve the overall customer experience.

Similarly, Croma places importance on account management by assigning dedicated account managers to key clients. These managers act as trusted advisors, regularly engaging with clients to understand their goals, challenges, and preferences. They provide personalized attention and tailored solutions to address specific needs. Croma focuses on strategies to maintain strong relationships with key accounts, including regular communication, proactive support, value-added services, and relationship-building activities.

Croma describes a successful account management initiative involving a proactive renewal program for software subscription services. By engaging with customers well in advance of their renewal dates, offering personalized renewal packages, and highlighting the value gained, they achieved a high renewal rate, leading to increased customer retention and sales growth.

Both Starbucks and Croma align with the insights of Steenburgh and Ahearne (2018) by recognizing the importance of effective talent management strategies and strategic alignment in account management. They assess the skills of their salespeople systematically, train them for knowledge and resilience, and create psychological profiles of ideal buyers. Additionally, they assign strategic account managers to their most important customers. This alignment ensures that both companies prioritize strong customer relationships and provide personalized attention and tailored solutions to meet customer needs, as emphasized by Steenburgh and Ahearne. By acting as trusted advisors, promptly resolving issues, and identifying upselling opportunities, Starbucks and Croma aim to enhance customer satisfaction, foster loyalty, and drive sales growth.

**Sales software utilization**

"To ensure effective utilization of sales software, we provide comprehensive training to our sales team members," emphasizes Ritika Sharma, sales manager at Starbucks. "We educate them on the features and functionalities of the software and encourage its incorporation into their daily routines."

Similarly, Pankaj Jain, sales manager at Croma, highlights the value of sales software and tools in their sales strategy, stating, "In our sales strategy, we find several sales software and tools valuable for maximizing productivity and effectiveness. These include customer relationship management (CRM) software, sales automation tools, sales analytics platforms, and proposal and contract management tools."

Both Starbucks and Croma recognize the importance of utilizing sales software and tools to support their sales processes and enhance productivity. Starbucks emphasizes the use of customer relationship management (CRM) systems, sales analytics platforms, and collaboration tools to streamline workflows, track customer interactions, and gain valuable insights into sales performance. They provide comprehensive training to their sales team members to ensure effective utilization of the software and encourage its incorporation into their daily routines. Starbucks highlights the positive impact of their CRM system in centralizing customer data, tracking preferences, and identifying upselling or cross-selling opportunities.

Similarly, Croma values sales software and tools such as CRM software, sales automation tools, sales analytics platforms, and proposal/contract management tools. They recognize the significance of CRM software for managing customer data, tracking sales activities, and facilitating communication with prospects and existing customers. Croma ensures effective utilization and adoption of sales software among their sales team through comprehensive training, clear communication of value and benefits, regular feedback, and integration into existing processes. They provide an example of how implementing a sales automation tool for email outreach significantly improved sales productivity, leading to increased efficiency, improved response rates, and enhanced tracking and analytics.

Both Starbucks and Croma align with the findings discussed in the mentioned research (Jelinek, Ronald, 2013) by recognizing that the utilization of sales software alone is not sufficient to drive long-term improvements in sales performance. They understand that simply motivating the use of sales software is not the key to achieving enhanced effectiveness. Instead, they prioritize additional factors such as training, integration, and monitoring of software tools. By considering the empirical findings and best practices outlined in the research, Starbucks and Croma align their approach to sales software utilization with the aim of maximizing sales effectiveness and efficiency.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the interviews with sales managers from Starbucks and Croma highlight the importance of sales and marketing alignment, integration of inbound and outbound sales strategies, customer profiling, accurate forecasting and budgeting, effective territory allocation, strategic account management, and the utilization of sales software and tools. Both companies prioritize collaboration, customer focus, training, and strategic alignment within their organizations. These strategies contribute to their success in targeting the right customers, maximizing sales opportunities, building lasting relationships, and achieving their sales objectives in a competitive business environment.

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