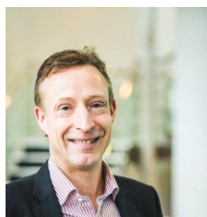


Why Marketing is essential in your KAM strategy



An interview with Mike Green, Director of Business Development, Capita Modular People Solutions

Key account managers play a leading role in managing the relationship between client and internal stakeholders. A complex skillset including communications, influencing, sales ability, project management, strategic focus and numeracy are vital KAM competencies. Yet the reality is a key account manager cannot deliver retention and growth without deploying other strategic competencies in the organisation. According to Mike Green, Director of Business Development at Capita Modular People Solutions, this is why collaboration with the Marketing function is so pivotal to KAM strategy.

Mike has held KAM responsibilities for over 30 years in multi-national organisations including American Express, PwC and GE Capital. By integrating KAM and Marketing teams and strategies, he has been responsible for increasing retention and delivering cross-fertilisation among his customer bases.

Aligning KAM and Marketing

Every key account has a set of strategic objectives defined for a specific period. The key account manager gathers knowledge and insight into the customer organisation and collaborates with client stakeholders to align needs and goals with those of their own company. Thus, the key account manager creates a key account strategic plan.

But as Mike Green explains, the Marketing team also formulates strategic objectives. This is where alignment is key. “Account-based marketing (ABM) has become the

basis of strategic marketing for key accounts.” But he observes: “The challenge for many organisations is that the KAM and Marketing functions operate in silos. This is so wasteful as neither side benefits from the strengths and knowledge of the other. And most importantly, the customer experience is poorer.”

Mike has developed an approach over the years that brings KAM and Marketing together to serve the greater good of the customer. “Key account managers provide so much insight into a customer’s needs, organisational structure, decision-making systems and more. The Marketing specialists understand how to design propositions and communications effectively for each level within the customer hierarchy. A key account manager simply cannot do everything. As a team, the two can deliver a fully cohesive and relevant strategy for a key account.”

Finally, the key account manager’s plans become integrated with those of the ABM team to create one organisational Key Account Strategic Plan. “Both sides need to leave their egos at the door, but by collaborating effectively our results improve significantly for all stakeholders,” says Green.

How technology helps marketing communications

In large, complex organisations, it is challenging for colleagues to understand the relationship each part of their business has with a key account. Can technology help? “Definitely. We use Salesforce as a traditional CRM for developing sales opportunities. But we needed a tool for managing key account relationships within the platform. For example, we may provide three or four services to a high street bank. It is essential we communicate in a congruent way, identify opportunities based on shared knowledge and ensure everyone within Capita

understands the strategic importance of that account. It was becoming impossible to do this without the right technology solution.”

So how did Capita solve this problem? “We integrated DemandFarm, an account planning and relationship intelligence software into Salesforce and now have a highly effective system for recording customer activity across all divisions. The Marketing team can design an ABM strategy based on visibility of the whole client relationship. Furthermore, DemandFarm also details the client organisational structure, allowing our marketing team to produce more relevant communications for every level.”

How marketing communications can open doors

Mike is quick to separate the activities of Sales and KAM. However, he believes key account managers must possess sales skills to deliver their strategic objectives. But a skilful marketer can often enhance those skills. He provides a good example: “My business has been building a major HR Transformation proposition. I became aware of an HR Director of a well-known insurance business who was publicly discussing his ideas about behavioural change and nudge theory. My ABM specialist researched all his output, absorbed his approach, and crafted a tailored communications strategy. As a result, we got a meeting with him to develop the conversation about aligning our HR Transformation proposition with his behavioural change goals.”

Equally marketing can support the battle against customer attrition. “At American Express, I had a large portfolio of SME accounts, a percentage of whom were continually reviewing alternative suppliers. My marketing

Why Marketing is essential in your KAM strategy (continued)

team built an algorithm to analyse customer spending patterns, identified those likely to switch, and created interventions that had significant impact on our attrition rates. This experience carries into key accounts. Again, we analyse customer behaviour, helping key account managers identify threats and delivering apposite messages to improve client perception and sentiment.”

Mike has edited a list of forty down to ten, bringing necessary focus to those customers, allowing greater concentration of effort, and understanding of ROI for the investment in time and money. Accounts on the list are not merely the largest revenue generators. He is continually looking for the ‘stars’ within his portfolio with the potential to drive significant growth.

There are further issues here for the relationship between KAM and Marketing. “ABM for global accounts tends to sit where the client HQ is located. Often that is the US but can also be European based. Sometimes that can make creating targeted communication strategies difficult. We strive to allow local KAM and Marketing teams space and responsibility to support that activity. Of course, team communication is another area we manage carefully. Setting up internal account calls is logistically challenging given the number of time-zones involved, across EMEA and the US.”



Collaborating to drive growth

How can a supplier convert a list of major yet transactional clients, into a portfolio of engaged accounts utilising services from across its organisation? That is a challenge that Capita has been working on for the last few years.

What is Mike doing to address this issue? “With so many customers taking just one service from us, I identified an opportunity to build joint propositions with other parts of our business. For instance, my division provides technical graduates to support client projects by delivering project management and business analysis skills. Our service means a customer has no need to employ additional heads. Another of our divisions designs technical and digital transformation processes for our clients. I reached out to create a proposition that not only offered the transformation process but also the technical graduate resource to add implementation and professional services delivery to ensure success. This has been well-received, internally and externally.”

Identifying key accounts is vital.

And does Marketing have a role to play here? “Yes, a valuable one. The Marketing team analyses the customer base, reviews key targets both at client and contact level, and works with the key account managers to design a communication process that makes the proposition come alive for our customers.” Mike says this is changing the culture within Capita, breaking down silos and putting collaboration at the heart of KAM.

The challenge of global accounts

Global accounts provide an additional layer of complexity to the account management mix. Does Mike think it is possible to provide an integrated approach to a global account? “In most cases, no. Multi-nationals rarely organise themselves in a centralised way. Each region, down to country level, has different regulations, tax laws, cultural differences and more. There are exceptions. Professional services companies like KPMG and PwC have a degree of global alignment but mostly, we manage Key Accounts at a local level.”

The KAM/Marketing vision

Mike believes that functional structures are less important in delivering his collaborative vision. More fundamental is a customer-centric philosophy across the business. If the organisation genuinely values its customers and wants to do its best for them, more meaningful collaboration ensues. Mike believes the KAM should lead an organisational team that includes Marketing and where necessary, Operations, Finance, and IT too. He also encourages his Marketing team to build relationships with their client counterparts to further strengthen key account relationships.

Most importantly, he believes if organisations want to build successful key account relationships, they must be prepared to listen and always be answerable to those customers. It is clear that by bringing KAM and ABM together as he does, the ability to achieve strategic goals on both sides becomes ever greater.

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