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# The 57% Gap: Curing a Content Marketer's Nightmare

Today's buyers aren't seeking out sales reps early on, they're waiting until after they've done their research and are further along in the buying process—57% of the way to the decision.

What can you do to fill the 57% gap?

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# The 57% Gap: Curing a Content Marketer's Nightmare

*When Corporate Executive Board published its 2011 study showing that corporate technology buyers were 57% of their way to a decision before ever engaging a sales rep, everything changed for marketers.*

Until then, you could still assume that the rep played a critical role in disseminating basic information about your product—sales tools, leave behinds, and printed packets were essential, as were the actual sales presentations and discussions. Marketing's goal was to get the rep into discussions, and the rep would pretty much take the sale from there.

But this groundbreaking research demonstrated that buyers are increasingly finding the information they need without reps, and they are making more and more of their decision without the service of the sales rep mediating the relevant information. While they still need a rep, they don't need one until the prospect is much further along in their process—57% of the way to the decision. While this new reality raises many questions, the most important for the marketer is this: ***What are you doing to fill the 57% gap?***

In the old days, marketing could simply generate leads with low levels of qualification or propensity to buy, and it was good enough. The gap that marketing filled was only 10-15% of the decision; sales took it the rest of the way. In today's world, the buyer is already 57% of the way to a decision, and if you as a marketer have not influenced the customer, your competition has. In other words, the buyer's framework and selection criteria are being established by your competition, and that means your rep has to compete on terms defined by the competitor. *That's the nightmare.*

The challenge for marketers is guiding the customer so they are 57% of the way complete to deciding to buy ***your solution!*** That means creating, cultivating, and maintaining an information relationship with the prospective customer, and sending them to sales when they are ready.

## Closing the Gap—the Next Wave for Content Marketers

Until now, many content marketers were already out with content disseminated through the various digital channels. White papers and webinars were developed, and the best ones addressed specifics of the situations in which customers found themselves. For most, the goal was to develop trust and credibility with the customer, and the biggest challenge seemed to be getting them to open the content. In the old 10% model, the idea was that if a prospect opened something, reps would call them almost immediately assuming they were a lead. Then, it was the rep's job to nurture that lead into an eventual sale.

## Knowing How Customers Buy

The 57% gap refers to what customers are doing during that presale phase where they get well over half way to a decision. It is no longer enough to know your customer's interests and profile. It is no longer enough to know their workflow and build products that meet the needs of their



work. It is no longer enough to build trust by providing content they want. Today, the digital content marketer needs to understand the actual buying process the customer is going through, and match the content provided to that process.

There is really only one way to understand the customer buying process, and that's to ask them. This is a new kind of market research that is not about profiling customers or studying their workflow or environment for the purpose of building better product. Instead, this research is specific to understanding the **process they use to buy**, and all the information needed to fulfill that process.

Research that answers these questions is sometimes called customer engagement research, and it typically asks different questions than traditional market research. For example:

- How do customers find the information they need?
- What information does the buyer need as they separate offers during that 57% window?
- When do they need it? Is there a sequence to the questions they ask?
- Who else gets involved and when?

It is really about understanding the decision making process so that the marketer can better serve that process. This insight into customer decision making enables a profound transformation in what the marketer can do, and the proper engagement of it creates huge benefits to the marketer.

## Transformational Benefits

By answering these questions with research, the marketer is empowered to create content systems that accomplish several key goals:

- Establish a thought-frame in the customer's mind for assessing options
- Identify better qualified leads with a higher propensity to buy
- Address known concerns and objections before they are raised
- Provide information that supports the internal decision making process

In other words, you can deeply influence the customer during the 57% gap, and select those that are most likely to buy for transition over to the sales rep. The development of systems meeting these goals requires detailed thought and analysis, but it is always based on the science of understanding the customer buying process. To learn more about the benefits of customer engagement research, contact Tony Signorelli at: [tony@signorelli.biz](mailto:tony@signorelli.biz).

## About Signorelli

Signorelli Consulting Group, Inc., is an innovative leader in customer engagement, marketing effectiveness, and sales optimization. Using tools such as customer research, field organization assessment, process mapping, workflow analysis, customer journey mapping, and industry leading sales training methods, Signorelli helps corporate leaders get the most out of their sales force. From executive sales leadership, to product marketers and call center managers, clients rely on Signorelli to bring the insights necessary to keep their sales forces in line with the needs of a rapidly changing market. Find us on the web at: [www.signorelli.biz](http://www.signorelli.biz).

