

# Four Keys to Cultivating a Winning AR for Sales Program

Industry analysts wield incredible influence on the IT purchasing cycle within many enterprises. Analysts directly engage with IT and business decision-makers by providing procurement recommendations, vetting shortlists and advising on contract negotiations. Having recognized the influence that industry analysts can hold on IT buying decisions, the challenge technology vendors often face is how to best leverage that analyst-buyer relationship, thereby improving the use of analyst relations (AR) resources and outcomes in their sales operations.

### **The Impact of the Analyst on Enterprise Buying Decisions**

A 2007 independent study, commissioned by Microsoft Corp.<sup>1</sup> and titled “The ITDM Perspective on Industry Analysts,” highlighted the industry analyst’s impact on IT decision-makers. Surveying 800 IT decision-makers across the U.S., Western Europe, India, Australia and New Zealand, the study found analysts to be valuable sources of information for customers, trailing only “internal research” and “discussions with colleagues and vendors” in importance.

Results also showed that more than four-fifths of IT buyers included a vendor for consideration based on analyst opinion and cited analysts in a business case in the past year. Likewise, half of IT decision-makers excluded a vendor from consideration in a selection process based on analyst opinion.

Other research confirms the crucial role that analysts play, from swaying opinion to providing in-depth reviews. A large WE technology client reports that two-thirds of its IT decision-makers believe that analyst opinion “makes a real difference” in whether buyers select its products. In addition, more than 70 percent of decision-makers say they are more likely to purchase a product from this client based on research findings and counsel from analyst firms such as Gartner Inc. and Forrester Research Inc.

Numbers like these underscore the point that industry analysts serve as trusted procurement advisors to your customers. Most major technology vendors formally incorporate feedback and advice from the analyst community into marketing campaigns aimed at shaping market perceptions. What many AR programs often lack, however, is a systematic and effective alignment of AR with sales. Because analyst influence with IT decision-makers runs so high, developing a powerful AR program that ties in directly with your sales efforts is the sensible thing to do.

The AR programs that WE designs and implements are targeted at driving the greatest positive impact on our clients’ business objectives. And today, more than ever, a successful AR program is defined by its ability to increase our clients’ competitiveness and success in the field. To help you tap into this opportunity, we’ve outlined the four essentials of a winning AR for Sales program.

<sup>1</sup> The ITDM Perspective on Industry Analysts

# The Four Pillars of a Winning AR for Sales Program

**As you formalise your AR for Sales strategy, keep these four building blocks in mind:**

## One — Evangelize

The first pillar of a strong AR for Sales program is evangelism. Identify and actively cultivate advocates within your organization to help stakeholders recognize the value that AR brings. Educate sales and marketing executives about the intersection between fostering strategic connections with analysts and the effect it can have on buyers' decisions. Demonstrate to the sales force how cultivating analyst support can assist in reaching quarterly sales goals.

### **Tactics to consider:**

- Embark on a “listening tour” with the sales organization to assess current knowledge and understanding of analysts and their impact on IT buying decisions.
- Create educational materials, including info packs, data points and slide decks, to share with internal audiences.
- Use these materials at field meetings and events to promote your AR for Sales program and further engage with sales teams.
- Create a podcast to educate the field on the impact analysts have and how to best integrate AR and sales strategies.

## Two — Assist

The second pillar of a successful AR for Sales program centers on assisting internal partners in making use of analyst feedback and opinion. Provide personalized assistance to select account teams by identifying and sharing supportive analyst evidence — data points, quotes, reports, etc. — to help them be more competitive and win deals.

### **Tactics to consider:**

- Conduct meetings with leads in your sales organization to determine where deal assistance is needed and warranted.
- Get access to the customer relationship management (CRM) database to track sales cycles and identify support opportunities.
- Determine proactive approaches for accounts in escalation.
- Begin regular outreach to account teams, providing analyst evidence to support specific sales situations. Examples: competitive battle cards, top report summaries, and inquiry and consulting insights.
- Put in place a rapid-response structure to provide personalized assistance to incoming requests.

## Three — Enable

The third pillar of a powerful AR for Sales program addresses sales enablement. Help the sales team compete more successfully by programmatically providing relevant analyst reports, insights and data points. These resources equip the sales team to translate key findings into effective sales strategies. Develop distribution platforms and processes to ensure that the sales force has easy access to vetted data.

### Tactics to consider:

- Establish a field-oriented AR internal Web presence. Contents can include customer-ready reprints of positive analyst reports, pre-approved analyst quotes, data points and statistics, as well as competitive analysis. Include AR guidance and talking points for negative reports.
- Create partnerships to share content with existing field assistance or sales excellence programs.
- Ensure that analyst insights, updates on analyst research and quotes in the media are frequently communicated with the field.

## Four — Feedback Loop

The fourth pillar concerns establishing a consistent feedback loop with your marketing and communications teams. As you integrate AR with Sales, work with analysts to gather valuable customer feedback on your company's products and services. This feedback will lead to better audience understanding and can be applied to results in better targeted marketing and communications campaigns.

**TIP:** Embarking on an AR for Sales program can be an overwhelming undertaking. The size of an AR team will usually pale compared with the size of your sales organization, and personalized sales assistance does not always scale well. Set yourself up for success by kicking off with an AR for Sales pilot program. You can focus, for example, on a product set or specific technology where analyst evidence is abundant and/or mostly positive.

# Conclusion

There is little doubt that the AR function in most vendor organizations has come a long way over the past 10 years. Analysts have the power to dramatically impact sales by driving product recommendations, ratings and research. Today, the key to optimization of AR resources is to devise a program that better aligns AR with sales, leveraging the analyst relationships that are carefully built and the analyst evidence that is hard-won, to help the sales force be more competitive and, eventually, win more deals.

# Contact Us

WE's Global **Analyst Relations Practice** helps clients navigate and effectively access the analysts who shape market opinion and customer buying decisions in their industry. Applying a unique AR methodology grounded in client business priorities, we engage target analysts to deliver impactful results that support sales and empower broader communications and marketing initiatives. Our integrated AR strategies help to influence perception and drive recommendations that lead to better business outcomes for our clients.

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