

An interview with Bev Burgess, Director, The Capsicum Group

## Key Account Management: Marketing's Impact. - An interview with Bev Burgess, Director, The Capsicum Group



Recently, SI interviewed Bev Burgess, a B2B services growth specialist, on the topic of marketing's role in Key Account Management (KAM) programs. Bev is director of UK-based consultancy The Capsicum group, and a recognized expert in the process of applying strategic marketing insight to grow key account. She has assisted many technology-based corporations across Europe successfully implement an account-based marketing (ABM) model.

Bev gained wide recognition for her marketing acumen in the technology sector through the book that she co-authored in 2010 titled "*Marketing Technology as a Service*". More recently, she published an article in *Velocity*, the Strategic Account Management Association's members' magazine, titled "*Steria: Why Account Managers Need Strategic Marketing*", which described her experiences in working with one of Europe's largest technology-enabled business process outsourcing companies.

Matt Leary, a Principal at SI and an expert in KAM and ABM, recently had an opportunity to talk with Bev about her opinions on the importance of selling high value solutions through KAM programs.

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*SI: In our recent Key Account Management research study done in conjunction with the Hult International Business School, we discovered that many of the top programs had dedicated marketing resources for key accounts. These are difficult times for marketing budgets -- in your view, what are the biggest benefits to an organization that puts scarce marketing resource "eggs" in a few key account baskets?*

**Bev:** For many large B2B organizations it is the 80/20 rule. The impact of a few accounts on the business is significant enough to warrant the investment -- and the fact is that, in this environment, the revenue from those accounts must be protected and nurtured for a firm's survival. It's the same issue as deciding whether to have any other type of resource dedicated to an account -- from commercial through programme management to account directors themselves. For example, some accounts warrant an account director while others could be managed by a service delivery manager. Marketing can have an impact at the strategic level by leveraging their research and intelligence to help sales and management with key account prioritization—deciding which accounts should have marketing or other resources allocated to them.

Once the decision is made to allocate a marketing resource, their contribution needs to be more than just campaign-based. We need to look past our traditional view of marketing as simply a "marcom shop" and bring the full marketing mix to bear to the account.



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**SI:** *You are passionate about marketing working with key account managers to build custom value propositions for each key account – what is the best approach in your view of balancing the positioning of a firm's broad horizontal solutions with the account teams need to target value for specific key accounts?*

**Bev:** Well, you're right – it's important to balance what's important for specific key accounts vs. the need to sell what's "on the truck". First and foremost, marketing needs to work with sales to completely map the key accounts' business and technical needs against the company's portfolio and see what they already buy, what the account has bought from other solutions providers, and what is currently being done in-house.

Once that picture is clear, the next step is to review the issues and priorities of the account and think creatively about what can be built to solve the issues it faces either with existing or new solutions – this means working with people from other parts of your company or other companies/partners.

For example, I was working with a large IT service player and looking at the issues faced by one of its telecommunications clients. Once we clearly understood what the client already bought, we explored its issues and priorities through desk research and interviews with executives in the business. We then ran a workshop with capability leads from the IT services company, innovation specialists and account managers of other telecoms clients around the world. This led not only to some straightforward opportunities of cross selling the existing portfolio, but also to the development of a new value proposition, drawing on the capability of another country's operation, to solve the client's pressing need to do more with less in the back office.

Marketing should be the catalyst to generate the right customer information through research and get the right people in the room together to analyze the customer's needs, leading to a comparison of these needs against the company's portfolio.

**SI:** *Doing the research and getting the right people together is one thing – but how does marketing help determine the value it can deliver to the customer?*

**Bev:** This is where marketing can really be a great asset in a KAM program. Let's face it -- top account managers need to constantly service the account and look for new opportunities. They often don't have the time and resources to do the homework that is needed.

Marketing can help here by reviewing all existing information on the account held by the account team (including everything relating to the current service and relationship) then supplementing this information with desk research about the account, its industry and its key people.

The account team needs to get a clear view of what is actually going on, what is keeping people awake at night, and to which other suppliers the account is talking to try and solve its problems. To do this, they need to speak to the delivery team of the service provider to understand the day-to-day service, relationships and issues, and then to a



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range of executives in the account. Remember – the delivery team is on customer site, sometimes daily!

Pulling all of this information together allows you to analyze the “sweet spots” where the account has an issue, and the supplier has a competitive capability that can deliver value. It also shows who the account team should work with in the account to develop the thinking around the solution further.

In my experience, when the research interviews with a client are focused on business discussions that explore how both parties can continue to get additional value from a relationship, the account executives are happy to share their views and are also then keen to stay involved in shaping the solutions and value that can be delivered.

***SI:** Another key finding from our KAM study — closely linked to marketing — is companies are making a significant investment in customer engagement activities that gain them access to the decision makers of key accounts. In your experience, what can marketing do to expand engagement with the top decision makers in key accounts? What works?*

**Bev:** In order to expand engagement with them, marketing should create content-rich materials or events that help executives with issues they are facing.

Ideally, this will include demonstrating that the supplier understands a key issue, perhaps with new thinking or research around the issue, and then stories of how others have approached it. It’s human nature to want to listen and learn from someone who understands your problems and can share stories of what other companies have done in the same situation.

Combined with this, marketers can help their technical colleagues to articulate the value of their own solution to the client’s problem – *using the client’s language and not their own*. Marketing can help them be very clear on why the client would buy from their own company and not a competitor, highlighting the company’s differentiators and the benefits the client receives from those differentiators.

This seems so obvious and yet takes care and thought, and is rarely done well. Bringing the solution to life through powerful messaging, interactive demonstrations, creative process presentations are other ways that marketing can help to make solutions engaging for client executives.

***SI:** As marketing takes a highly focused role in top accounts, how do you measure marketing’s success in these efforts compared to traditional broad-based marketing programs?*

**Bev:** In short, the measurement of success has to be in business terms rather than marketing measures, although marketing measures such as brand awareness, campaign response rates, web visits and downloads of white papers are useful to the marketing team.

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Business managers want to see increased opportunities to spend time with decision makers, pipeline growth, higher cross-selling rates, and improved customer satisfaction.

In my experience with several of these programs, a quarterly review that includes three simple dashboards on all key accounts is essential to make sure the program is relevant and effective:

1. Revenues, orders and forward pipeline;
2. Contracts and opportunities across the portfolio (including where competitors have contracts in the accounts);
3. The status of the relationship with key stakeholders and the next planned contact.

***SI:** Many of our clients and readers are interested in growing their solutions business. Do you see marketing's involvement with KAM programs as particularly helpful in selling these complex, high value offerings?*

**Bev:** A successful KAM program is essential in selling complex, high value offerings. It's very different from a high volume, lower value business where you can afford to take a broad-brush approach. If you contact enough people in more of a mass-market marketing program, where you're typically selling lower value products, there will inevitably be some that you hit at the right time who want what you have to offer – it's essentially a numbers game.

When you are selling a solution that will transform a client's business, such as making a retailer or bank fully integrated across multiple channels, you'll need a different, highly targeted and nuanced approach. It requires a deep understanding the client's business – and marketing can help deliver that when working closely with the account team.

Complex solutions generally have a long sales cycle, and success depends upon steady and constant relationship building and the management of numerous stakeholders. The average account team often will not have enough "shoe leather" – the time and energy supplied by senior sales reps -- to manage that. In key account programs, marketing can keep the dialogue going and the supplier front of mind to leverage that shoe leather.

***SI:** Solutions selling often requires that a company co-sell with partner organizations in order to deliver what the customer needs. If marketing is a strong catalyst for key account program, how does it involve key partners in the planning process?*

**Bev:** It depends on the nature of the partnership. In a well-defined partner program, where each company's contribution is already clear and the client engagement is agreed, then it's a good idea to include the partner from the beginning of the planning process.

Marketing can help establish the joint agreement to build business inside top accounts as part of the partnership program. Partner coordination with account teams should include sharing target lists and organizational reach inside an account, sharing insights



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into the account's situation, and mapping the right vertical or horizontal solutions to help solve an account's top challenges.

For example, I worked on a program for a large IT services firm focused around smart metering solutions. This firm had the solutions concept to solve the problem, but marketing had to reach out to the mobile communications partner as well as bespoke software and specialist hardware partners to pull the approach together for major utility accounts. That was all done in the account planning process.

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Whether driving account research, helping expand engagement with key customer executives or driving the adoption of complex solutions, Bev's feedback and experience certainly support our research findings that marketing is essential to the success of KAM programs.

Many thanks to Bev for the time and the great insights -- [Matt Leary](#)

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**Check out SI's recent posts on KAM programs:**



- [Solutions Marketing: 8 Critical Success Factors for Protecting and Growing your Best Accounts](#)
  - [Solutions Marketing and ABM: Recommendations for making them work well together](#)
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