Sales and Marketing: Better Together

A Workbook for Better Aligning SaaS Sales and Marketing Efforts Through PR

BLASTmedia

Introduction

Sales and Marketing: Better Together

Whether the discussion centers around lead quality, buyer personas or content, there seems to be a never-ending battle between sales and marketing departments — including those at SaaS companies — to stay aligned.

The area of contempt over content typically stems from the sales team's frustration that what is created by the marketing team does not align with the conversations they are having with prospects. On the other side, marketers are, in turn, frustrated that the content they are creating is not being used by sales.

So, what to do?

Would you believe that public relations, a function your team (hopefully) already has in place, can help bridge that divide? To begin aligning sales and marketing efforts through PR, you have to first understand what resources you have and how to best leverage them.

What You'll Learn

In this two-part workbook, we will address:

- How marketers at SaaS companies can involve sales to generate content ideas that fuel thought-leadership pieces to pitch to the media.
- How sales teams can leverage media coverage that actually speaks to their buyer, creating additional touchpoints with prospects.

We'll also provide you with resources, including:

- A worksheet to use when story-mining with your sales team
- Samples emails to use when sharing media coverage with prospects at different stages of the SaaS buyer journey
- Examples of how the sales team and others can use media coverage on social media

Let's dig in!

Part 1
How to Work With Sales to Drive Marketing Content

When it comes to content, the sales team is rarely using the content that the marketing team is creating. In fact, according to data from eMarketer, 90% of content developed for sales is never used in selling.

Why? In most cases, sales teams don't believe the content developed by marketers speaks to their prospects in the right way, or it fails to address the common objections uncovered in the sales process. Ultimately, reps need content that can be used in leveling up or otherwise elevating sales conversations, and it's important to marketers that content stays on message, designed to help generate qualified leads.

The good news? Sales people can be great marketers. Seeking input from your sales team can yield ideas for quality thought-leadership content that will resonate with the media, the people on the front lines of customer acquisition, and prospects.

So, as a marketer, how do you go about creating thought leadership pieces that can be used by your sales team? Start with asking the right questions.

Asking the Right Questions: Story Mining

Let's begin by defining thought leadership. A thought leader is an individual or organization that is recognized as an authority in a specialized field. When it comes to PR, this often takes on the form of guest posts published by the media (sometimes called contributed content bylined articles or bylines), executive quotes in industry articles, speaking opportunities, or a host of other resources that educate and inform. These thought-leadership opportunities position your SaaS company — and those who lead it — as experts, and can be used not only in sales conversations, but also to help achieve marketing goals.

While a story mining session with key executives within your organization are a great source of information, they're not the only resources at your disposal. If you are looking to get to the root of why prospects buy and create content that speaks to the pain points that your SaaS solution addresses, start with setting up a conversation with your sales leaders.

Story mining is exactly what it sounds like: speaking to someone with the goal of uncovering information, commentary or perspective about your industry/customers that can help shape a story. To get you started, we'll begin with sharing the questions we most often ask sales leaders from our clients:

Five Questions to Ask Your Sales Team

Work with your sales team lead(s) to answer the following questions. After the answers are collected, we'll then walk you through how these answers can drive topics for potential thought-leadership pieces.

1) Why do prospects purchase our solution over the competition?

Having a clear sense of your strengths and differentiators (both real and perceived) is essential to understanding how to position your solution to prospects. Keep in mind - the answer should not be a comparison of features, but rather the unique benefits as to why prospects buy.

2) Why do we lose?

It's important to be honest about the things your competitors do better. An understanding of your weaknesses provides an opportunity to address them up front.

3) What are the top three customer pain points that our product solves?

You can't be everything to everyone. Identify the most common pain points of your prospects and define your target audience. This approach will help you craft a message that speaks most directly to their interests and needs.

4) What are the common questions and objections you receive?

Asking about common questions or objections from prospects ties in with the previous question. It further drills down on your core audience: if you have a solid understanding of potential hangups for prospects, you can develop campaigns that directly respond to those issues up front.

5) What's an interesting trend or shift in buyer habits you've observed in the industry in the past year?

Your team should already be keeping a finger on the pulse of your industry, so why not talk about the trends those on the front lines are seeing? Ask them what they think: do they believe the trend will have a lasting impact? Or is it a passing fad? Are they trying to steer the company into the current, or are they more interested in going against the grain? Get the details: what's driving the new trend? What benefit is it bringing to your target market? If they think the industry is moving in the wrong direction, have them explain their reasons why. They're the experts—make sure they share their expertise.

Turning Sales Feedback into Story Angles

After holding a story-mining session with your sales team lead(s), you now have information that can be reshaped and formatted into topics for thought leadership pieces. It might not be obvious on what to do next, so here is how to use the answers to develop story angles that can ultimately be pitched to the media as guest posts.

Question Asked: *Why do prospects purchase our solution over the competition?*

Asking why prospects buy can uncover your strengths and differentiators that can be highlighted in thought leadership. For example, if you play in the compliance space and your sales team tells you that the reasons prospects buy are security, scalability and reliability, then you can write a piece titled "The Three Most Important Factors In Choosing A Third-Party Compliance Platform." This thought leadership piece helps educate prospects about what to consider before buying and, while the piece doesn't talk about your solution directly, it points to your top three differentiators as the primary consideration pillars.

Question Asked: *Why do we lose?*

Unlike "why do prospects purchase our solution over the competition?," which can directly point to something you want to highlight in thought leadership, asking about why your sales team is losing uncovers weaknesses. Those weaknesses may be something you need to address as a larger team (outside of marketing), but they might also present opportunities to combat misconceptions or concerns using thought leadership. For example:

- Maybe you're losing because your prospects are resistant to the perceived headaches of change and innovation, sticking instead with legacy, self-built systems. In this instance, crafting a thought leadership piece talking the "build vs. buy" dilemma (highlighting, of course, the benefits of the "buy" choice) or "when it's time to move on from legacy systems" can help open prospects' minds to the idea of innovating through technology.

- Maybe you're losing because prospects don't realize you have a certain set of features that address a given pain point. In that case, consider developing a piece of thought leadership content that addresses that given pain point (see the next question for more on addressing pain points) or a piece of content that explores a specific aspect of the solution in more detail.

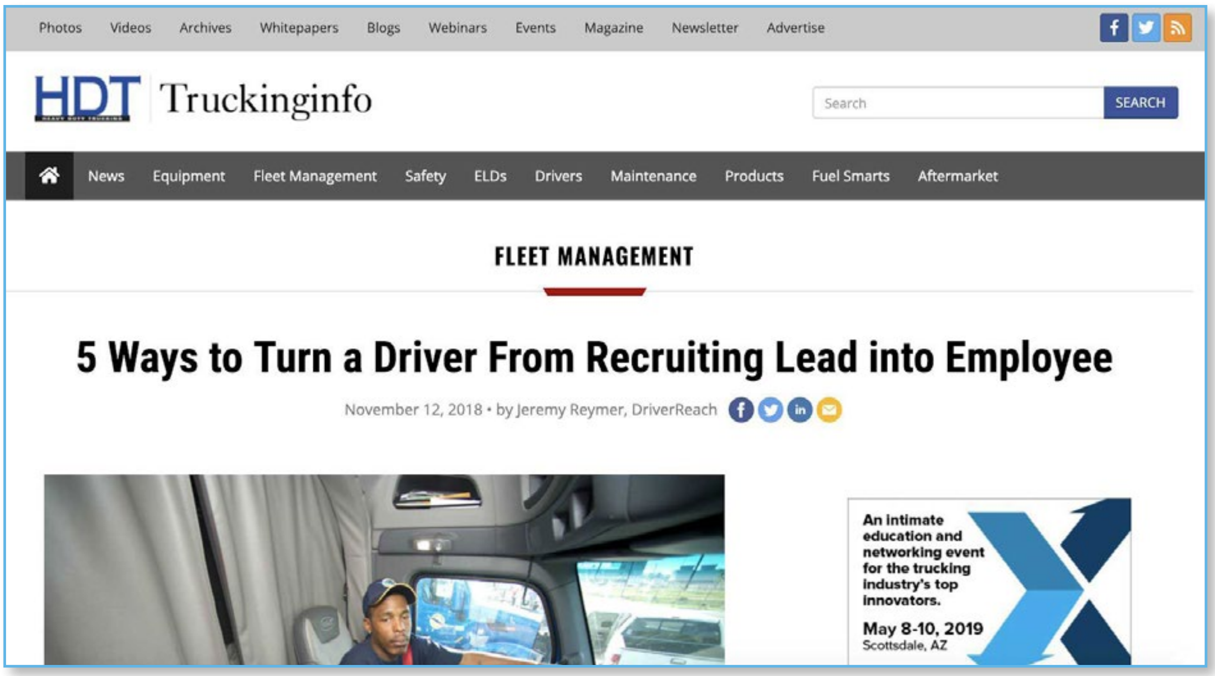
- Perhaps lost deals can be attributed to a lack of overall brand awareness vs. larger-name competitors who (right or wrong) have built-in "trust" due to their size. While you can't change the size of your company quickly, you can change your perception. Securing media coverage is an industry stamp of approval by a trusted third party, and being featured in a respected media outlet adds instant credibility. The next time a prospect searches your company, seeing your CEO featured in Forbes or your CTO writing about industry trends in InformationWeek establishes trust as a first touchpoint.

Regardless of what you uncover by asking your sales team "why do we lose," a clear understanding of your weaknesses can help to provide direction.

Question Asked: *What are the top three customer pain points that our product solves?*

When it comes to creating thought leadership content, addressing a struggle your prospects share that your product solves is an ideal starting point. For instance, if you are a healthcare tech company and prospects are concerned about complying with new industry regulations, you could use that information to write a piece about the latest ISO regulations, "6 Best Practices for Complying with ISO 13485:2016" and pitch to healthcare trade media. Once the article is secured, use it as a first or follow-up touchpoint with prospects to add value without pushing the product.

We asked our client, DriverReach, about customer pain points solved by the SaaS company's mobile-enabled recruiting system for hiring CDL drivers. After uncovering that trucking companies are struggling to move drivers down the hiring funnel once they've applied, our team developed a bylined article that could be pitched as a guest post to trucking trade publications. A piece by DriveReach's CEO ran in trade target Trucking Info.



Question Asked: *What are the common questions and objections you receive?*

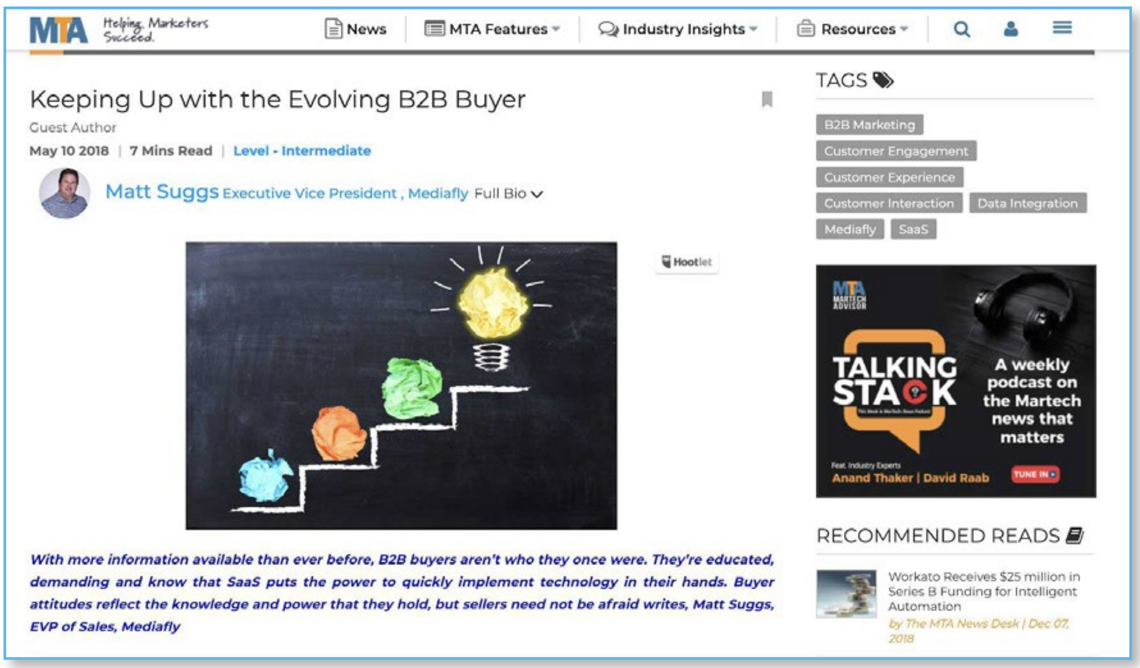
As you may have gathered, thought leadership is about providing education and value without pushing your offering directly. By gathering common questions or objections your sales team is receiving and creating thought leadership content that answers those questions, your team can create resources that help to guide prospects down the sales funnel.

For example, if you're offering a SaaS solution that addresses something previously done using paper and pencil or Excel, prospects might ask, "Why would we spend budget on technology when our self-built systems cost us nothing?" In this case, you might want to create a piece of thought leadership content addressing the pitfalls of a paper-based system. Or, if prospects tend to question who should own the SaaS solution — because they already have someone in the organization who does that or because they don't have a team in place that can support it — you could develop thought leadership around who should own that type of process, or ideas about how to structure a team that can support new product implementations.

Question Asked: *What's an interesting trend or shift in buyer habits you've observed in the industry?*

Uncovering changes or potential changes in the industry, exploring the origins of those changes and providing insights on how to cope is great fodder for thought leadership. For example, client 250ok — an email intelligence platform — noticed that, while there are plenty of tips available for what a consumer can do after a data breach, there was far less advice for the brand who actually caused the breach. This discussion with our team led to a piece titled, "Delivering Email Post-Data Breach: 4 Tips for Avoiding the Impact," which ran in Security Boulevard.

Our team also used a similar question in a story-mining session with client Mediafly and their EVP, Matt Suggs, surrounding B2B buyer habits. The team dug deeper with Suggs, prompting him to share insights for how to meet the demands of evolving B2B buyers. These insights were used in outreach to generate interest with marketing and sales trade media and ultimately led to the team drafting and placing a guest post, also known as a bylined article, with Martech Advisor.



By looking at responses from your story-mining session with sales and developing story angles based on the responses, you set yourself on the path to create thought leadership content that will appeal not only to the members of the media that your PR team pitches, but also your prospects.

Aligning marketing and sales through PR doesn't stop at securing media coverage! Continue to part 2 to learn how a SaaS sales team should use media coverage after it's secured.

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Part 2

How to Use PR Coverage in the Sales Process

A sales team is constantly looking for reasons to create more touchpoints with prospects.

Compelling touchpoints are vital to helping SDRs and account reps keep prospects moving through the sales funnel. From eBooks to whitepapers, marketing content is often used in outreach, but long-form content like this takes time to research, draft, design and publish - pushing an already-stressed marketing department to their maximum bandwidth when asked to create more.

This is where meaningful press coverage comes in: it is additional content that can be leveraged as both a marketing asset and a compelling touchpoint for sales. Plus, it's powerful, as press coverage has the third-party credibility of a respected media outlet and now contains messaging that will resonate with prospects because the topic was sourced directly from the sales team.

Whether your organization is utilizing social selling or is relying primarily on email for follow-ups, here's how media coverage can help move prospects along in the sales funnel.

Using Media Coverage in Email Touchpoints with Prospects

Media coverage — especially thought leadership — can feed the lead funnel at different points. Depending on a given prospect's stage in the SaaS customer journey, the type of message you want to communicate with your touchpoint is going to vary. It could be general awareness, or maybe an individual has reached the consideration stage and you're looking for a touchpoint that assists with product evaluation. Perhaps the prospect is caught somewhere between consideration and purchase and you're looking for some social proof to help push him along.

Not sure where to start? Here are a few sample sales emails that take advantage of media coverage to:

- Generate awareness
- Influence a purchase decision
- Leverage social proof

Awareness:

An article authored by your CEO or another thought leader within your company can act as a great touchpoint for awareness. These types of articles (often referred to as guest posts, contributed content, or bylined articles) do not talk about a company or product, but rather serve as education or problem/solution articles - establishing awareness of the need for your product/service and serving as a helpful touchpoint for prospects.

EBN Looks at E-Sourcing

prospect@company.com

EBN Looks at E-Sourcing

Hi Prospect,

I've been speaking with many sourcing leaders who are looking to streamline their procurement process in the year ahead and make a noticeable financial impact. If you are like them, it might make sense to examine your E-sourcing strategy. To gain an understanding of how an organization can gain efficiencies and improve the bottom line through E-Sourcing, take a look at this article our CEO, Alex, wrote for EBN.

Through E-Sourcing companies can:
Get the most out of their buying projects because less time and energy is required to manage larger spend amounts and more purchase transaction.
Create a level of transparency through an e-sourcing platform which can help to expedite internal buy-in from other teams and departments.
Provide both the supply and demand side the information they need, as well as see improved accuracy and efficiency throughout each step of the purchase process.

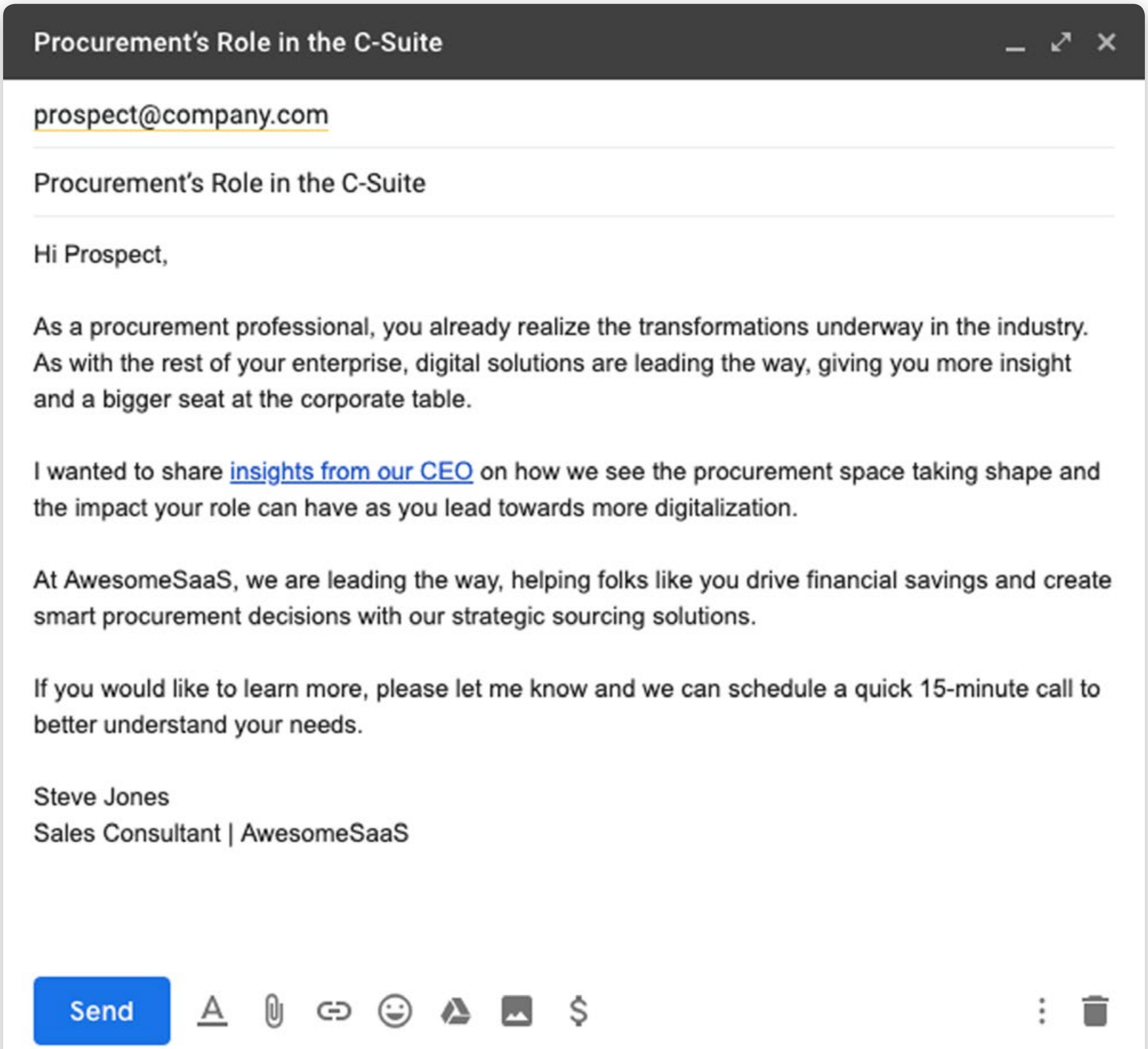
Any interest in setting up a call to learn more about how e-Sourcing fits into your procurement strategy?

Steve Jones
Sales Consultant | AwesomeSaaS

Send

Guest posts aren't the only kind of thought leadership that can be used when looking to generate awareness. Articles that quote your CEO or another thought leader — especially those that share their insights on a larger industry trend — are another great resource to use in sales touchpoints.

You don't have to wait until a prospect reaches out with a question to share this kind of coverage. Because it's informative, you can reach out mid-sales-cycle, positioning the content as an educational resource.



Procurement's Role in the C-Suite

prospect@company.com

Procurement's Role in the C-Suite

Hi Prospect,

As a procurement professional, you already realize the transformations underway in the industry. As with the rest of your enterprise, digital solutions are leading the way, giving you more insight and a bigger seat at the corporate table.

I wanted to share insights from our CEO on how we see the procurement space taking shape and the impact your role can have as you lead towards more digitalization.

At AwesomeSaaS, we are leading the way, helping folks like you drive financial savings and create smart procurement decisions with our strategic sourcing solutions.

If you would like to learn more, please let me know and we can schedule a quick 15-minute call to better understand your needs.

Steve Jones
Sales Consultant | AwesomeSaaS

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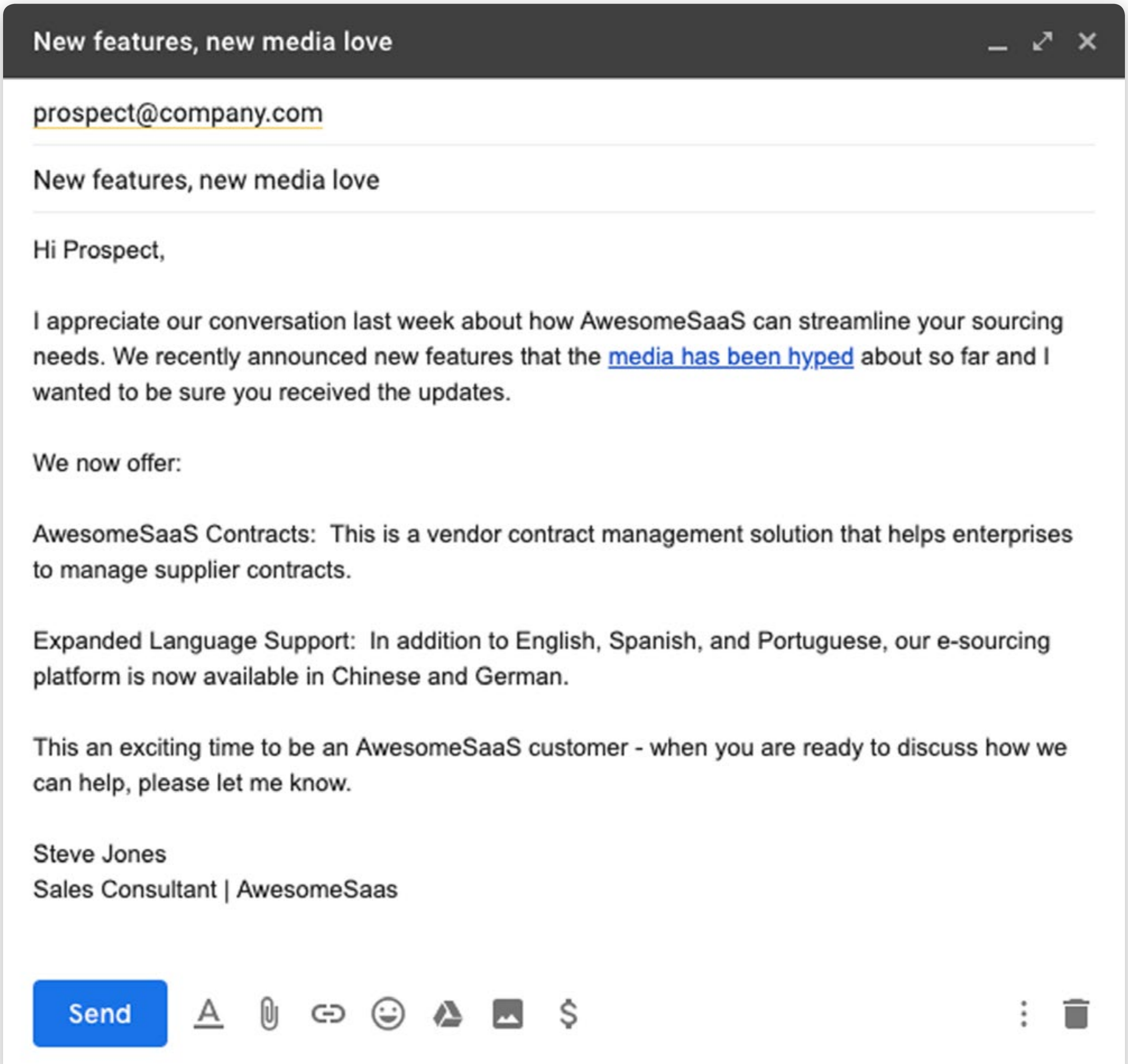
Product Evaluation:

For prospects in the consideration stage of the sales funnel, product coverage can influence their decision to purchase your solution over competitors. They've already heard from you how great your solution would be for their company - wouldn't it be powerful if a trusted, third party agreed? If sales and marketing are aligned, product coverage will echo your messaging and build a sense of trust with the brand.



New features, new media love

prospect@company.com

New features, new media love

Hi Prospect,

I appreciate our conversation last week about how AwesomeSaaS can streamline your sourcing needs. We recently announced new features that the media has been hyped about so far and I wanted to be sure you received the updates.

We now offer:

AwesomeSaaS Contracts: This is a vendor contract management solution that helps enterprises to manage supplier contracts.

Expanded Language Support: In addition to English, Spanish, and Portuguese, our e-sourcing platform is now available in Chinese and German.

This an exciting time to be an AwesomeSaaS customer - when you are ready to discuss how we can help, please let me know.

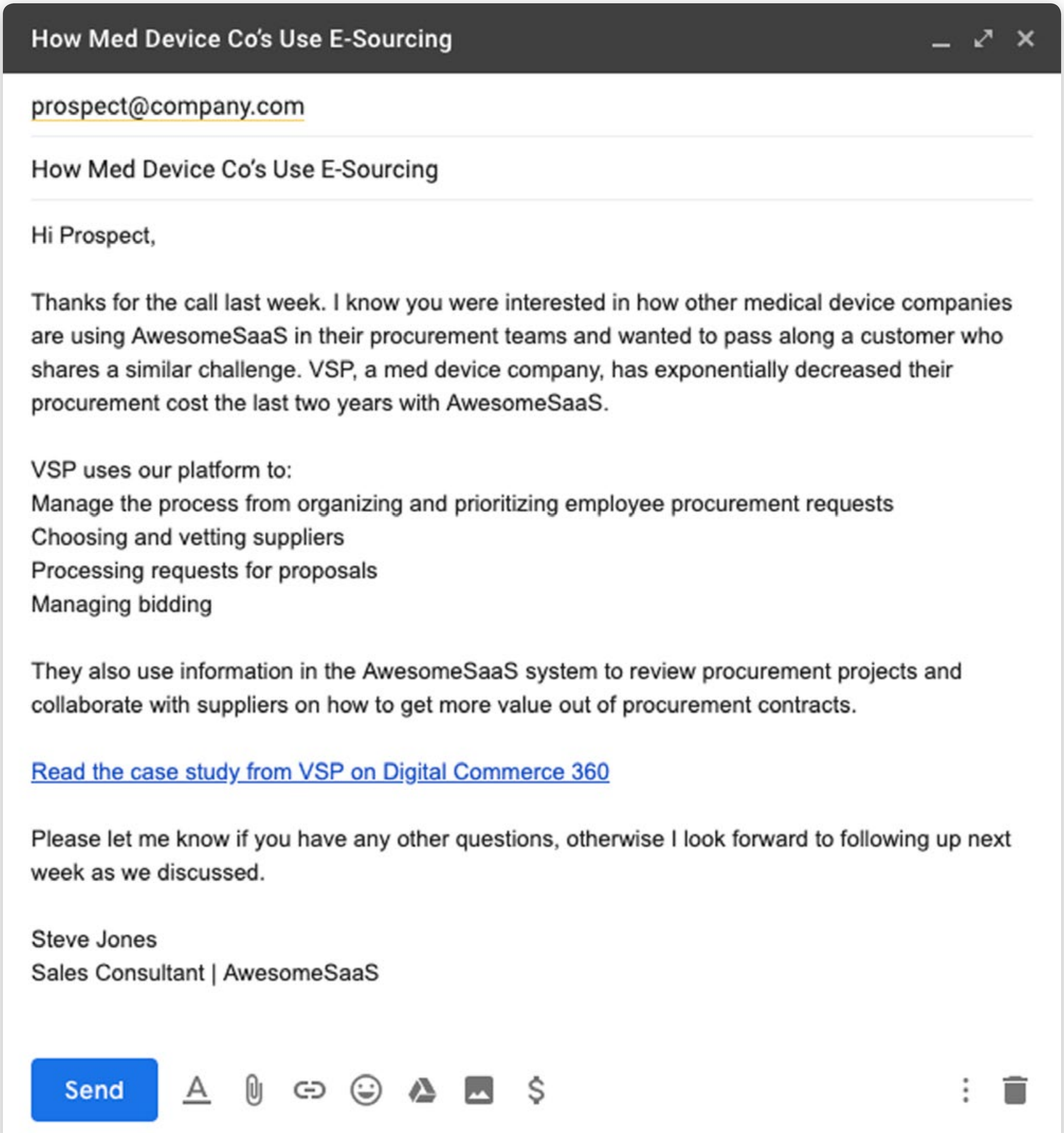
Steve Jones
Sales Consultant | AwesomeSaas

Send

Social Proof:

Every salesperson has experienced it: you had a solid call with a prospect — maybe even multiple calls — but now it's been a month and he seems to be ghosting you. Media coverage can provide the social proof that your solution is a good option for companies like his.

Media coverage that highlights a case study, provides a customer quote or otherwise shares your customers' experience with the product or service is ideal for this kind of touchpoint.



How Med Device Co's Use E-Sourcing

prospect@company.com

How Med Device Co's Use E-Sourcing

Hi Prospect,

Thanks for the call last week. I know you were interested in how other medical device companies are using AwesomeSaaS in their procurement teams and wanted to pass along a customer who shares a similar challenge. VSP, a med device company, has exponentially decreased their procurement cost the last two years with AwesomeSaaS.

VSP uses our platform to:
Manage the process from organizing and prioritizing employee procurement requests
Choosing and vetting suppliers
Processing requests for proposals
Managing bidding

They also use information in the AwesomeSaaS system to review procurement projects and collaborate with suppliers on how to get more value out of procurement contracts.

Read the case study from VSP on Digital Commerce 360

Please let me know if you have any other questions, otherwise I look forward to following up next week as we discussed.

Steve Jones
Sales Consultant | AwesomeSaaS

Send

Using Media Coverage in Social Selling

While any relationship-development tactic used as part of the sales process can be considered social selling, we are going to examine social selling as it relates to the social media platforms where this most often takes place: LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

Social media can be an effective outlet to develop relationships with prospects, especially during the early stages of the customer journey. However, it requires a significant amount of compelling content to make an impact. Any social selling pro will tell you: content that's soaked in marketing speak and self-serving messages won't cut it.

Media coverage works well in social selling because it typically provides value to the prospect - an education piece or otherwise addressing a larger industry trend - but also has your name (company or personal) and messaging attached to it for awareness.

Tips for Drafting Social Posts to Use in Social Selling

1. At least 70% of content you share should be unbranded. In other words, the company should not be mentioned by name in either the copy or displayed metadata. This helps to prevent your feed from becoming too promotional — which can turn off prospects.

2. When sharing coverage on Twitter, tag the profile of the editor, analyst, or inflluencer who wrote the article and the media outlet handle in each tweet that shares media coverage. This will help encourage engagement from the individual who published the content and gives your link additional credibility.

3. Content should include topical hashtags when applicable, which helps give your post additional visibility. For those new to using hashtags to increase reach, there are a number of tools out there that can be used to research Twitter hashtags. On LinkedIn, the most effective hashtags for increasing exposure are often those suggested by LinkedIn in the "add hashtags" section that populates when drafting an update.

4. When possible, retweet (Twitter) or share (Facebook/LinkedIn) posts from outlets, journalists or other influencers that include coverage about your brand. You can find these instances by searching the URL for the media coverage on Twitter.

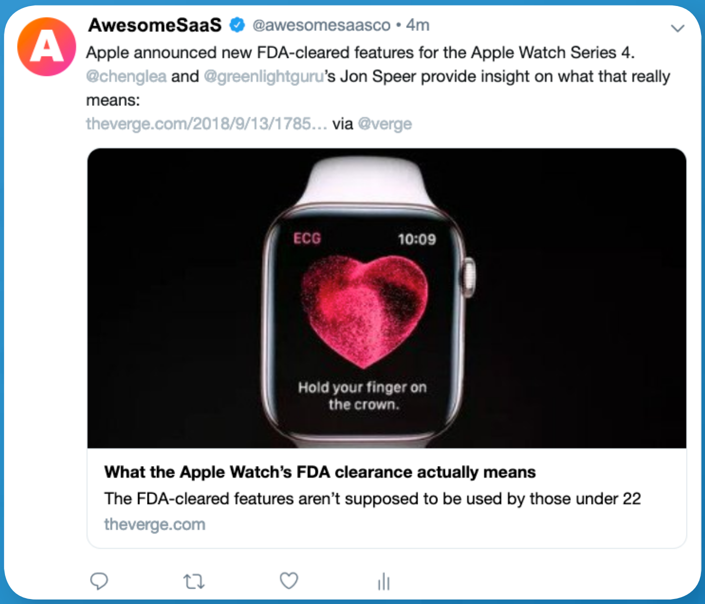
5. Get more life out of media coverage — and more content to promote — by sharing the same article multiple times with varied copy. Changing what copy, or text, you are pairing with a coverage link allows you to highlight disparate aspects of the longer form content that may appeal to different members of your social follower base. Because Twitter's timeline is based on timing and moves rapidly, it also provides a higher likelihood that your coverage link will be seen at some point. See "3 Ways to Share the Same Media Coverage on Twitter" for examples.

3 Ways to Share the Same Media Coverage on Twitter

1 Once with the title

2 Once with a stat or a key fact

3 Once plugging the brand



Truly aligning all aspects of your SaaS company's sales and marketing isn't an action that can happen easily or quickly. However, there are ways to ease the frustrations between sales and marketing. First, by making sure both departments are able to lend their ideas to develop quality thought leadership content. Next, by securing media coverage that can be used in sales and marketing efforts. And, finally, by making sure both departments understand how they can leverage these powerful assets.

We hope this workbook has been a helpful guide - now go get those conversations scheduled!

About BLASTmedia

Established in 2005, BLASTmedia is the only national B2B SaaS PR agency in the US, representing B2B technology companies from start-up to IPO. BLASTmedia understands the challenges associated with scaling a SaaS business and uses media coverage and thought leadership campaigns to impact four primary pillars: investors, employees, partners, and customers.

Learn more about BLASTmedia and how our team can help align sales and marketing efforts through PR, contact us at BLASTmedia.com/contact

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