

HubShots

Interview with Sam Shoolman

Transcript of our interview with
Sam Shoolman, Sales Director for
HubSpot Asia Pacific

Episode 27: Inbound Sales with Sam Shoolman

by Beacon



Welcome to Episode 27 of HubShots!

Interview: Inbound Sales with Sam Shoolman (@samshoolman) - Sales Director at HubSpot Asia Pacific

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In this episode we interview Sam Shoolman, Sales Director for HubSpot Asia Pacific and discuss:

- one key thing successful marketing managers are particularly good at (from a sales manager's perspective): the willingness to adapt
- research is showing conclusively that old school tactics (cold calling, trade shows, spamming email lists) don't work well any more
- how company culture, if fixed on old school, will limit the benefits you get from embracing the inbound methodology
- the importance of logging activity and research into the CRM, and

getting a habit going

- why HubSpot gets all of the sales people to get inbound certified and build a marketing site before they are allowed to start selling
- Brand New Certification just launched: Inbound Sales Certification: <http://academy.hubspot.com/isc16/intro-to-inbound-sales>
- prioritising the activities that need to be focussed on e.g. focusing on questions like: When I come to your site what do you want me to do?
- the best way to capture more leads at the top of the funnel
- white bread versus wheat bread leads
- gamification and the importance of reporting and dashboards for promoting positive activities
- the smarting virtuous cycle versus the old school vicious cycle
- the massive changes going on in the industry e.g. focussing on ecommerce industry
- evolving the culture to embrace change - the constant work in progress

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Interview Transcript

Ian Jacob: Now, just tell us a little bit about yourself and what your role is here at HubSpot.

Sam Shoolman: Sure thing. So, I head up the direct sales team here in Sydney, which basically means I'm working with a bunch of our sales reps and our business development folks to help them spread the inbound love throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Craig Bailey: Fantastic. All right. So, I'm going to actually kick this off by asking what's one thing that successful marketing managers are particularly good at? And yeah, I'm asking a salesperson about what marketing managers are good at.

Sam Shoolman: I'm sure some people would be probably wondering, "Why would this guy be qualified to know what successful marketing managers are particularly good at?" I think being on the sales side for a marketing platform like HubSpot, and I've been with the business for

about five years, prior to that working with another software as a service company with marketers specifically, I've had the chance, the opportunity to speak with literally thousands of marketers at this stage. And some of them do really well and others struggle in certain areas.

So, it's hard to generalize and lump together, you know, the good ones do this, and the poor marketing managers do that. But I think at a core level, willingness to adapt and change is super important. If I come into a conversation with a marketing manager, I'm not looking to sell this or that. I'm just looking to understand what's their current situation? What are their goals and their challenges that they're up against?

And the ones that are more open to sharing that tend to not just see more success with our own products, but in general they tend to evolve at a faster rate, and they're really looking to improve their process, and put their own skill sets or lack thereof or lack of tool sets under the microscope and say, "Okay, where do we need to fix things." So, I think that willingness to adapt and openness is super important.

Craig Bailey: Okay. So, in terms of willingness to adapt, what are some of the things they need to adapt to now? And I guess we're looking at this whole sales and marketing alignment, isn't it?

Sam Shoolman: Yes. No, absolutely. From all of our research from a lot of data that's been done by countless marketing research companies, there are certain tactics that are just less effective these days – trade shows, cold calling, buying lists and email spamming them. That stuff is not effective as it used to be. And if someone's got their head in the sand or says, "We're going to keep doing things the way we've been doing them because that's what we know," you know what? You're going to continue getting the same results you've always been getting.

Ian Jacob: Or even worse now.

Sam Shoolman: Yes, or even worse now, exactly. So, it really just depends if they've got those goals for increasing leads or automating communication to those leads, and that is something that they know is going to have a bottom line impact on the business. That's an area that we're really happy to help. But resistance to that type of change, which can be hard for some companies to adopt, just depending on their culture and who's leading it and things like that.

Ian Jacob: Now, Sam, I was reading I think on a HubSpot blog somewhere or in some training, one of the things that it's probably more so people in marketing, but I would also say in sales, is training and adapting themselves, it's a big challenge, right? Because you're trying to do the day to day work. You're trying to get stuff over the line, you're trying to do deals, talk to customers, talk to potential people that you're prospecting.

But you're also going to learn, "How do I use the CRM? How do I use Sidekick to make sure that I'm actually giving appropriate feedback, I'm putting all the information back in the CRM correctly, I'm communicating to the right people?" How much do you see of that as being probably more ongoing, but as time goes on, things get more complicated or get more sophisticated? So how are you dealing with that in your team as a sales organisation?

Sam Shoolman: Yeah. If something is new to somebody coming into the business, they need to get a habit going, right? And that's going to happen typically by tasks and reminders that are popping up in the calendar or in CRM. And it's something that we keep tabs on. Reporting is really effective.

So, if you don't have a system that's measuring things and sending out the results to everyone, whenever you're in the public eye and you see your name next to a smaller bar and everyone else's bar is a lot bigger, it doesn't look like you're pulling your weight. And if you know that you have been, but you just haven't been logging your stuff, that's I think going to be the prod that you need to be a little bit more effective with how you manage your pipeline and how much you log things.

You need a baseline, or everything that follows is not efficient. It's not logged. You're going to have trouble seeing where things are falling through the cracks. Do I need to focus on my assessment to demonstration rate? What do I need to change about my sales process that's incredibly hard to improve as a salesperson? And I think as a marketer, if you don't have a proper system of measurement and holding yourself accountable for actually getting the inputs logged.

Ian Jacob: Now, would you say it's important that sales teams actually do inbound certification?

Sam Shoolman: Inbound marketing certification or inbound sales certification?

Ian Jacob: Either or both.

Sam Shoolman: Well, we don't have an inbound sales certification yet. That would be a really good idea and probably something that's on the roadmap. Inbound marketing certification, I think it depends what their industry is, and also how much is their marketing team currently adopting inbound marketing or planning to.

From a smarketing perspective, sales and marketing alignment, if your company relies on inbound marketing, or it's planning to in the near future, the sales guys have to know what the core foundation of inbound marketing is. They should do the certification, or they should at least get some training sessions around it so that they can work effectively with the marketers because it's not a one-way street.

Ian Jacob: I'm assuming all of your guys do inbound certification?

Sam Shoolman: Yeah. They do inbound certification before they go to Cambridge, where we're headquartered, and they train for a month there. They're already inbound certified before they get on the plane.

Sam Shoolman: They need to know HubSpot and inbound marketing in and out because that's exactly what we're talking about every day, but I think there's value for salespeople across a wide range of industries.

Craig Bailey: You know what I think is interesting about that is because you say, "Well, they get training on the product because they have to sell it," and we're going, "Well, duh, of course." But how many companies do you know, when they get the sales team in, they don't even train them on the product they're trying to sell and they're just kind of, "There's the phones, get firing boys." That kind of thing, it's just like...

Sam Shoolman: No, it's a good point. Absolutely. For our project, and I would say for people that are listening, try and maybe liken this to your own product or service and how you could replicate something like this because it's really effective. And our reps are hitting their targets. We achieved incredible success, over 100% last year and year over year

growth. You can look it up. But it's been astronomical.

And I think part of that is thanks to the training foundation that's provided where someone that comes into HubSpot, and they're going to be on our sales team, actually has to build a website on HubSpot and they need to build an awareness offer, a consideration offer, a decision offer.

They need to use this content optimisation system and map out where all this is living and how is it optimised, and build social media pages for it. They're basically creating a business in the span of one month, and it's expected to be fully inbound marketing best practice, and have working automation workflows and the whole works.

So whatever that means for your business, it's going to be easier for some than others. I think for every software as a service company, it's definitely something that's achievable because they've got that product that they can give a demo account to, but for some others, that would take a bit of thinking and creativity, probably.

Craig Bailey: Fantastic. That's great advice. I wanted to ask you, and it's almost like a follow-on from previously, but what mistakes are you seeing marketing managers make that could be avoided?

Sam Shoolman: I don't mean to be overly critical or harsh, I think marketing managers have a really tough job. They signed on for that. It's not easy. And the good news is there's a lot of support for it. So I think that, one, failing to plan is planning to fail, right? So I think a lot of the time, like we were talking about before, you might have a sales team that you say, "Okay, just hit the ground running. Get on the phone. Let's see how it goes. And sell stuff."

If you don't plan there, if you don't have training there, you're in trouble. Same thing for marketing. So, they need to come in at a baseline understanding of what the organization is up to, and get trained by the rest of the marketing team on how do things work here. And really inventory, "Where is the budget going? Where is our focus?"

And I think once they do that, and they hopefully have some reports and analytics they can look into, prioritising, not just saying, "How do we get found by more people?" I think that's the natural tendency by a lot of

marketers, it's how do we increase website traffic, how do we get more likes on social media, how do we get more followers? And a lot of the time, they're already getting that exposure, but they're not being as effective as they possible could be with the eyeballs that are already on their website.

When I come to your website, what do you want me to do? Where do you expect me to click? How do I become a lead? I don't think marketers are always asking themselves those questions. And that's a process that we help them through quite a bit. So we might say I'm landing on your site. You're a manufacturing company and you've got a Contact Us button. I'm not qualified. I'm not ready to click Contact Us. That's a very bottom of the funnel offer.

If someone knows that they need your business and they already trust your brand or something, they probably already know your company and they end on your website, maybe they'll click it and you get one or two submissions there, but if they don't have other conversion points like an e-book or a whitepaper download or a webinar, something like that where someone can very non-aggressively plug in their details, but it's not super salesy, it's not a big commitment, that's the best way to capture some leads at the top of the funnel.

And it's amazing how many marketers across the world, it's not something that the U.S. has figured out. What I'm inspired by is how quickly Australia is adopting this, and really wants to get ahead of it and be a thought leader. So, that keeps me super excited doing what I'm doing every day and will help marketing managers one at a time here.

Ian Jacob: Now, I've got a question around reporting. We were talking about reporting, and everybody in the organisation using reporting and having their own dashboards, feeding off the same data. And Rosalee has mentioned, you know, make sure that sales also have a dashboard, but marketing would build that out. What happens in your team? Is it something that you can see what marketing is doing as well as sales performance? Or is it just purely sales-focused for you once you get the MQL?

Sam Shoolman: No. We have a smarketing meeting every month. We actually just had it today, a couple of hours ago. So, marketing is going to present what did our MQL achievement look like. Where are we on

the SLA, the service level agreement. That we've basically said each rep needs this many marketing qualified leads per month.

And the rest is going to be what we call white bread leads, white bread versus wheat bread. The wheat bread are the MQLs, a bit heartier, a bit more qualified. And the white bread being maybe an e-book or a whitepaper download, something that's not too far down the funnel yet.

But we look at their metrics, they look at ours, they know our achievement, they know how quickly we're following up with leads. So, we have an SLA back to them on that. And it really feels like a partnership. It doesn't feel like we're banging our heads against the wall because we have different priorities. We're very much aligned and on the same page, which is super important and enables us, I think, to work a bit closer together, and also with a level of transparency and honesty that is important, but frankly not prevalent in a lot of places.

Ian Jacob: Now, I do want to ask you something. And I saw this when I went to the office in Boston. There are these big screens on the wall with I can see people's faces popping up there ever periodically. Now, I'm assuming, and you've touched on this before, it's like you see your face popping up next to a graph that's a bit low compared to everybody else's and you want to take action.

Sam Shoolman: Sure.

Ian Jacob: Has that been a key driver since the start of HubSpot to really keep everybody on the same page, and I guess create transparency as well. Because a lot of times you can carry on and go along in a sales team, like you can say, "Go to visit that customer over there," or, "I'm going to be going in to do this," but no one ever knows what's going on. Is this a way of creating transparency in the team and also so marketing can see what's going on and see what sort of activities within the team?

Sam Shoolman: Yeah, I think marketing pays less attention to those boards as the sales team does themselves. It's more of a gamification to make this fun and to spark team camaraderie. So, we'll run some contests between teams around attainment of assessments, or how we're tracking for the month or for the quarter. And it's important. It sparks some teamwork and some unity. I wouldn't say that since

HubSpot started, it was the most prevalent thing. I think more measurement for sales reps, it was sent out just via dashboards in email that everyone was seeing.

But that's a more recent thing in the past year and a half. And it's been really positive. We've had good reception from people. And they do care about it, right? If there's a contest on, you want to win. If it's down to the individual, you want to be at the top of the leaderboard. So, just like watching stats on a football game or a rugby game or something like that, you're kind of making everyone their own celebrity and the master of their own business and success and a bit of an entrepreneur. I think it's incredibly empowering.

Craig Bailey: Okay. Just going back a bit to the sales and marketing alignment piece, so you said you had a monthly smarketing meeting, and it sounds like it's working really well. Now, have you been exposed to HubSpot customers that are actually good at having that sales and marketing alignment?

And if so, what do you think it is about the companies where it is working that makes them different?

Sam Shoolman: Yeah. I think that first and foremost, like I said before, companies that are more adopting inbound marketing, and they have a high volume of leads and a sales team where there's more than just one or two reps, they're going to be more qualified for a smarketing kind of alignment.

If you're an old school business or a really small business that's got 1 guy on the sales team or 2 people, or you've got 10 reps but they're not doing any inbound marketing, it just doesn't...I don't know how it would operate. I've never seen it. So, maybe there's another type of smarketing alignment that can work from a trade show attendance perspective. That's just not something I would have been as exposed to.

But we do have some customers that have adopted it really well, and it's those that have tended to take off with HubSpot and just generate a ton of leads and high-quality ones, and iterate on what they're doing to make sure that they're continuously higher and higher caliber. And then the sales team really appreciates that, and they see marketing in a good light, and they work the leads harder, and then marketing is happy that

sales is closing more business. It's a good cycle, and they can start to align more.

And going along with that is not just the idea of generating the leads, but nurturing them over time. So if a company has really adopted automation and they're using lead nurturing, that's going to directly impact the rep. Because there might be a nurturing stream of 15 emails over a couple of months period, and then finally the lead actually requests whatever it is, a consultation or a demonstration or something like that, so we can't really work without each other is the way it is.

Craig Bailey: Right. So, it's almost like a virtuous cycle promotes the smarketing, whereas if you've got this vicious cycle, there's not enough heads and you're burning them, it's almost like it's a barrier that just grows...

Sam Shoolman: Totally. And what you're doing today isn't automatically going to work next week or next year. And our team locally knows that. Our team in Dublin knows that. Our team in Cambridge knows that. And back to my first point earlier, you have to be willing to adapt and to change and to look at the data on a really constant basis and say, "Why does this look lower than it did before?" We're super paranoid about our growth. We're not resting on success.

Ian Jacob: So tell me, in the last 12 months, how many things have you changed in your team?

Sam Shoolman: I can't even count.

Ian Jacob: So you've obviously changed a few things based on the data that you have. Would I be right in saying that?

Sam Shoolman: Yeah, for sure. So, looking back, really 12 to 18 months, when we came here from Boston, we were 7 people. We're now a team of 35. The sales team is nearly 20 at this stage. So, I think the way in which we've grown from a sales perspective, which obviously I'm a bit closer to, it's been looking at where the market is responding the most.

So, we're starting to look at a bit of industry specialisation. We've got one guy who's focusing on ecommerce specifically. And the more knowledge that he can gain in that industry, and given the fact that we have solid interest in adoption with ecommerce companies, and really

strong integrations with partners like Magento and Shopify and Bigcommerce, some of which actually have offices in Australia, that's where we've pivoted and made changes. I never would have predicted that would happen now when we opened up shop here. I guess that's one specific example.

But I think from a cultural perspective as well, I'm not just thinking about sales, but more team-wide, since sales is central to the organization and we're a large percentage of what's here in Australia, how do we need to evolve the culture when we pull in our first IT person, and our first office manager, and have a services team launching, and interfacing with marketing, and now a sales enablement person?

It's a constant work in progress. We need to evolve ourselves internally in what we do, and how we interact with each other, and the meetings that are happening, and outside of work, how we get involved in one another's lives. It's important and it's central.

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