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When asked to assess their go-to-market processes and capabilities, multinational companies acknowledge significant deficiencies in their overall marketing and sales effectiveness. In fact, most respondents give themselves distinctly low marks. It is clear that empowering front-line marketing and sales professionals with better customer analytics, insights, market segmentation and messaging can both improve return on investment and drive significant revenue growth. Yet, these self-critical responses point to the pressing need for companies to rethink and recalibrate existing capabilities in order to achieve a true go-to-market advantage over competitors.

Just how diligently are companies working toward attaining go-to-market excellence across the value chain? Driving the Bottom Line From the Front Line offers a current and in-depth view of what’s changing, what’s not, and what needs to change, as companies strive to attain marketing and selling excellence. Unfortunately, in the critical area of enterprise-wide go-to-market capabilities, a lot of what should be changing is not.

The study revealed these notable insights:

• **Low Marks:** Senior marketing and sales executives don’t rate their go-to-market effectiveness very highly. Only 6 percent of marketers rated their go-to-market capabilities as “extremely good,” with another 27 percent rating themselves as “quite effective.” Sales executives also provided notably low self-assessments, with only 6 percent giving their go-to-market capabilities the highest marks, and 29 percent calling themselves “quite effective.”

• **Slow Transition from Vision to Action:** While the vast majority of executives view marketing and selling capabilities as the most critical contributor to commercial success, many have not made the effort to take action by engaging in major or sustainable capability-building initiatives in the last five years. Two-thirds (66 percent) have undertaken fewer than four high-profile initiatives to improve their marketing and sales capabilities over the last five years.

• **Short-Term over Long-Term:** When it comes to strengthening their business, many high-ranking executives seem more focused on near-term operational challenges than on building advantage over a longer time horizon. Most of the executives surveyed said they were focused on selling effectiveness and account management (43 percent), while placing less importance on longer-term capabilities such as customer data capture, integration, mining and warehousing (15 percent). Improvements in channel management (14 percent) or multi-functional selling teams (11 percent) also ranked relatively lower.

• **Insufficient Training Relative to Other Talent Investments:** A majority of respondents (56 percent) said that investments in people (talent and performance management) will be key to enhancing go-to-market performance over the next three years. Yet relatively few (24 percent) are planning to improve their existing teams’ skills and capabilities via increased training and development.
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- **Attention Focused Inward vs. Outward**: While most marketing and sales professionals (60 percent) strive to be considered best-in-class, few are prioritizing analysis of competitors’ strengths and best practices. Less than 8 percent ranked looking at best practices externally or internally as a top priority.

- **Resting on the “Tried and True”**: Companies appear to be relying on traditional metrics such as revenue growth (85 percent), customer acquisition and/or retention (53 percent), market share (49 percent), and margin improvement (47 percent) for evaluating go-to-market performance. Input and insight from consumers, as well as the channel, are lower on the list of priorities. As technology advances and evolving markets demand fresh and innovative thinking, marketing and sales have to keep pace.

Arming front-line marketing and sales teams with improved customer analytics and market segmentation and engagement strategies can significantly enhance revenue generation. Companies are seemingly focused on these vital areas. But their failure to implement substantive changes to create go-to-market capabilities will put many of them at a competitive disadvantage.

This study offers a true and honest snapshot of today’s business world as seen through the prism of marketing and sales. This reality check should be seen as a guide to help companies identify the common pitfalls of current go-to-market strategies. However, these recorded impressions also serve as a template for productive change, with specific ideas and recommendations for best practices.

**Driving the Bottom Line From the Front Line** illustrates what’s changing, what’s not, and what needs to change. The CMO Council’s role will be to not let the trend of inactivity and ineffectiveness continue.