

Content Meets Commerce

How sales and content teams build pay-to-play programs that actually work

THE BIG IDEA

When sales and content work in separate silos, you sell products that don't meet buyers' needs. When they build together, you create one coordinated customer solution that starts with what the customer needs, not what's on the rate card.

6 Principles for Productive Collaboration

1

Start with the objective

Lead with the customer's business goal, not the inventory you need to move.

2

Bring content in early

Involve content early enough to help shape the opportunity, not just dress it up later.

3

Define the negotiables

Agree up front on what is and isn't negotiable, before the client hears a promise.

4

Settle who's on first

Decide who leads which part of setting up the opportunity.

5

Stay aligned in front of the client

Present one voice from first pitch through delivery.

6

Build toward renewal

Design for loyalty and the long game, not just one event.

Locked in Silos vs. What Collaboration Unlocks

LOCKED IN SILOS	COLLABORATION UNLOCKED
Generic exhibit packages and content offerings that don't benefit customers	A participation model built around how the customer wants to engage
Sales relationships and content expertise operate separately	Sales opens doors to potential speakers; content creates credible thought leadership for target customers
Individual teams pitch their own products	One coordinated customer solution
Sales stays transactional	Customer opportunities built for long-term engagement

The Playbook: What Each Side Needs From the Other

SALES NEEDS FROM CONTENT	CONTENT NEEDS FROM SALES
1. Early heads-up on topics. Visibility into programming so sales can build sponsorship conversations before the program is locked.	1. Pipeline visibility. Which companies, categories and opportunities sales is chasing, early enough to plan.
2. Flexibility with guardrails. Willingness to shape custom ideas with clients without breaking the rules of the program.	2. Expectation-setting. Sales sets boundaries with the client, so content isn't left renegotiating a deal after something was promised.
3. For content to have a seat at the table with the client. Content experts can explain the educational value directly to buyers.	3. Treat thought leadership as substantive inventory. Premier content is a major client activation, not an add-on, even when the revenue lands in another budget.

Steal This: 5 Things You Can Do Next Week

- Bring the content expert into the room. Sales doesn't get weaker by adding content to a customer conversation. It adds credibility and makes a stronger opportunity for the client.
- Know your colleagues. Ask for their help.
- Do your homework. Arrive with an understanding of the account and the market opportunity.
- Instead of asking the content team "What can you make for me?" ask "What do you think?"
- Don't be afraid to go off the rate card. Something built around the client's goal can create long-term loyalty.

TRY THIS: A QUICK SELF-CHECK

When does your content team typically get involved in a deal?

Before the pitch | During the pitch | After the client shows interest | After it's already sold

The earlier you answer, the more you can shape. Think about your last deal and where earlier involvement could have helped.