





A better way to sell: cloud, mobile, social, big data

A...B...C... When we think of the abc's, perhaps even more so than the popular sales mantra "always be closing," we think of getting back to the basics. The alphabet is a foundational lesson we learn early on and internalize to the point where we hardly even notice it as we move through our days, no matter how ubiquitous it is on our lives.

In naming our latest ebook, we wanted to convey this deeper message beyond "always be closing." From the chalkboard illustration on the title page to our subtitle "the ABC's of Sales in the Modern Era," this ebook is all about finding our way back to the heart of sales with technology that is helpful without getting in the way.

The sad truth we face with the complexity and pressure in today's market is a salesperson can only spend about 22% of their time actually selling¹. Even if a salesperson closes 100% of their deals, they're only able to do this with less than a quarter of their time. This is a problem.

So how do we solve it? We need technology that doesn't waste a salesperson's time—that actually helps salespeople do their jobs better, improving their productivity while enabling them to meet today's customer expectations and the dramatically different buying process.

In this ebook, we tackle the issues facing sales today head on, incorporating changes and developments in the market that your teams need to understand. I'm incredibly excited not only to introduce this brand new ebook, but also the next generation of sales productivity from Microsoft.

In the interest of maximizing all of our productivity—let's get to it!

All my best,

Fred Studer

GM, Microsoft Dynamics CRM

@fredstuder

¹http://paceproductivity.com/files/How_Sales_Reps_Spend_Their_Time.pdf

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Let's get down to it — **BUSINESSES NEED TO LET SALESPEOPLE SELL**

Companies hire salespeople to drive revenue, but it turns out that the majority of sales reps spend very little of their time actually doing the jobs they were hired to do. According to Pace Productivity, just 22% of a typical sales rep's week is focused on selling.¹

Let's face it—reps can't close if they're hamstrung by inefficient processes, left out of the conversation initiated by marketing, or simply distracted by time-sucking administrative tasks.

What's more, considering that sales reps are often not looped in until buyers are two-thirds of the way through the decision-making process, sales productivity matters now more than ever. In other words, salespeople need to free up as much of their time as possible to focus on selling.

So how can organizations set their sales teams up to succeed? Give them the tools, guidance and support they need to do what they do best: sell. In this eBook, we'll explore ways to do just that, with a focus on the trends shaping today's buying—and selling—process:

- Buyer 2.0: The way people buy has changed
- How sales reps can transform from solution providers to trusted advisors
- The role of content and conversations in today's buying and selling process
- Why and how sales reps need to tap into data for smarter selling
- The tools and technology that help sales reps get more done faster and better

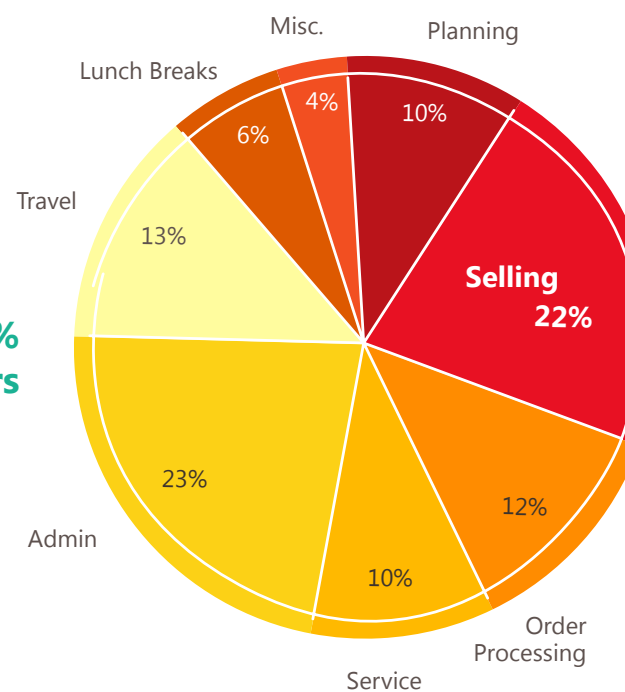
Two key dynamics influence the productivity of today's sales teams:

- Sales reps lack the right skills to be effective in this new buyer-driven economy
- Buyers' expectations and companies' selling processes are not aligned

— Tiffani Bova

VP and Distinguished Analyst, Gartner

**Typical Sales Reps %
of Weekly Hours**



¹ http://paceproductivity.com/files/How_Sales_Reps_Spend_Their_Time.pdf

Buyer 2.0

THE WAY PEOPLE BUY HAS CHANGED

Today, sales teams must sell to self-empowered, highly informed “super” buyers. These potential customers are incredibly savvy when it comes to tracking down information about possible vendors and solutions and vetting their options. They are getting information about companies and their products from an unprecedented number of sources: Internet searches, company websites, their social network (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter), their professional communities, news outlets—you name it!

Put simply, today’s buyers can access virtually any information, easily compare options, and instantly validate their decisions with the click of a mouse or touch on a screen.

“Today, with buyers now controlling the majority of the front end of the sales process, **sellors must learn to facilitate a buying process**—not conduct a sales process.”

– Colleen Francis, Founder and President of Engage Selling Solutions

Buyers no longer want to be sold to

Along the way, most buyers prefer to keep sales reps at arm’s length as long as possible. Who can blame them? No one wants a hard sell if they can avoid it. As a result, because buyers are more in control of accessing information, they no longer depend on sales reps to narrow down their options and make a shortlist.

Buyers are **57% of the way through the buying cycle**¹ before they reach out to sales.

For **complex purchases**, this number jumps to **70%**.²



¹ <http://www.salesbenchmarkindex.com/bid/91415/Is-57-Your-Buyer-s-Number>

² <http://partnersinexcellenceblog.com/70-of-buying-process-completed-without-sales-involvement/>

Buyer 2.0

THE WAY PEOPLE BUY HAS CHANGED (CONT'D)

Digital signals are key

This sea change in buying has altered the nature of engagement and ways that organizations interact with buyers. That's not to say traditional interactions—such as those via email, on the phone or in person—are dead. It does mean, however, that cold calls and unsolicited emails are less effective than ever at sparking a conversation with potential customers.

Just look at the stats: a cold call is only 3% effective, according to an IBM preference study.¹ Now compare that to reaching out via a LinkedIn Inmail—recipients are likely to respond to those outreaches 67% of the time.²

So what does this mean for today's sales reps?

Social buying signals are an opportunity for sales to listen to social conversations and pick up on trends or indicators. When people send the signal they're looking for something, dissatisfied with their current solution, or need more information on a topic, that's an opportunity for a seller to engage.

Pay close and constant attention to **signals being given off by buyers** in the digital realm. Then reach out and **engage prospects on these new channels**.

¹ <http://business.linkedin.com/sales-solutions/prospecting-tool/cold-calling-tips.html>

² <http://www.gmigroup.be/cms/uploads/Presentaties/Klantendag%202013/GMI%20Dynamics%20CRM%202.pdf>

Get social OR GO HOME

At the end of the day, the fundamentals of selling haven't changed: what makes a great sales rep is the ability to establish and nurture relationships and build trust. In today's world, sales pros can tap into social as a tool that extends those natural abilities, and they'd better do so sooner than later. Reps ignoring social as a source of their next opportunities will find themselves left out of every deal.

There's no doubt about it: social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are incredibly valuable tools for making connections and nurturing business relationships, but it's not that easy. Sales reps need a way to tame the firehose, so to speak. They need tools that help them separate true social buying signals and important moments from social noise (more about those tools later in this eBook). Otherwise, they end up wasting valuable time, time they could be spending selling.

Despite these challenges, now that buyers are moving along the path to purchase without involving sales, it's more important than ever for reps to pay attention to these channels. Remember, by the time buyers reach out, they've downloaded competitors' eBooks, read online reviews, and may have even asked members of a LinkedIn group for advice on the products or services they're considering.

"When a seller can't or doesn't engage early with the right people, more often than not, they have lost the deal before they even started." – *Ryan Blakely, Dynamics Business Development Manager, Microsoft*

What's a sales rep to do? How can organizations get a foot in the door, so to speak, without spending countless hours on social?

Ditch overt sales pitches

The answer is to adopt the principles of social selling. The Aberdeen Group defines social selling as the utilization one of three techniques¹, which include:

- **Social Collaboration:** Sharing information internally or with partners to pool knowledge on how to generate more leads and sales
- **External Listening:** The gathering and interpreting of information or content produced by clients and prospects
- **External Participation:** Providing prospects with relevant and helpful content or information to build relationships and positively impact future buying decisions

However, let's be clear: the term social selling is misleading. In the social realm, selling is a no-no. Social is about connecting, informing, and helping. This is how today's reps influence the buying process before buyers even engage them on a deal.

The amount of respondents who connected directly with potential solution providers via social networking channels **increased by more than 57%**.

– *DemandGen Report, The 2014 B2B Buyer Behavior Survey*

"Sales reps need to do research to have a meaningful interaction with a prospect or customer. Social insights are typically best because they are **real time and provide invaluable insight into your prospect's point of view** and what is important to them at that given time."

– *Craig Rosenberg, Co-founder, TOPO*

Think about **"social selling" as networking or building relationships**. It's not about making a quick sale so avoid anything that gives the impression you're selling.

According to Corporate Visions, **74% of buyers choose the company that was FIRST to add value.**¹

¹ SAVO, Techniques of Social Selling: Just Do It!, 2014, http://www.slideshare.net/SAVO_Group/techniques-of-social-selling-just-do-it-sales-for-life

79% of sales people achieving quota used social selling techniques. Only 15% of those who didn't use social selling achieved quota.¹

In fact, **social selling was the #1 way** for sales reps to generate their own leads in 2013.²



¹ Sales Benchmark Index, How to Make Your Number in 2014

² Sales Benchmark Index, How to Make Your Number in 2014



OR GO HOME (CONT'D)

Become an expert in your industry

According to Ryan Blakely, Dynamics Business Development Manager at Microsoft, the key to successfully engaging buyer 2.0 is the following: deliver a steady flow of expertise, insights, and relevant content that nurtures, teaches and influences throughout the buyer's journey. When done well, buyers see the sales rep as a partner and valuable asset to long-term success.

The best reps establish thought leadership on social channels to become the trusted expert buyers seek out. As Colleen Francis of Engage Selling Solutions explains, "Today, no one buys from salespeople—they only buy from experts. And buyers are actively searching for thought leaders and experts daily." Kendra Lee, author of *Selling Against the Goal: How Corporate Sales Professionals Generate the Leads they Need*, continues by saying "To distinguish themselves from the competition, sales reps need to inspire trust in prospects."

"Without having a way to monitor your target market and identify buying signals, you're missing out. CRM intelligence arms reps with **accurate data, buying signals and events, and connections for getting an intro.**"

– Brian Kelly, CMO, InsideView

Succeeding in this way requires a disciplined focus on understanding as much as possible about buyers' pressing concerns and then sharing useful and relevant information. Furthermore, until prospective customers indicate otherwise, the information should not be about the company or its offerings. Remember—if buyers even pick up a whiff of someone trying to sell to them, they'll likely close the door to any interactions. On the other hand, the sales reps that deliver selfless value often make the short list...and in many cases, close the deal.

Get social OR GO HOME (CONT'D)

Use digital signals to jump-start interactions

Effective sales reps monitor and engage with prospective buyers in social channels. Doing so lets them pick up on signals that give them a reason to reach out or jump into a conversation. In other words, it's a foot in the door early in the buying cycle. The trigger could be something personal such as a key contact receiving a promotion or celebrating a birthday. It could also be something indicating when a contact is primed for purchase, such as her company receiving funding or a key executive spearheading a new initiative.

To support their reps, a growing number of marketing and sales leaders are offering their sales team listening tools, content libraries, and social publishing tools. These make it easy to stay top of mind and provide thought leadership, as well as real-world advice that actually helps their prospects do their jobs better. Increasingly these marketing and sales leaders are also partnering to provide social insights on leads, contacts, and accounts, freeing sales teams to focus more on what matters rather than noodling with their latest tweet.

Always be connecting

Jill Rowley, an incredible social selling thought leader (see page 37 for her complete interview), called us out on the title of this eBook. She believes that when it comes to social selling, it's not "Always be Closing"—it's "Always Be Connecting." As she says, "The Modern Sales Professional uses social networks like LinkedIn and Twitter to find, listen, relate, connect, engage and amplify her buyer, the buying committee and their sphere of influence."

We could not agree more with this. While it may not be possible or even smart to connect with everyone in a company on social channels, connecting socially should be a key focus for any organization's top accounts. It's important to remember not to connect just for connecting's sake. This isn't the equivalent of building up a Rolodex—it's about building relationships.

"Through social, sales can identify the best message, the best communication vehicle, uncover referrals... the list goes on. And when prospects "go dark," **social selling can bring them back.**"

– Kendra Lee, author of *Selling Against the Goal: How Corporate Sales Professionals Generate the Leads they Need*

"When the empowered buyer is ready to reach out and talk, they often feel as if they have to step back in the buying process to get on the same page as sales."

– Tiffani Bova, VP and Distinguished Analyst, Gartner



TIP: Get your entire company to follow your top ten prospects on Twitter and LinkedIn. These potential buyers will notice.



OR GO HOME (CONT'D)

The smartest reps are extremely targeted in who they reach out to (another tip from Jill Rowley). They also take the time to research that person to give context as to why they want to connect. Perhaps most importantly, they offer free, valuable insights or advice. According to Rowley, "The Modern Sales Professional doesn't sell; she serves. She doesn't sell; she helps. She doesn't sell; she facilitates a buying process." Doing so gets a buyer's attention and quickly dispels the notion that the rep is all about making a quick sale.

In fact, this advisory approach boosts the likelihood that prospects will share their contact information or agree to a demo, for example. As Colleen Stanley, founder and president of SalesLeadership, Inc., says, "Most people view salespeople as self-centered, Lone-Ranger types. The best salespeople I know are generous. Generous people enjoy the law of reciprocity. When you give, you get." Barbara Giamanco, president of Social Centered Selling and co-author of "The New Handshake: Sales Meets Social Media," agrees. "...the focus is not on your company or what you sell, it is in offering something that is educational. Giving is more important than getting. Giving first leads to more opportunities over time."



TIP: Before reaching out to someone on LinkedIn with a "cold connect", take a few minutes to discover similarities or recent developments, such as promotions or job changes. A little can go a long way here and in the long run you'll be way more productive making a few smart connections than hundreds of meaningless ones.

Key takeaways

- Give your sales team social insights on their leads, contacts, and accounts.
- Provide reps with content and tools that makes it easy for them to be productive on social.
- Make social connections on LinkedIn and Twitter a key part of the process workflow for top accounts.



TIP: To make sure sales reps effectively engage in social "selling," train them on the tools and processes and help them build and maintain strong social media presences.



Special Guest Chapter

Real-world tips for building relationships and closing more deals on LinkedIn.

by Jason Miller, Senior Content Marketing Manager, **LinkedIn**
@JasonMillerCA

Social Selling is the way forward for modern-day digital sales reps that are looking to exceed their quota and become a sales linchpin within their organization. In this world where relationships are the new currency, the sales folks with the best networks will become rock stars. Why? Because they'll be the ones who connect with and glean insights about decision makers via social channels to move deals along.

So how can a sales professional best utilize LinkedIn—the world's largest professional network—for social selling? It boils down to three things:

1. Build your network on LinkedIn
2. Identify prospects
3. Engage with them





Special Guest Chapter (Cont'd)

by Jason Miller, Senior Content Marketing Manager, [LinkedIn](#)

[@JasonMillerCA](#)

Here are 10 ways that best-in-class sales teams use bleeding-edge Social Selling techniques on LinkedIn to be more productive:

1

Lay the foundation with a solid company page.

Once companies begin implementing a social selling strategy, it's vital to establish a "home base" on LinkedIn for messaging, content, products/services, and campaigns. Post helpful, targeted content consistently, and encourage current customers to follow the company's page. When an extra push is needed, try using a Sponsored Update to reach beyond the company's initial following.

2

The "who's viewed your profile" play.

"Funnelholic" and Social Selling expert Craig Rosenberg uses this technique. He says, "On LinkedIn – the prospect clicks on YOU. You aren't 'nameless sales guy x calling me again'—they looked at your profile. It's a prime opportunity to talk to potential buyers. Isn't that better than 'checking in'? They see your face, glance at your headline and summary..It is especially effective with people you have already connected with. (Think lead nurturing)."

3

Use InMail for personalized emails.

Matt Heinz from Heinz Marketing recommends "taking three minutes to learn three things about someone before reaching out to them," and I absolutely agree. Reps should leverage the insights they gather from profiles and other social networks to indicate they've done research on the person they're connecting with. For example, reference a blog post or speech given by that person.

4

Organize prospecting with LinkedIn contacts.

With LinkedIn contacts, sales pros can combine their address books, emails and calendars, and keep them up to date in one central place. LinkedIn will automatically pull in the details of past conversations and meetings, and add those details directly into the prospect's profile. Reps can take it a step further by utilizing Tags, Notes and Reminder features as well.



Special Guest Chapter (Cont'd)

by Jason Miller, Senior Content Marketing Manager, [LinkedIn](#)

[@JasonMillerCA](#)

5

Leverage the power of LinkedIn Groups.

LinkedIn Groups are a great way to build a personal brand, but they're also terrific for reaching out to group members as if they were a first-degree connection. In addition, group members are also able to view the profiles of other members of the same group without being connected.

6

Give wings to LinkedIn Updates.

When reps post an update to LinkedIn, with a check of a box they can easily syndicate that update to share it with their Twitter followers as well. Just select the Public + Twitter option in the Share With dropdown before clicking Share in the LinkedIn update composer.

7

Leverage @mentions in Status Updates.

In 2013, LinkedIn rolled out the ability to tag or @mention other users and companies in status updates—much like the way it works on Facebook and Twitter. Want another LinkedIn user or company to see a status update? Include the @ symbol immediately followed by the user's/company's name in the update. That user or company will get alerted about the mention, and their name will also link to their profile/page in the status update itself.

8

Apply the 4-1-1 Rule.

The 4-1-1 Rule, coined by Tippingpoint Labs and Joe Pulizzi of the Content Marketing Institute, states:

"For every one self-serving tweet, you should retweet one relevant tweet and most importantly share four pieces of relevant content written by others."

It's easy to apply this simple rule to activities on Personal Profiles and LinkedIn company page. For social selling, the 4-1-1 Rule is particularly useful when applied to building relationships with prospective customers. This helps reps foster an informative dialogue regularly and also keeps them at the forefront of prospects' minds as they move through the buying process. As Jay Baer says, "Sell something, get a customer for a day. Help someone, get a customer for life."

9

Get employees in on the discussion.

LinkedIn isn't just for marketing and sales folks. In fact it gives everyone in an organization a path to become a thought leader and establish their personal brands. Consider third-party apps like GaggleAMP and Advocate to empower employees to share the company's most important content with their networks.

10

Take a cue from the marketing team.

Reach out to the folks on the company's social, content and PR teams as they are likely seasoned pros at posting great content and engaging within social. For example there are many parallels between social selling and influencer/customer marketing. These teams can likely provide tips around the messaging and content that resonates with the company's target audience. Sales reps can then apply that strategy to interactions with their prospects.

Tell a story



THAT INSPIRES ACTION

We've already spelled out that sales reps need to be seen as a valuable resource for buyers, and we've outlined how they can do that by establishing themselves as the go-to-resource for all the information a buyer would need about top-of-mind issues, the latest industry trends and relevant solutions. By cutting through all the clutter and funneling only the most relevant content to prospects, reps further their role as a trusted advisor.

“Consistency in sharing best practices and insights develops **high credibility, trust and sales.**”

– Elinor Stutz, CEO of Smooth Sale

But let's not forget the job they were hired to do—sales pros need to effectively sell their company's product or service. Getting there means putting prospects and customers at the center of the vision they're painting for them, and educating and entertaining them as they lead them down the path to purchase. It means engaging buyers with a story that compels them to act, one that answers the questions: Why do anything? Why now? Why us?

According to Brian Kelly of InsideView, “Thought leadership can contribute significantly to all three by informing the market of your value, instilling urgency and differentiating over the competition.”

Make the buyer the hero of the story

Julie Hansen, Founder of Performance Sales and Training, picks up on that thread, saying effective storytelling can do a lot to quickly move buyers along the path to purchase. “A good sales story can draw prospects in and get them emotionally involved and inspire action, in a way that hammering them with facts and figures simply cannot. And because emotion plays a critical role in our ability to remember, good sales stories are extremely effective in making sure that our message is remembered by busy prospects at the time they are ready to make a decision.”

The story sales reps—and their content—tell needs to:

- Convince prospects that the status quo is unacceptable
- Educate them about their problems and options for overcoming them
- Inspire them to make a change and overcome objections to making a change

As we've moved from **information scarcity to information abundance**, it's critical that the content companies offer breaks down the buyer's current beliefs and replaces them with new, unexpected ones that lead back to the vendor.

Tell a story



THAT INSPIRES ACTION (CONT'D)

And here's why it's critical that sales reps provide this type of content: according to research by the Corporate Executive Board (CEB), "many suppliers are churning out more and more content in the hopes of capturing more customer mindshare. This approach, however, creates even more noise and even less differentiation and does not help suppliers escape the commoditization trap...buyers perceive little difference between the business value various suppliers can offer."¹

"When sales reps are interacting with buyers who present a roadblock or key question, **they need content** that helps them get them through that roadblock. Marketing needs to create that content."

– Craig Rosenberg, Co-founder, TOPO

Don't distract sales reps with non-selling activities

Whether called thought leadership or something else, sales reps don't have the time to create this content. In fact, a 2014 Sirius Decisions study revealed that 65% of companies' sales reps spend too many hours on non-selling activities, including digging up resources and tailoring presentation materials.² That's hardly the best use of their time.

The answer is for sales and marketing to work together closely to make sure the content their organization produces will truly hit the mark. Then sales needs to pay attention to how and when that content is consumed. Smart reps know that content assets map to the buyer's cycle and can pinpoint when a prospect is ready to talk. That means they can strike while the iron is hot.

Just remember—once reps are talking to prospective buyers, they need to carry on the conversation that's already been triggered by the company's content. That's one more reason it's important for marketing and sales to be in lockstep.



TIP: Get agreement from marketing that they'll keep sales informed of every new content asset: the target audience and buying stage, key message, where the asset can be found, and talking points when sales reps are following up with prospects or customers.

Key takeaways

- Tell "stories" that give prospective buyers an urgent reason to depart from the status quo.
- Arm sales reps with content that fuels interactions.
- Prepare sales pros to continue the conversation started by the company's content.

¹ The Corporate Executive Board Company, From Promotion to Emotion: Connecting B2B Customers to Brands, 2013

² <http://www.savogroup.com/blog/sales-productivity-efficiency/>

Get the edge

WITH SOCIAL INSIGHTS



If buyers no longer want to be sold to but *do* want relevant information and insights, what's a sales rep to do? The answer is for them to tap into all the data at their disposal to inform smart interactions. Doing so makes it easier to engage when the moment is right and deepen connections over time.

There are plenty of golden nuggets to unearth in the social sphere. While salespeople can glean lots of information through social listening and by participating in the social channels where prospective buyers spend time, spending endless hours sifting through social data isn't the most effective strategy. It can quickly overwhelm even the savviest of reps.

"Intelligence about your prospects and customers is imperative to effective selling. It enables reps to be relevant and timely with their outreaches, prioritize accounts, and increase probabilities to close/win deals."

– Brian Kelly, CMO, InsideView

"In 15 of the US economy's 17 sectors, companies with more than 1,000 employees store, on average, over 235 terabytes of data—**more data than is contained in the US Library of Congress.**"

– McKinsey Global Institute

Help sales make sense of social streams

That said, sales reps also can't afford to ignore this stream of information. Recognizing this, today's top organizations enable their teams to make sense of social interactions and social buying signals without drowning them.

Brian Kelly, CMO of InsideView, calls this giving your sales team the "knowledge advantage." And he advises the best way to empower them is to provide a tool that monitors and alerts reps of buying signals and other account activities. That way, they can prioritize interactions, understand what's top of mind, and engage with timely, relevant messages.

Focus sales on relevant insights

Smart organizations are also providing their sales teams with access to CRM tools with embedded social intelligence. With real-time feeds from leading social channels connecting directly to lead and account contacts, these CRM systems allow reps to cut out the social noise and focus on the insights that matter. That means they can reach out when the time is right and communicate about the topics that matter. Plus, with all the intelligence they need in one place, they can cut the time spent on pre-call research by over 70%.¹

¹ InsideView, <http://learnmore.insideview.com/Microsoft.html>

Get the edge

WITH SOCIAL INSIGHTS (CONT'D)



Here are three great ways to take advantage of social intelligence embedded in CRM:

Find and connect with new prospects

- Tap into social networking contacts to jump-start “warm” lead-generation efforts.
- Identify prospects by focusing on conversations and topics relevant to your product or service.

Engage in more meaningful conversations

- View social networking conversation history within the customer system of record.
- Utilize interests and discussion threads for more relevant conversations.

Better understand your customers

- Gain a more holistic customer view by instantly seeing a social networking profile for each contact.
- Better track relevant professional events such as job changes and promotions.
- Identify chief online champions and influencers.

Work your internal network

The power of social doesn't stop there. The hallmark of every successful sales rep is finding ways to take advantage of every resource possible to get the deal done. Some claim that in the most effective sales teams, “strong sellers don't merely execute their day-to-day tasks well... they rely on collective skills in ways that weren't possible just a few short years ago.”²

Reps need to harness the power of their own social networks, namely their colleagues. It's just a matter of tapping into the combined social intellect of their companies by working like a network.

That's why so many organizations are adopting enterprise social networking applications like Yammer. Here's good reason to follow in their footsteps: the 2014 Miller Heiman Sales Best Practices Study found that 91% of world-class organizations collaborate across all departments to close large deals, while only 53% of all organization collaborated on large deals.³

² Harvard Business Review Blog Network, Why Individuals No Longer Rule on Sales Teams by Brent Adamson, Matthew Dixon and Nicholas Toman, January 9, 2014

³ http://www.millerheiman.com/knowledge_center/knowledge_center_articles/sales_performance_research/2014-miller-heiman-sales-best-practices-study-exec/

Companies using enterprise social networks saw **business productivity rise by as much as 30%**.

– McKinsey Global Institute,
The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies, July 2012



Get the edge

WITH SOCIAL INSIGHTS (CONT'D)



Using an internal social network, sales reps can collaborate more effectively and query their colleagues directly. Just think how much time they'll save finding information and getting relevant answers.

Arming sales reps in this way should be a top priority for sales management. By better collaborating with their colleagues, sales reps often feel more engaged at their companies. Research shows engaged employees are more productive. Clearly, when we're talking about the sales force, that's a direct impact on the bottom line.

Sales no longer happens in a silo. **Salespeople need to tap into the combined social intellect** of their company.



TIP: To encourage collaboration and adoption of enterprise social networking tool(s), highlight a sales opportunity where the sales team rallied around a deal to win.

Key takeaways

- Make it easy for sales to tap into social insights and other data about prospective buyers.
- Facilitate internal collaboration.

Connecting in the age of the customer— **HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY FOR BETTER SELLING**



Whether it's the Internet or mobile devices, technology has changed the way buyers are buying, allowing them to plug in from anywhere to do their own research. But it's also changed how salespeople sell. Now, reps can work from anywhere, present from anywhere, sell from anywhere. With the right devices and software, sales reps can:

- Cut through the clutter—to **zero in** and easily identify what they need to do next
- Find a relevant way to connect with buyers so they can **win faster**
- Easily collaborate with people, to find and access the information they need to ultimately **sell more**

As James Oldroyd, Assistant Professor of International Business at Fisher College of Business, Ohio State University explains, "You want to send a better email? There are tools to help you. You want to measure your response to the email? There are tools to help you. Every step, when to respond, how to respond, how to follow up, how to build a relationship etc. can be measured and optimized."

"Ubiquitous selling means spreading client attraction and retention efforts wide and far, using a multitude of approaches so that the target market finds you wherever they go. **Ubiquity** involves using every tool available to you and not just relying on the telephone or email as too many sellers do."

– Colleen Francis, founder and president of Engage Selling Solutions

"The most important thing is to base your sales strategy and process decisions on **what your buyers want.**"

– Craig Rosenberg, Co-founder, TOPO

Identify the processes that work

It's all a matter of choosing the right tools for the job at hand. It's also critical, however, to use technology to support the best way of working. Tiffani Bova of Gartner advises organizations not to put the cart before the horse: "Technology for technology's sake doesn't help anyone, and rolling out tools which users find no value in or don't know how to use puts a strain on any organization. If the organization is willing to change, then they can't look at technology as a way to automate and improve processes. Technology must be used to support (new) processes, which are built from new ways of thinking about how to create a top performing sales culture."

"Progressive companies are changing business processes to adapt to a new style of work influenced by mobile devices, collaboration tools and social technologies...businesses are changing processes to embrace the new business buyer..."¹

¹ Avanade, GLOBAL RESEARCH SHOWS MOBILE AND SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES COMPLICATE B2B SALES PROCESSES; BUSINESS BUYERS MIMICKING CONSUMER SHOPPERS, November 19, 2013

Connecting in the age of the customer— **HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY FOR BETTER SELLING (CONT'D)**



In fact, formalizing sales process workflows is key to increasing productivity. Think of it the way a data scientist would. What elements around an opportunity provide true insight into pipeline? What key markers of success should the sales team focus on? It's not enough to rely on the instinct of the sales force (as solid as that might be). Companies need to determine the key indicators for each stage in an opportunity. Not only does this reduce guesswork, it can provide sales managers with actionable feedback on how a rep can improve.

Now that we've covered the basics when it comes to laying a solid foundation, here's a rundown on the latest tools designed to take sales productivity to new levels.

A modern CRM solution can better enable sales

There's little question that CRM systems are the de facto tool for sales, but in the past, CRM systems weren't built to help salespeople do their job. They were made for reporting purposes, so the management team could get an accurate view into forecast. We call those systems of oppression. Salespeople had to take time out of their day to keep the system updated. Those systems are a drain on productivity and don't help reps do what's needed to sell. Even systems created just 10 or so years ago aren't optimized for what a sales person needs to do today.

Let's consider what happens when reps get a lead. They have to log into one application (i.e., the CRM system) to see the lead, then open a browser to start researching that person and company on the buyer's company website and on social networks.

All of this takes time, can lead to distractions, and still often leaves reps short on information. Once sales finds the opportunity to connect, they need to get as educated as they can—as quickly as possible—to identify a way to provide immediate value.

As Colleen Francis, founder and president of Engage Selling Solutions explains, "The CRM system must be the hub for all sales templates, proposals, marketing materials and coaching dashboards. If everything sellers need is in one place, they will use the tool completely. When CRM is being utilized to its fullest extent, the team will be more productive and the organization will have a more predictable sales forecast."

The good news is that CRM technology has evolved to help sales reps conduct research internally and externally, collaborate with colleagues, make connections on social networks, and focus on the buyer. The result is a modern selling experience that facilitates interactions and sales.

"My ideal sales dashboard shows all of my team's activities and presents it in a way that allows us to make **smart decisions**. Ideally, it would track phrases that resonated most with buyers based on the circumstances, and would track the best questions for each of our buyer types."

— *Lori Richardson,*
founder and CEO of Score More Sales

Connecting in the age of the customer— **HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY FOR BETTER SELLING (CONT'D)**



Put predictive analytics into the hands of every rep

Today sales can also tap into the power of predictive analytics and dashboards to identify promising opportunities. In a nutshell, predictive analytics makes it possible for everyday businesspeople to query data using natural language and checking off boxes for instant and visual results. Specifically, they can apply analytics to data sets and easily see possible future outcomes. Many call this the democratization of data. No matter what its name, it's all about putting important insights directly into sales reps' hands.

Imagine entering the query "show all customers by geography and lead source over the past five years and predict the likelihood of repeats." Or think about being able to take note of when a certain segment of prospects is typically ready to speak to a rep. The sales team can reach out when the opportunity is hot. They can even pinpoint when existing customers are most likely to purchase an additional product or service, and jump on cross- and upsell opportunities.

But sales pros need an easy way to view and analyze all that data. That's where the dashboards in CRM systems shine. With it, sales pros can easily:

- Visualize data in a clean way
- Easily draw conclusions from trends
- Make the right decisions when it comes to assessing the health of their pipeline, prioritizing the hottest leads, and focusing on the right deals

Arm road warriors

At the same time, sales apps need to do one thing: Help sellers close more deals faster—wherever they are. The smartest organizations are responding to the BYOD trend by empowering reps with a secure way to access information, content and colleagues via their mobile devices, whether smartphones or tablets. Doing so keeps the sales team happy, focused and productive.

Organizations doing business on a global scale need to help their reps to do their jobs more effectively around the world. Until recently, this meant establishing field sales offices in every location where the company did business. But with today's advanced tools, a new approach is possible. For instance, Skype instantly translates conversations, enabling teams to knock down language barriers and easily sell in global markets.

Key takeaways

- Consider the way the sales team prefers to work when selecting tools to support them.
- Use technology to automate as many processes as possible.
- Provide tools that streamline the sales process from beginning to end.

There you have it...



A few best practices and tips to help you sell effectively in the modern era.

Read on to hear from some of the world's top sales thought leaders.



Insights from the experts.



We published these responses from some of the world's most influential sales thought leaders, raw and unfiltered. While the views expressed here may not necessarily reflect the views of Microsoft or endorse Microsoft's products, we are all about diversity of opinion and open dialogue. We believe this is the best way we can support our customers.



Insights From The Experts:
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Meagan Eisenberg

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Sales productivity is a critical measurement for the success of any sales and marketing organization. When you increase sales productivity you reduce your costs of sales and increase your speed to revenue. Sales resources are expensive and hit the bottom line, and for SaaS companies, a lower cost of sales and marketing to revenue nets higher shareholder value. Sales enablement should be a joint responsibility between sales and marketing to improve sales productivity. From onboarding and continued sales training to compensation, measurement, and sales tools – all areas need continual focus and ongoing enhancement. According to SiriusDecisions, 52% of lost sales are due to a failure in sales enablement.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

We hear stats that more and more of the buyer's journey is online and occurs before there is an actual connection with sales – as high as 70%—but the buyer process will rarely if ever replace the sales funnel. The buyer's process or journey will overlap and run parallel to a company's sales funnel. So we need to make every effort to align the buyer's journey with our sales cycle and communicate the right message at the right time. Marketers may need to take on more of the sales role in the early stages of the funnel with content and education. As sales reps and leaders, we need to make sure we partner with marketing to have the relevant content online so that the buyer can self-educate and reach out to sales as needed and when ready. And we need to monitor our buyer's activity and proactively engage at the right time by providing sales with the tools to monitor and the content to respond to prospective customers. Our communications and nurture programs should also align to the stage that the buyer is in so we don't lose them from our funnel or fail to realize they're not ready to engage. At DocuSign, we are careful to align the buyer's journey of Need – Learn – Evaluate – Negotiate – Purchase – Implement – Advocate to our sales cycle with the relevant content syndicated at the right time in that journey.

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

My top tips are education, lead qualification process and sales tools—not to mention hiring the right folks. From the moment you onboard your sales reps, you need to effectively train them on your solution, on the buyer persona and journey, on discovery questions, on the content available for them to educate and move the buyer through the gates, on competitors and typical objections, pricing, and on the sales tools available to them. And then you need to reiterate and trust, yet verify, they digested the learnings and are applying them correctly.

As far as lead qualification, you need to partner with marketing to ensure you agree on the buyer personas, and what makes for a quality lead. Agree on the scoring criteria and how you mark the incoming leads for priority order. Make sure sales are focused on the leads most likely to convert.

And pick your sales tools for the entire funnel. As soon as a lead comes in it should be accurately scored by your automation platform for priority order, and sales should have the appropriate scripts, content and qualification criteria to move them through the funnel quickly. As they get ready to close the deal and send out the contract, you should arm them with DocuSign's Digital Transaction Management platform to save money and quickly close the deal online. No need to chase the paperwork, print, sign, fax or overnight.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer?

For sales and marketing to align around the empowered buyer, they need to have three things:

1. Build the models together,
2. Transparency in all results and metrics, and
3. Habitual communication.

People commit to and enforce things they helped build. Sales and marketing need to build the following together: the waterfall definitions and stages, buyer personas, lead flow model, lead scoring and qualification models. They need to monitor the results of the models and continually troubleshoot, improve and enhance. And sales and marketing must have constant communication on a weekly basis where feedback is welcomed and freely shared as part of the improvement and alignment process. Like any good relationship, communication makes a huge difference.

Meagan Eisenberg (continued)

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

SiriusDecisions has some great models and processes for sales to harness from persona creation to waterfall metrics and conversions to lead scoring and nurture best practices. As far as technologies, the list is only growing with the marketing and sales clouds being built out across some major contenders. The Gartner quote—CMOs will spend more than the CIO by 2017 has already come to fruition—we already spend more at DocuSign in marketing and sales software. We started with our core technologies—CRM and MAP (Marketing Automation Platform) at the end of 2011. Once we had our MAP platform in place we added on many other technologies.

We run more than 15 marketing technologies for our B2B business with several directly enhancing and improving sales productivity. Twitter and LinkedIn aid in our focus and training around social selling and understanding the prospects interests.

And of course we use our own technology—DocuSign—to close business faster by expediting the sales contract process.

If you could see any information about your leads, contacts, and accounts in your sales dashboard, what would that be?

Interest and engagement are key for a sales rep to prioritize who to talk with first and how to frame the best conversation to improve conversion rates and sales productivity. At DocuSign, we provide our sales team with insights to the lead and contact's web activity, form submissions, online search terms, social activity, email response and more. All of this adds up to a 360 degree view of the prospect. And now with the harnessing of big data, we can provide external data around finances, social activity (hiring for instance), web presence, and software they leverage. All of this provides triggers for sales to map to our existing customer DNA to improve conversations and fit to our solutions. Of course, we would all love to provide the BANT answers upon receiving a lead, but we have a ways to go for that without sales intervention and qualification.

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy and what are the top ways reps can tap into these?

Social selling and social insights are definitely part of the sales arsenal and should be adopted if not already by savvy sales reps. We train our reps regularly at DocuSign on the latest social selling techniques within LinkedIn and Twitter. And DocuSign uses LinkedIn within CRM. Peer-to-peer introductions and referrals are still the fastest way to convert a buyer into a customer, as well as the number one trusted source for many buyers. And by monitoring a buyer's activities and interests on social sites, such as Twitter, we can better form not only a relationship with the buyer, but also a solution that matches their needs and in turn convert to a sale faster.



Insights From The Experts:

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Christina Dieckmeyer

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

To have the most productive sales force, sales leaders must have an effective strategy in place. The use of a sales strategy means the leadership team allocates resources efficiently, and can get the most production from his/her sales force. The objectives of a sales strategy should be:

- Align the sales strategy with buyer needs
- Align the sales strategy with the corporate strategy
- Align the sales strategy with product/solution strategy
- Capture the available market by outselling the competition

It is key to have an operating plan in place to ensure a productive sales force.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

You must define your buyer's process and create Buying Process Maps. Buying Process Maps are sales tools that map the decision making process used to purchase a product, service or solution. This provides the sales team a blueprint so they can get into deals early enough to win them. The use of one means that the buyer and seller are completely aligned resulting in the elimination of blown opportunities.

According to SBI's research, there are several key benefits to Buying Process Maps.

- 42% longer buying cycle—with a Buying Process Map in place, sellers are more than twice as likely to get engaged with a buyer early enough to help define the problem.
- 113% greater chance to engage with a buyer prior to the Options phase. The Options phase of the buying process is when the buyer has already defined the problem, and is determining what options can solve this particular problem.
- 47% fewer competitors involved in each deal
- 37% higher win rates
- 26% higher average deal size

Your internal sales process and how you have defined your customer's buying cycle should be aligned for the greatest chance of success.

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

One way to improve sales productivity is to complete a Sales & Marketing Assessment. The objectives of Sales & Marketing Assessment are:

- Identify, validate and quantify the opportunities for growth
- Prioritize the opportunities for growth based on the financial return, level of effort and probability of success.
- Get all major stakeholders to buy into the sales and marketing plan.

A Sales & Marketing Assessment will result in a set of recommendations and a plan to implement the recommendations to accelerate revenue growth.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer?

Decision makers today are overwhelmed. They are suffering from information overload. How do you stand out? To do this, marketing and sales must recognize the problem, understand the new buyer, and work together to embrace the new trend.

Marketing has a strategy and sales does too. Though often, the two are not integrated. As a result, there are serious issues for resource allocation. Time and money go to waste, the sales funnel springs leaks, and the goals aren't achieved.

The solution is to align the marketing and sales strategy, and integrate the processes for effective handoff points. This allows the teams to focus on the mission critical initiatives that contribute to the most revenue growth.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

The new buyer is well informed, technology enabled, saturated with media and suffering from information overload. As a result the buyer self-directs his educational process in search of a solution to his problem. Our research shows that in 2014, 69% of the B2B buyer's journey will be complete before the buyer ever communicates with the sales force.

Sales leaders have two choices. The first choice is stay with the "status quo"—spend time, money, and effort in the "31%". As a result, every deal will be competitive. They will be unable to get into deals early enough to influence the customer's evaluation criteria. Our research suggests that if you make this choice you are going to miss the number more than half of the time.

The second choice is to embrace the trend. Spend time, money and effort in the "69%". By doing this Sales leaders are not competing on price and win deals with little competition. SBI research shows that sales forces doing this are 56% more likely to make the number.

Christina Dieckmeyer (continued)

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy, and what are the top ways reps can tap into these?

Social selling is a modern prospecting methodology that fills the funnel with opportunities. It generates meetings with decision makers inside of target prospects. Top reps can use social selling to make their number without any dependencies on other departments.

SBI's research has shown that Social Selling is:

- The #1 source of rep generated opportunities (note: 70/30 split sales-to-marketing best-in-class)
- The #1 shift in sales training dollars (note: 48% budget increase)
- The #1 Lead to close conversion rate (note: 15% from first contact inside 12 months vs. 3% marketing sourced)

There are 3 steps to achieve Social Selling Excellence:

- **Profiles.** You must create a world class LinkedIn profile. Prospects rely on the web, and specifically LinkedIn, to do their research. Not just research on problems and their solution options, but on people who can help them in their journey.
- **Reach.** You must increase the reach of the sales force. This is done by multiplying the number and quality of connections in their LinkedIn database. Sales teams will make or miss their number based on the quantity and quality of the team's connections.
- **Referrals.** You must generate referrals amongst buyers. To monetize the database, a process is needed to get warm introductions to decision makers in target accounts.



Insights From The Experts:

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Brian Kelly

Provide top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders.

- 1) **Know your buyer.** Sounds like motherhood and apple pie and sales 101, but I am constantly running into organizations that don't have a solid understanding of their buyers. What are their pains and priorities, how do they measure success, what is their modern buying process? How can you respectfully "sell", or bring value to the table if you don't understand what makes your buyers tick and how you can move the needle for them and their organization? By understanding your buyer and their buying process across these dimensions, your reps can more effectively prioritize accounts and engage with timely, value-based, compelling messages.
- 2) Give your team the **knowledge advantage.** Intelligence about your prospects and customers is imperative to effective selling. It enables reps to be relevant and timely with their outreaches, prioritize accounts, and increase probabilities to close/win deals. Don't make reps spend half their time doing account research and tracking. Their time is better spent selling, but selling smart. Give them a tool that monitors and alerts them of buying signals and other account activities that allow them to prioritize accounts and engage with timely, relevant messages. Prospects are 32% more likely to reply to relevant messages, but sales reps spend as much as 42% of their time doing research. Tools like InsideView automate the delivery of account intelligence.
- 3) **Get aligned with marketing.** Marketing is your friend more than ever. Marketing has the reach and ability to significantly impact close rates. Most marketers are now measured on revenue (or certainly should be), meaning they have to deliver leads that convert to revenue. And marketing programs are more focused than ever on not just top-of-funnel leads but on programs that bring in leads mid-funnel and nurture all the way to close. Marketing programs should be completely aligned with your sales process. They should nurture and acquire leads with the same persona messaging being delivered by your reps. The result is a consistent lead-to-revenue process that more effectively moves deals to close. A key way to this alignment is the flow of lead information from marketing to sales. The lead should hit sales in a complete and accurate form. And by complete I mean not just contact name and contact info, but all the news and social buzz associated with the account. Right there, ready to use. The key being, the master customer and contact data needs to come from a single source, needs to be highly accurate, and needs to include insights and connections for true sales-ready leads. The result: Sales loves marketing for killer leads, and marketing loves sales because they convert the leads to revenue.

How important are social selling and social insights to your overall sales strategy and why?

Very important. We leverage insights in both sales and marketing in a few ways:

- 1) We look for buying signals. Buying signals can be seen in a couple ways. The first is seeing news that indicates a buying process could be underway. For example, you sell office furniture, and a company just announced an expansion. Second, a prospect is posting questions in social groups that indicates they're doing research for a certain product or service.
- 2) We engage with our market in social. We respond and contribute to social posts, questions, and comments to show we care and can help improve their business. By engaging, you not only answer the individual's question, but the interaction is seen by potentially thousands or even millions of people.
- 3) Contributing thought leadership material and moderating industry groups. This is a great way to establish thought leadership and market leadership. We moderate a few groups that have developed into very active and engaging forums for sharing ideas, discussing best practices, and getting questions answered. This has established InsideView as a thought leader in Social Selling, CRM Intelligence, and Sales Intelligence.

What are the top 3-5 ways marketing can better support sales?

- 1) Making sure the programs and content are aligned with the buying process, with an emphasis on overcoming the biggest barriers.
- 2) Deliver leads that are complete, accurate, and truly qualified.
- 3) Establish thought leadership in your industry.

How important is content and thought leadership in the sales process and why?

It's a must-have. We're trying to answer the three key questions: Why do anything? Why now? Why us? Thought leadership can contribute significantly to all three by informing the market of your value, instilling urgency, and differentiating over the competition.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel?

The sales funnel should be aligned with the buyer process, at a minimum. It's part of understanding your buyer and guiding them to close. If you're not aligned with the buyer process, your sales process will be less efficient and effective. The tools and technology are available to monitor buyers and be timely with engagement and messages. Why wouldn't you?

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

I believe that CRM Intelligence is required for effective sales. Without having a way to monitor your target market and identifying buying signals, you're missing out. CRM Intelligence arms reps with accurate data, buying signals and events, and connections for getting an intro. This information is delivered directly within CRM for easy access.



Insights From The Experts:
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Colleen Francis

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Sales productivity is required to maintain a high-performance culture. Top-performing organizations manage their teams to ensure 80% or more are hitting targets (and poor performers are coached up or out quickly). In a typical sales organization, 10% of salespeople overachieve, always exceeding their target. Another 20% underachieve dramatically and are considered “deadwood.” And 70% are average, performing inconsistently and regularly missing their quotas. Top-performing companies build an entire team of top performers. To do this, they ruthlessly manage productivity and get rid of their average, not merely their underachieving, “deadwood.” Their tolerance level is far below what most companies will endure. I call this “Find the best, remove the rest.”

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

It’s not the funnel that has been replaced but the sales process. Today, with buyers now controlling the majority of the front end of the sales process, and, with over 57% of buying decisions being made before a seller is contacted, sellers must learn to facilitate a buying process—not conduct a sales process—and adapt their sales process to be aligned with the way their buyers are buying. The sales funnel remains a critical tool for sellers to use in managing their business but it must be adapted to reflect the new processes buyers are using to buy.

What are the most important elements of a sales story, and how can effective storytelling accelerate prospect movement through the buying cycle?

Real-life examples and metaphors. Real-life examples because buyers want solid proof that businesses like them are using the products successfully. Buyers care little for why you think you can help them but they care deeply about what others have said about your help. The smartest sellers use a combination of case studies, examples and testimonials in audio, video, and text format to prove to their prospects that they have a long history of success. Metaphors are critical because they make the abstract clear, create a sense of familiarity, trigger emotions, draw attention, and motivate action. As people buy emotionally and justify logically, the right metaphor can be the difference between winning and losing a sale.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today’s era of the empowered buyer?

Ubiquity. Ubiquitous selling means that you are spreading your client attraction and retention efforts wide and far, using a multitude of approaches so that your target market finds you wherever they go. Ubiquity involves using every tool available to you and not just relying on the telephone, or email as too many sellers do. In this way, the lines are blurring between sellers and marketers. The most successful sellers are not relying on their marketing departments. Instead, they are using marketing as a springboard to be more leveraged in the marketplace, ensuring prospects exclaim “hey! I see you everywhere!”

What are the top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders?

- Coach your team 3 hours per month at a minimum. Sellers that are coached 3 hours or more per month achieve on average 107% of target. Sellers that are coached 2 hours a month achieve less than 90% of their targets. Coaching is a no-brainer.
- Monitor and measure leading indicator performance indicators such as pipeline health, number of calls, hours on the phone, the number of meetings, proposals, etc. A sale is a lagging indicator of success. When a sale is made, it means that the seller first successfully completed a series of presale activities or leading indicators. In order to assure future success, you must track these activities.
- Use a CRM for everything. Your CRM system must be the hub for all sales templates, proposals, marketing materials, and coaching dashboards. If everything a seller needs is in one place, they will use the tool completely. When the CRM system is being utilized to its fullest extent, the team will be more productive and you will have a more predictable sales forecast.

Colleen Francis (continued)

How important are social selling and social insights to an overall sales strategy?

75% of B2B buyers state that they are influenced by some sort of social media during the buying process. The key to using social media profitably is to be active on the same social media platforms your buyers are using. There is no point in promoting your business on Facebook (for example) if none of your buyers ever use Facebook! Social media should be part of a broader sales strategy, not your only sales strategy, and must include a variety of platforms such as social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, blogs, forums, and audio (podcasting) sites for the best results.

What are the top 3-5 ways marketing can do a better job of supporting sales?

- 1) Create a common definition of a qualified lead before marketing campaigns are started.
- 2) Prepare an integrated sales and marketing funnel showing the conversion rates and steps of leads at all stages of the buying process.
- 3) Speak to customers directly to build use cases, case studies and testimonials for inclusion in all marketing materials.

How important is content and thought leadership in the sales process and why? Critical. Today, no one buys from salespeople—they only buy from experts. And buyers are actively searching for thought leaders and experts daily. How do you make yourself noticed and get found as a thought leader? By building or promoting a platform where you can share what you and your company know better than anyone else. The platform can be varied, and include book publishing, blog posts, regular emails, podcasts, market- or association-specific websites, social media groups, newsletter articles and public speaking—all with content fine-tuned to address topics that are relevant to your target audience. This is not a place for product pitches or demonstrations. The more opportunities you create to be seen as a familiar, trusted expert who helps people solve their business problems, the more likely it is for you to get meetings with new buyers.



Insights From The Experts:

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Julie Hansen

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Gone are the days of blindly stumbling in to a prospect meeting without having at least a rudimentary understanding of the prospect's business environment, challenges and opportunities. This discovery is the cost of entry into the sales process, but it can take a fair amount of time out of an already busy schedule. If other less critical tasks cannot be streamlined, delegated or automated, the discovery process often suffers, as do sales results.

What are most important elements of sales story?

Those of us in sales have much to learn from the 1.8 trillion dollar entertainment industry on how to engage and move prospects through the use of story.

- **An attention-grabbing opening.** Why do movies start with a car chase? Because the director knows that if they don't grab the audience's attention in the first few seconds, they may lose them altogether. A sales story is no different. A strong opening doesn't give your audience a chance to think, "Why is she telling me this?" or "Hey, I don't have time to hear a story!"
- **Dramatic tension.** Stories are based on drama and drama requires conflict and tension before it ultimately comes to a resolution. Give your story the "So what?" test. If it doesn't pass, you may need to escalate the dramatic tension. At every point in your story ask yourself, "And then what would happen?" to ratchet up the tension. The tension should be at a peak before you show the solution.
- **A theme.** Good stories trust the intelligence of their audience and let the listener come to their own conclusion. In sales this is especially powerful, as the listener's own conclusion has much more weight. By weaving that theme throughout our story, we can make a huge impact on our audience.
- **A clear, strong closing.** A brilliantly told story with an unclear, over-explained or simply blown ending can undo any positive affect the story may have made. Know what your ending is and when you've reached it. Resist the urge to start explaining what your story meant and its relevance to your prospect.

How can effective storytelling accelerate the prospect through the buying cycle?

Most decisions are made emotionally then justified intellectually. A good sales story can draw prospects in and get them emotionally involved and inspire action, in a way that hammering them with facts and figures simply can not.

In addition, since stories can create emotion and emotion plays a critical role in our ability to remember, they are extremely effective in making sure that our message is remembered by busy prospects at the time they are ready to make a decision.

How can marketing support sales?

Understanding the reality of what salespeople face in the field: audiences' that are short on time and attention and who are comparing their presentation to a dozen other similar presentations they've seen. Marketing needs to work closely with sales to create flexible decks that take into account how people absorb information today, have multiple points of engagement and interaction, and differentiate how their solution is presented from the competition.



Insights From The Experts:
Founder and CEO, DemandMetrics
@DemandMetric

Jesse Hopps

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Helping is the new selling. Unfortunately, most companies are not yet at the point of recognizing they need to give their sales teams permission and tools to spend time enabling prospects. Too often sales teams are pressured to make the next sale, maximize margin on each deal, and get their funnels to be 4x their quota. That drives behavior that is not conducive to 'helping' and only reinforces the 'selling' we have all come to loath.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

Yes, the customer decision journey or 'buyer process' has replaced the sales funnel. The sales funnel is an arbitrary representation of wishful thinking. It was a useful framework two decades ago when B2B sales teams actually had a significant level of influence on customer decision-making. Today, with ubiquitous information and social networks, customers are in charge of their decision process, customer experience, and brand relationships. Companies need to scrap their sales funnel and focus on enabling buyers.

That being said, the place to start is to understand the customer decision journey. Counter to market myth, there are not thousands of journeys but each vendor has about 3-4 journeys that cover 99.9% of their high-value customer segments. The implication is a simple one—let go of yesteryear's comfort zone and embrace what the customers' expectations and actions are today. Aligning your sales methodology and sales enablement tools to your customer journeys will give you a much more reliable way to qualify opportunities and manage your sales forecast.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer?

Sales and marketing alignment has been a never-ending power struggle over resources. By focusing on the buyer, instead of each other, sales and marketing can get on the same page and work together to enable buyers to achieve their desired outcomes. That also means that CEOs need to stop pitting these teams against each other as this only hurts the top-line. Furthermore customers are very astute at picking up on any team disconnects.

The first suggestion I have is to drop MQL/SAL/SQL reporting—measure revenue and conversion from each stage in the customer decision journey. Second suggestion is to measure social engagement—based on how successful the company is with each high-value target account. Third, marketing needs to own taking a lead well into the conversion funnel and, for each lead, craft a full handoff for sales that includes history of engagement and the engagement strategy for sales. Fourth, sales needs to stop being lazy about leads and actually act on what marketing passes over.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

Our research shows that organizations with tightly aligned CRM and Marketing Automation systems outperform (from a revenue target-attainment perspective) peers who don't use these technologies or don't have them well integrated. I'd add to that the effective use of LinkedIn, content curation and distribution, sales intelligence, and sales enablement platforms that enrich the customer experience and feed content analytics to marketing.

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

IDemand Metric has a fantastic 'how-to' guide on how to develop sales playbooks based on customer journey maps. I recommend folks check it out along with our over 500 other guides, reports and tools.

If you could see any information about your leads, contacts, and accounts in your sales dashboard, what would that be?

- What stage in the customer decision journey are leads in?
- What % of leads are where in the journey?
- What is the % conversion from journey stage?
- What is the desired outcome leads are trying to achieve?
- What is the sentiment of leads at each stage?
- What is the degree of social engagement at each journey stage?
- Lead-to-close conversion and time-to-close?
- % disengagement of leads by journey stage?

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy, and what are the top ways reps can tap into these?

With 70% of the buyers' journey complete before companies ever want to talk to sales reps, it's critical that reps engage their target accounts via social networks (Twitter, LinkedIn, etc). Social selling is a misnomer; it should be called social enabling or buying. Social networks are powerful vehicles to build trust and credibility, which are the critical first steps for moving the conversation from social to other channels (in person and phone). Again the recipe is simple—focus on helping; the sale will follow. Focus on understanding what the buyer is trying to achieve and why it's important to them.

Stop hammering sales reps on how many cold calls they did in a day. Instead teach them how to engage on social and give them lots of content that has been developed for each stage in the customer decision journey. Then trust your sales teams to do the right thing. Let them do what they do best—help prospects.

Social selling starts with your culture. If your company culture is rooted in pressure and constantly terminating the bottom 10%, you'll never get there. If your company culture is based on enabling, empowering, and training employees to be the best they can be, you'll grow fast and it'll be sustainable. In other words, social selling is not a gimmick but a core business strategy.



Insights From The Experts:

Author and Change Agent, Social Centered Selling
@barbaragiamanco

Barbara Giamanco

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Sellers are under constant pressure to achieve sales objectives, and the bar keeps rising. Couple that pressure to drive revenue and pipeline with representing multiple products/services, understanding each prospect's business, and finding unique ways to get in front of buyers who block emails and phone calls, means sellers must work very smartly. More importantly, productivity should not be confused with activity. To be successful in today's global, fast-paced, competitive sales environment, the sales rock stars focus their attention on the right people, the right opportunities, and the right activity.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

Yes, the traditional sales funnel has been blown apart. Buyers no longer enter the top of the funnel as a lead that is scored by marketing and passed over to sales who then sets a meeting, presents, proposes, and closes business. Estimates vary, but we know that buyers begin the sales process without sellers roughly 70% of the time. And leads can come from anywhere: LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, a blog, a referral, marketing event or an email campaign.

The implication is that sales and marketing must first accept that buyer behavior has changed. Traditional sales and marketing processes are not as effective as they once were because the buyer's journey looks much different than it did 5 or 10 years ago. As a result of the massive disruption that the internet and social media brought with it, sales and marketing must work together. Each camp has to think differently about their roles. Marketers need to think more like sellers, and sellers need to learn to become more like marketers.

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

- Start with a clear plan for where you are headed. This is especially important now that sellers must leverage social media as part of their sales process.
- Have a system, use the right tools, and follow a process consistently.
- Learn, learn, learn, and continuously adapt.
- Focus on the right activity. Call and meet with the right people. Qualify early for a no and move to the more promising opportunities.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer? Sales needs to stop assuming that using social is only marketing's job. Marketing should stop using social channels as just another way to push information out to the marketplace. A Social Selling Framework should include: Strategy, Skills, and Execution.

Sales and marketing need to plan the Social Selling strategy together. They will answer questions like:

- Are our sales and marketing goals aligned?
- Who is our target audience? What do they care about?
- What social channels are our prospects likely to use?
- How will we track social interactions and nurture leads?
- Do we have a process for capturing opportunities that come from non-traditional sources like Twitter?
- What are we known for, and how will we communicate our message?
- What are the right social networking platforms for our salespeople to use?
- Do our people have the right sales and technology skills?
- What training is needed?
- How do we define social selling success?
- What will we monitor, measure, and track?

Skills come next: In this step, you must honestly assess the people's sales and technology skills and determine what type of training is needed. When it comes to selling, what areas need help?

- Networking effectively
- Prospecting
- Qualifying opportunities
- Planning for sales calls
- Presenting your solution
- Negotiating terms
- Closing deals

What about the technology? Do your salespeople understand what platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook are designed to do, or how and when a buyer is likely to engage there? Don't assume a great profile or clicking on a few buttons will lead to sales results. More likely, it will only lead to sales frustration.

Finally, execution. This is the final phase of the Social Selling Framework. Here is where everything is pulled together. It requires disciplined behavior – making sure that salespeople are engaging in the right activities consistently and using technology in the right way.

Salespeople represent the company's brand, and how they choose to represent themselves online will make a big difference in success or failure. Consistent participation generates the visibility needed to demonstrate credibility and thought leadership, in advance of sales opportunities. Salespeople need to follow a daily process of using social to help them generate new leads, reach decision makers fast, differentiate themselves from competitors, present solutions at the right time, demonstrate business acumen, and secure those meetings quickly. The end goal is closed deals. The process matters!

Sales leaders will need to diligently monitor and measure the effective execution of sales activities, which include constantly evaluating the sales and technology skills of their people and providing the ongoing training, coaching, and support that they need to succeed.

Barbara Giamanco (continued)

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

It isn't just new processes and technologies that salespeople need to use; they need to change their mindset and behavior entirely. This is no longer about simply meeting someone at an event, sending email, or making a phone call, getting a meeting, presenting the solution, sending over a proposal, and closing a deal.

Salespeople need to learn how to use social technologies effectively. Having a LinkedIn profile and connecting with people is one thing, but using it as a marketing and sales engine is something else entirely. If leads can come from anywhere and buyers source the web and their social networks for recommendations, sellers have to be where their buyers are. Using social must be a daily part of the routine.

If you aren't viewed as a trusted resource and providing value in advance of sales opportunities, you get locked out. With buyers searching the web doing their upfront homework, they better be able to find you and discern that you have the credibility and capability that they want.

Tips for increasing visibility and demonstrating credibility beyond using social:

- Speak on panels at association events or conferences
- Deliver an educational session on business topic as association events or conferences
- Conduct/facilitate informational webinars with industry guest experts
- Host a webinar in which customers tell their story
- Host a peer-to-peer networking event that includes a guest speaker

In all of these cases, the focus is not on your company or what you sell, it is in offering something that is educational. Giving is more important than getting. Giving first leads to more opportunities over time.

If you could see any information about your leads, contacts, and accounts in your sales dashboard, what would that be?

Naturally, you want to see the standard stuff (name, title, location, revenue, stages of deals in the pipeline, etc.), but now you need the social data and public data to help engage more effectively at the right time. Plus, you need who else is part of influencing the purchase. In complex deals, it can be 10-15 people who are part of the decision making process. Social insights can help to expose more inter-related connections inside an organization.

The dashboard must also include access to social data from places like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Salespeople need to be able to quickly walk in the digital footprint of their prospects and customers. Who are people connecting with, what groups are they joining, what do they say on Twitter, who do they follow, what do they share about themselves, what do they care about? We don't sell B2B or B2C, we sell P2P—person to person.

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy, and what are the top ways reps can tap into these?

Buyers expect sellers to know about their business. Granted, they can't know everything, but the days of showing up and asking a busy executive to explain what keeps them up at night are over. Salespeople need to do the upfront homework to demonstrate that they are not there just to sell, but to add value to the prospect's business.

Sellers need business intelligence that helps them learn quickly about potential issues or challenges that a prospect or customer is facing in their business. Selling today isn't about the one-sided presentation pitching products and services. Buyers want salespeople to educate them about what they don't know. They want help solving problems they cannot solve on their own.

As noted earlier, sellers must think like marketers. Their job is to proactively seek out sales opportunities, but at the same time, they need to attract prospects to them. That's where social media plays a role in selling. Well-crafted social profiles are the foundation.

Top ways to tap into a Social Selling strategy:

- Follow prospects, customers and influencers—monitor and pay attention to what they talk about.
- Share content that is educational and relevant—not marketing slicks.
- Participate in group discussions. Add to the conversation by sharing unique points of view based on personal business experience.
- Connect people to each other and cultivate referrals. A referral network is one of the most powerful ways to increase sales opportunities.



Insights From The Experts:

Founder, KLA Group
Best-selling author, *Selling Against the Goal: How Corporate Sales Professionals Generate the Leads they Need*
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Kendra Lee

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

In a nutshell, the more your sales team is able to focus on the right activities, the faster they will identify more qualified opportunities and move them through the pipeline to close. Activities doesn't just mean actions. It means doing the actions the right way. For example, prospecting doesn't just mean cold calling. It means calling within a defined micro-segment at the appropriate level with a targeted message and an effective follow-up strategy. Those prospecting actions will garner better qualified opportunities.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel?

No, they work in tandem. As a sales person, it's critical to recognize that your prospects are going through a buying process simultaneously to your sales process. Companies must align their lead generation and sales processes with the clients' buying process. When they do this, companies and their sales teams will be communicating in the manner that will guide prospects through each stage of their buying decision. However, you can't abandon your sales process because there are critical steps that must be met and information that must be provided to ensure the best odds of winning.

What are the most important elements of a sales story, and how can effective storytelling accelerate prospect movement through the buying cycle?

Stories are memorable. That's what makes them so effective. A prospect may not remember the speeds and feeds, but he or she will remember that your company helped The Big Cheese cut overhead by 18% and solved the downtime issue that seemed unsolvable.

The most successful sales stories have main characters and circumstances that your prospect can relate to directly: Who—are he and his company just like me and mine? What—is that a situation I'm facing? Can I really get those same results? How—did he solve it using resources I can access, too? Why—did he decide to address the issue now, and with you? The more you can bring the story to life, the better it will resonate.

Throughout the buying cycle, your stories will evolve. In prospecting, it's short and sweet: for example, the Big Cheese above. In the Interest phase, you will get into all the gory details of the pain and frustration the hero was experiencing, then share the happy ending. In Desire, you'll share exactly how the hero made his decision and implemented. You can use one story and expand on it throughout the sales process, referring back to it; or you may have different stories. People love stories. Definitely use them to your advantage.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

Marketing automation. A wealth of data is held within your marketing automation system and while you expect (and hope) that whoever is responsible for executing your lead generation and marketing will have a fabulous lead scoring system that passes leads, we find that isn't the case just yet. So, as a sales rep you can cold call, or you can master your marketing automation system and mine it for warm prospects to call. You'll see what prospects have clicked on, downloaded, viewed and attended—and you'll instantly know where their interests lie and what type of knowledge they have before you ever contact them.

What are the top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders?

1. Learn. Sales isn't the same as it was even five years ago. It won't be the same in five years. The technology changes. Your customers change. Keep learning.
2. Retain your integrity. Today, the biggest mantra I have is the importance of inspiring trust in prospects to distinguish yourself from the competition. If a client is going to entrust their IT with you, now the critical artery of a company's business, they have to trust you.
3. Strive for excellence. It's a fast-paced world and many people overlook the mistakes. Think what a differentiator it is if you don't make them.

How important are social selling and social insights to an overall sales strategy and why?

Very important. Before you hire a new employee, check out their social presence. Customers do the same by checking on sales reps selling to them and the companies those reps work for. You need to have a social presence and leverage it to learn just as much about your prospects. For your sales strategy, you can identify the best message and the best communication vehicle, uncover referrals... the list goes on. And when prospects "go dark" on you, social selling can bring them back. Let me say, we won't even interview a sales rep who doesn't have an active, professional, engaging social presence.

Kendra Lee (continued)

Who are the top 5 sales leaders you admire the most and why?

1. My first IBM Sales Director who taught me how to grow and lead other salespeople with integrity and passion.
2. A company president in Utah who watches the numbers like a hawk but is leading the sales team into international markets with enthusiasm and commitment to each individual.
3. A Global Marketing Director based in Toronto who has identified a growth path that starts college hires in a sales job they can be successful at immediately, then grows them to successful, confident, performing outside sales reps within 24 months.
4. A VP of Sales in FL who despite a lean hiring market attracts and retains top caliber sales people who want to work for him because of his support in their mutual success.

Great sales leaders are all around us. They don't have to be household names. Just look for the people who are guiding their staff to top performance, their companies to new markets, and their customers to success.

What are the top 3-5 ways marketing can do a better job of supporting sales?

1. Take the time to nurture prospects.
2. Educate sales on the campaigns they are running: the target market, the persona, the key messaging and content. If sales is aware, their follow-up can be more precise. Their conversations will be more impactful and prospects will want to work with them.
3. Implement lead scoring to identify the best odds leads for salespeople to pursue. Access rates, win rates and productivity will improve.

How important is content and thought leadership in the sales process?

Critical. It's what nurtures prospects along through their buying cycle. It generates awareness in the market. It builds and supports your brand. For salespeople, thought leadership opens doors and wins sales.



Insights From The Experts:

Sales Strategist, Author of *AGILE SELLING* and *SNAP SELLING*
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Jill Konrath

What are three top pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders?

Sales executives are under intense pressure to meet their numbers —without adding headcount. Plus, buyers expect more today. Successful salespeople need to be fountains of knowledge, technology savvy and leveraging new skills.

In light of the fact that multi-tasking is a sales productivity killer, how can reps get away from this bad habit?

The first step is awareness. You won't change until you know that:

- It takes 20-40% longer to learn new things when you're multitasking.
- Or that constantly emailing/texting while you work reduces IQ by 5 points for women and 15 points for men.

That's only the tip of the iceberg.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

Slowly, but surely it is. Changing the focus to the buyer alters the entire conversation between sales reps and sales managers: Where are they in the buying process? What will it take to capture their attention? How can we help them recognize the value of making a change? What do they need to know to select us?

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

1. Monotask. Period. It's the number one thing to do.
2. Clump similar tasks together.
3. Move. Your brain thinks better when more oxygen is flowing.
4. Sleep 8+ hours/night. The research is astounding.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer?

Shared goals. Frequent conversations. Constant testing.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

Today's modern seller needs to be proficient leveraging:

- Social media (LinkedIn, forums, Twitter)
- CRM systems
- Virtual meetings
- Sales intelligence tools
- Personal productivity tools.

If you could see any information about your leads, contacts, and accounts in your sales dashboard, what would that be?

Their social profile (LinkedIn, Twitter, other), org charts, connections to my company, as well as any digital interactions with my website and/or content.

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy?

They provide you with the context needed to craft good messaging, initiate intelligent conversations and plan effective meetings that are highly relevant to your potential buyer.



Insights From The Experts:

Assistant Professor of International Business,
Fisher College of Business, Ohio State University

James Oldroyd

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

The answer to all these questions is science. What do I mean by science? I think the most interesting trend in sales currently is the increase in the processes and technologies that empower sales agents. Sales has often been seen as an “art” with sales agents having “intuition”. This is rapidly changing. Sales is becoming a science. With a full-scale scientific discovery process backing the learning. Nearly every sales activity can be measured and optimized. Productivity is a key issue because it can finally be measured and managed. You want to send a better email? There are tools to help you. You want to measure your response to the email? There are tools to help you. Every step, when to respond, how to respond, how to follow-up, how to build a relationship etc. can be measured and optimized. Of course this process has been ongoing and dramatically facilitated by companies like Microsoft Dynamics CRM and Salesforce that standardizes the process. These efforts are critical because once standardization begins, measurement becomes easy.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

Customers were never in a sales funnel. This idea is rooted in a company-centric notion. Company-centric organizations fail to realize that the company is not what the company is about. Rather, it is the customer. (Read my article entitled “The quest for customer focus” Harvard Business Review (April 2005) for more details on this process.

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

I was recently interviewing a sales manager of a SME; he had 15 sales people on his team. You would think that he wouldn’t need technology and processes to stay on top of such a small sales team, but he was successful because he had a developed systematic and scientific approach to sales. He meticulously studied what drove results for this sales team and then constantly measured and managed these metrics. He used technology to help him automate the oversight and increase the capabilities of his sales team. My suggestion is this: study what drives results at your company, with your customers, and with your agents, then accelerate and scale it. It sounds simple but is deceptively complex.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer?

Alignment is the most difficult process. Often, companies are good at the individual pieces, but putting it together reveals that companies are still so poor at even basic sales activities. In a study I conducted with Kristina McElheran and David Elkington at insidesales.com, we measured how long it takes, on average, for companies to respond to online leads. These are people coming to the company’s website and asking to be contacted; they are actively seeking to buy. It’s shocking, but the average response time was two days. Perhaps just as shocking is that nearly a third of the leads were never contacted. Imagine walking into a store and the sales associate saying, “Just give me 32 hours, and I’ll help you.” Marketing was doing a good job at driving leads that were never responded to.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today’s era of the empowered buyer?

Any that enable them to be scientific. I have been working with many companies to find the right tools, tools that will accelerate their growth, but am a strong advocate that using any tool is better than using no tool. Much of what the “smart” manager at the SME I discussed earlier used was basic tracking functions he built in Excel. Of course, he will likely refine these analyses with more sophisticated tools over time, but just his efforts to measure and analyze were dramatically increasing his firm’s sales. He was using science, and even rudimentary science is better than advanced intuition.

If you could see any information about your leads, contacts, and accounts in your sales dashboard, what would that be?

The ones that mattered to me. General findings will give you general results. I don’t care what my competitors have in their dashboards. I don’t care what the standard technologies offer in their dashboards. I care about the actions that are most significant for my company, my customers, and my sales agents. Figuring out what these are requires, you guessed it, science.

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy, and what are the top ways reps can tap into these?

I am not sure they are important. It is question for scientific discovery. Start with the intuition of your sales reps, but then measure, act and measure again. This is the heart of the scientific method.



Insights From The Experts:

Dynamics Business
Development Manager,
Microsoft

Ryan Blakely

Why is sales productivity vital in the current selling environment? The days of selling solely through a rolodex of established, but siloed relationships, telling customers why they should buy your service or solution are gone. This is not news to anyone I know, but many organizations still operate this way and often wonder why sales are flat or their new launch failed.

All buyers, even you and me, have access to so much information that we build perspectives quickly on purchases, both big and small. We make what we think is the right decision, but was it? Will it really solve my pain or gap in my business? Sometimes as sellers we don't get an opportunity to teach the customer why going with "us" is the right choice, because Twitter and some reposted blog already sold them. How companies buy has changed and we as sellers need to evolve to meet that change head on.

Why the "top of the funnel" is so important?

- Organizations do not simply transact complex purchases.
- Organizations often self-select vendors early.
- Organizational consensus is required.
- Buyers don't know how to solve all of their challenges. We, as domain expert sellers, do know how to solve these challenges, but can we engage with the right people at the right time to influence their decision? This is the million dollar question. When a seller can't or doesn't engage early with the right people, more often than not, they have lost the deal before they even started.

Key elements of a successful engagement:

- When the customer views you as valuable asset to their long term success, not a commodity.
- Deep understanding of the corporate structure and strategy and how your service or solution maps to that strategy.
- When your expertise and insight is what engaged you in the sales cycle.
- Ability to deliver a steady flow of relevant content and personal engagement that builds on itself, nurtures, teaches and influences as both buyer and seller traverse the sales journey together.

What to consider if you really want to enhance sales productivity:

- Understand your customer, their business, and the broad market conditions influencing and impacting their decisions and business outcomes.
- Make data-driven decisions on how and when to engage with a customer.
- Lead with insight and establish a regular cadence—a focused and timely sales engagement.
- Have a single view of all your customer interactions—you can bet they have a single view of you.
- Understand what gaps may be present in your current tool set to enable an integrated and targeted engagement, connecting sales and marketing while leveraging social.

Change is hard, so empower your teams to help diagnose gaps in the business and let them help prescribe a solution. The more they understand why a change in behavior or process is important, the faster they can implement.

The old adage "The Customer Know Best" will always be valid, but I would argue today's seller must come to the table with a meaningful story tailored to the customer and help them understand "why you know what is best for the customer".



Insights From The Experts:
CEO, Smooth Sale
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Elinor Stutz

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Our days have shrunk in time due to increased requirements pertaining to legal documentation, reporting, and training. With technology advancing at rapid speed, salespeople must continually self-educate, implement and remain on the cutting edge.

What are the top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders?

1. Be cognizant of your values and priorities, your valuation of right versus wrong, and when to refuse business.
2. Commit to continued learning.
3. Change your vocabulary from failure to marketing research.

What are the top 3-5 ways marketing can do a better job of supporting sales?

1. Collaboration among marketing and sales departments is essential. Salespeople are most familiar with what both the clientele is asking and the competition is conveying. Improved results will be seen by the marketing and sales team working together.
2. Analyze the collaborative marketing campaign results. Analytics will help both marketing and sales tweak their approach and leverage presentations.
3. Multiple and inter-connected platforms should be utilized for marketing. The more media and mediums used, the reach and interested audience potential will grow at an exponential rate.
4. Hold monthly collaborative sales and marketing meetings for insight to new products, services and ideas for improvement. Open communication increases motivation and drives sales.

How important is content and thought leadership in the sales process, and why?

Excellence in shared content online greatly increases name recognition. In person, creative thought provides new perspectives for clients, thereby increasing sales opportunities. Consistency in sharing best practices and insights develops high credibility, trust and sales.

What are the most important elements of a sales story?

- Include “who, what, when, where, and why”.
- Relate previous client story to current prospective buyer’s interests
- Use emotion to draw person into the story
- Keep the story to 2 minutes or less
- Most important is authenticity

Upon finishing the story, bring the conversation back to where you last left it off. Then conclude with a question, such as, “Does this sound like the type of solution you are seeking?” Done well, you will receive a “Yes!”

How important are social selling and social insights to an overall sales strategy, and why?

Social selling and insights are extremely important. This is the most efficient and far-reaching platform yet discovered and insights delivered well are well rewarded.

What would your ideal sales dashboard look like?

The sales dashboard would include projects, follow-up schedule, and the Charlieapp.com—an essential because:

- Automatic research of people and companies before you meet
- Syncs to your calendar with advance notice
- Provides alerts before your meeting when prospects are in the news.
- Identifies all of the client competitors
- Common Connections: Last but not least, you can see who you know in common, automatically.



Insights From The Experts:
President, Score More Sales, LLC
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Lori Richardson

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Most of us in sales roles are not as productive as we can be. Some of this is systemic and some of it is within our own personal control. This is a big issue because you can never get your time back once it is gone, so you need to make good decisions and plan your actions. Time is currency—and every moment matters.

How important are social selling and social insights to an overall sales strategy and why?

It is critical to have insight about your customer—who they are, the market they are in, what challenges they face, and what they aspire to. Without insight it is very difficult to gain their attention. Sellers now need to find ways to stand out by adding valuable ideas, stories, tips and resources to help buyers.

What are the top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders?

Lead by example—don't expect your team to do anything you wouldn't do.

Learn what motivates each of your team members – everyone is a little different. While one person wants you to show her the money, the next team member wants recognition. If you understand what makes each person tick, you can get their best from them.

Listen more than you talk.

How important is content and thought leadership in the sales process, and why?

The company website and other locations online need content that helps buyers at every stage of the buying process. If I am ready to buy but your content and thought leadership is stuck at the beginning on why I should buy, I may start at your site and finish with one of your competitors. Instead, we need to help buyers along the way with what is relevant at each stage so that we keep their interest and loyalty.

What does your ideal sales dashboard look like?

My ideal sales dashboard shows all of the activity my team is doing and presents it in a way that we can make smart decisions from it. Ideally it would track phrases that buyers were most receptive to under different circumstances, and it would track the best questions for each type of buyer we have. It may be a bit futuristic but I think we should dream up dashboards like these and then find ways to make them real.



Insights From The Experts:
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Colleen Stanley

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Sales productivity has always been an issue. Productivity is becoming more challenging due to technology. While technology can provide great shortcuts, it can also be a deterrent to working on the "important not urgent." Many salespeople are tethered to their technology and, as a result, end up getting interrupted by constant emails and texts. They spend most of their time "checking in" and not enough time on productive, sales-focused work.

The second problem created by constantly being connected is lack of downtime. It is only in the downtime that a person achieves clarity of thought and purpose. How many people have come up with a great idea while answering 50 emails, 10 texts and running from meeting to meeting?

What are the top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring leaders?

Develop your emotional intelligence skills AND consultative selling skills. Many salespeople lose business and, as a result, go out and buy another sales book or attend a sales workshop in an effort to improve. Learning 'hard selling skills' is important. However, lack of emotional intelligence skills are often the root cause for lack of sales success. Most salespeople know what to do. However, in tough selling situations, emotions rather than effective selling and influence skills start running the meeting.

Do the work. In an instant-gratification environment, your most successful people still put in the work to get the reward. A good salesperson practices new skills BEFORE the appointment. A good salesperson invests time in calendar blocking and planning in order to effectively manage their week. A good salesperson turns off the TV and reads a sales book that helps him grow his skills. Denzel Washington, well-known actor, shares that his father always said, "Do the work so you can do the work."

Be generous. Most people view salespeople as self-centered, Lone- Ranger types. The best salespeople I know are generous. They are willing to mentor newbies on the team, give referrals to clients and colleagues, and use their talents to volunteer at non-profits. Generous people enjoy the law of reciprocity. When you give, you get.

What are the top 3-5 ways marketing can do a better job of supporting sales?

- 1) The marketing department and executives need to join the sales team on calls with prospects and clients. Nothing beats hearing information and objections firsthand.
- 2) Develop marketing materials that sell to the "old brain." Most marketing materials are still pitching what a company does rather than the problems or opportunities the company solves for clients. Pain is two to three times more motivating for a person to make a change than gain. However, when you look at most company or product value propositions, they are focused on positive, commodity language, i.e., "Good customer service, great expertise."
- 3) Take a sales training course. When a marketing department thoroughly understands all the steps to a sales process, they can more fully support the salesperson with proper tools.



Insights From The Experts:
Co-Founder, TOPO Inc., Funnelholic.com
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Craig Rosenberg

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

In the old days, we would give a sales rep a phone book and some product brochures and tell them to “go sell something”. If they didn’t work out, we went and hired more. That has changed and technology is a big factor. With technology we know more than we did before about what a sales rep is actually doing and can follow their activity. Also, technology provides opportunities to make reps more productive than ever before. Technology solves many inefficiencies in day-to-day selling. DocuSign is a great example. They have taken a painful part of the sales process and made it easier and quicker. With e-signatures, sales reps don’t have to use fax machines and have visibility as to where their contracts are in the signing process. Now making reps more productive is a key factor in your ability to compete.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

The buyer process has not replaced the sales funnel. It informs the sales funnel. High-performance sales teams map their buyer’s process first. Then they build the sales process to support the buyer process. Sales Benchmark Index has found that sales leaders who adopt a buyer-centric approach typically deliver 150% of their quota. So the buyer process didn’t replace the funnel, but it is the essential element to creating a sales process that actually works.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today’s era of the empowered buyer?

The most important thing is to base your sales strategy and process decisions on what your buyers want. For example, there has been an exponential rise in inside sales versus direct. The economics of an inside sales person are compelling compared to the expense of a field rep. However, making the decision to move to inside sales should not be based on the costs to your business but on how your buyer chooses to interact with vendors. Some buyers want face-to-face sales and some solutions can’t be sold over the phone.

What are the top three pieces of advice you can share with aspiring sales leaders?

Build your sales organization in the following order: Buyer, Strategy, Process, People, Technology

1. Develop detailed buyer personas for each of your buyers
2. Map how they make purchasing decisions
3. Build your sales process based on this data

How important are social selling and social insights to an overall sales strategy and why?

In general, insights—no matter how you get them—are critical to sales success. The buyer demands relevance and as a result, sales needs to take the extra 1-3 minutes to research before any kind of meaningful interaction with a prospect of customer. Social insights are typically best because they are real time and provide you invaluable insight into your prospect’s point of view and what is important to them at that given time.

What are the top 3-5 ways marketing can do a better job of supporting sales?

Creating content built to help SALES convert prospects while in the sales process. Today, marketing content is either built for downloads or views or for the end of the process in the form of data sheets and case studies. Marketing talks about moving buyers through the buying process via content, but that is via email or on the website. I am talking about when sales is interacting with a buyer and the buyer presents a roadblock or key question – they need content that helps them get them through that roadblock. Creating content for sales is different. It’s not a long ebook, etc. It’s a short concise content asset like a one-two page whitepaper or a 30-second video that helps them move the buyer from point a to point b.

How important is content and thought leadership in the sales process and why?

ITS HUGE. It’s harder than ever to move a buyer forward. We know that buyers prefer to do research on their own from credible sources. That doesn’t change when they engage with sales. They still want the content so they can make the decision themselves. Sales has to be able to deliver that content to their prospects. They build trust and more importantly, they give the buyer what they want, when they want it.



Insights From The Experts:
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Sharon Drew Morgen

Why is sales productivity a key issue today?

Sales productivity has always been an issue because the sales model misses most of a buyer's activity: it merely focuses on the last 3 steps of the 13 step process that buyers must take before they buy. We focus on selling solutions; buyers focus on maintaining stable environments, of which a purchase may or may not be the last action. Until a buyer handles their idiosyncratic change management path they cannot (regardless of solution or need) buy. And the skills of the sales model skills are not the skills that will help buyers facilitate systemic change.

Sales productivity has been limited to the 7% or so (from first contact) of buyers that end up buying. 80% of prospects will buy something similar to our solution within 2 years of our connection with them, but not from us: that's the time it has taken them to assemble the right people and policies and deal with their change issues. A buying decision is a change management problem, and the time it takes to get buy-in is the length of the sales cycle.

With a focus on placing solutions, we've got no idea who is going to close or when; our success rates, like our pipelines, are guesswork. I developed Buying Facilitation® 30 years ago to give my own sales team the ability to stop the guesswork and expand productivity. We helped buyers assemble, and become part of, the Buying Decision Team from first call; collapse the sales cycle by addressing all of the change issues; and help buyers figure out who needed to be included in the change. Buyers must do this anyway, with us or without us; might as well add a facilitation skill set and join them along their decision path rather than sit helplessly and wait for a small percentage of them to show up.

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

I coined the term 'buying process' 30 years ago to define the path buyers must traverse from idea to solution choice, from determining how to fix the problem internally to deciding on an external solution and managing the change, from one person to the voices of all who will touch the solution (Buying Decision Team). This process has always superseded the sales funnel but sales limits interactions to solution placement activities. That has created the transactional sale, as buyers can't count on us to do more than provide solutions.

The implications have existed within sales for decades: we spend too much resource coming in with what buyers need last. Buyers don't need our solution, they need to solve a business problem. They only make a purchase as a last resort and only when they get the buy-in to adopt something new without disrupting their status quo.

We have been failing for decades, and calling our 7% close rate 'success.' Buying Facilitation® works in tandem with the sales model to facilitate the first 9 change management steps buyers absolutely must address before they decide to purchase an outside solution. Using Buying Facilitation® it's possible to close 40% from first prospecting call. So top funnel, Buying Facilitation®; bottom funnel, sales. They work in tandem.

It's like trying to push your yummy dessert onto a dinner party that hasn't begun to eat: regardless of how good the dessert is, it's the last thing the people need: not everyone will want it, folks don't know if they want dessert until they're finished with the appetizer and main course, some folks may not eat sugar, some folks will want dessert first. Offering a great dessert is not good enough.

What are your suggestions for truly aligning sales and marketing around the empowered buyer?

So long as sales and marketing continue to focus only on solution placement, we miss 90% of what's going on during the buy path, delaying the buying decision by a factor of 5, wasting time on prospects who won't buy, and missing the opportunity to enter in different places along the change path. Facilitate change first, then sell. It's not sales, but we sit and wait for them to do it anyway, and lose many of them along the way. Adding more skills to merely 'find' prospects or 'determine' need will get you the same results we've been getting for decades.

In sales we can begin facilitating decision making at the first contact; in marketing, we can use more of the data available in the unstructured data that is missed by keyword-based analytics and sentiment analysis.

What new processes and technologies must sales harness to succeed in today's era of the empowered buyer?

Add change management; decision facilitation; Facilitative Questions. Collect data on CRM systems that allow us to understand if buyers have assembled their whole Buying Decision Team or gotten the right folks on board to manage their change.

Using Buying Facilitation® it's possible to get onto the Buying Decision Team after one call. Enter from the idea phase rather than waiting to connect when they are at their last decision stages of choosing a vendor/solution.

I teach my sales clients Facilitative Questions so they can lead buyers through their change management issues. We sequence the questions through the 13 decision steps to get the right folks assembled onto the Buying Decision Team early and facilitate decision making and solution descriptions. When it's time to sell, everyone is on board, and has already managed the change WITH you—and they do not ask price or choose a different vendor. We can add facilitation to our CRM systems. And we can use Facilitative Questions on our sites and sign in sheets to determine what stage they are at and meet them there.

Sharon Drew Morgen (continued)

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity? Start by being a change facilitator before discussing needs or solution placement. Facilitate the assembly of the full Buying Decision Team. Stop entering by trying to pitch, present, get in, gather needs, etc. around how a solution would fit: until the entire Buying Decision Team is assembled (those folks who will touch the final solution) and know how to manage their change, the buyer will not know how to fully define their needs, reorganize jobs or people, handle their old solution, etc. Do you want to sell? Or have someone buy?

If you could see any information about your leads, contacts, and accounts in your sales dashboard, what would that be? I would see if they have already assembled their Buying Decision Team, or gotten buy-in for any necessary change that a new solution would require.

We've never asked ourselves why buyers with an obvious need aren't buying. Where do they go? Why do we assume a prospect is someone with a need, someone who SHOULD buy rather than someone who WILL buy? Just because a buyer has a need for our solution does not mean their internal systems can ever get ready for the change necessary when a new solution enters.

Having more information about needs or contacts does not facilitate the change they must go through, although we can use any name—even of a gatekeeper—to help them assemble all voices that must be included in a purchase. I'd like information about the steps they have taken toward change and stakeholder buy-in; about regular vendors and current technology; about how the stakeholders make decisions together; about failures they've had in fixing their business problem to date. All that data will help me help them address their change issues.

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy, and what are the top ways reps can tap into these?

There are 13 steps all buyers or followers take before they buy. The first 10 of these steps are not directly related to a purchase but can be tracked and facilitated: they are hidden in the unstructured data and generally missed by keyword-based analytics and sentiment analysis.

Social selling and content marketing are great ways to cull the data that sales is currently missing and facilitate buyers through the stages of their decision path. We are currently underutilizing these capabilities.

Enter with Buying Facilitation® and be a neutral navigator first, then when it's time, be a sales professional. We can't make the changes for them as they live in unique systems and we're outsiders who can never understand their relationships and internal politics. But we can either facilitate them through the change, or sit and wait for them to do it themselves.

The time it takes for buyers to figure out how to change is the length of the sales cycle. We are ignoring that entire aspect of the buying decision path right now. But we can use sales and marketing to facilitate it. We're not doing it, and have never done it, and continue to find more and more and more 'new new things' to 'get in' rather than do what buyers really need: help facilitating change and THEN sell. Do you want to sell? Or have someone buy?



Insights From The Experts:
Social Selling Evangelist
@jill_rowley

Jill Rowley

Has the buyer process replaced the sales funnel? If so, what are the implications for sales reps and leaders?

We're living in the Age of the Customer, not the Age of the Seller. Customers don't want you to jam your sales process down their throats; they want help buying products and services that will make THEM successful. The Modern Sales Professional is an Information Concierge and a Content Connoisseur. She creates and / or curates content her buyers want, and shares that content across her social networks. She has a strong personal brand that is optimized for the buyer, not for the recruiter. Her digital brand demonstrates her subject matter expertise, not her quota-crushing capabilities. She uses Social Networks like LinkedIn and Twitter to find, listen, relate, connect, engage and amplify her buyer, the buying committee and their sphere of influence. She knows that ABC = Always Be Connecting, not Always Be Closing. No one's ever wanted to be sold to and now buyers have a choice. Buyers not only have choice, they also have voice. The Modern Sales Professional doesn't sell, she serves. She doesn't sell, she helps. She doesn't sell, she facilitates a buying process. She's where her buyers are Offline (at events), Online (in Social Networks), #AllTheTime. She earns trust by being #CustomerCentered #CustomerCentric #CustomerObsessed. She uses social networks to do research, to network and to build long-term relationships with her customers, coworkers, partners, and the influencers (bloggers, analysts, thought leaders, experts, and consultants). People buy from people they know, like and trust. The Modern Sales Professional uses her social networks to earn visibility and credibility!

Why are social selling and social insights important to an overall sales strategy?

The average salesperson makes 8 dials per hour and prospects for 6.25 hours to set one appointment. So, what is your sales team going to do? More cold calling? Why do more of something that is working less and less? Time for Social Selling. 78% of salespeople using social media outsell their peers.

Social Selling represents the number-one shift in sales training dollars, a 48% increase in 2013. New trends do not typically get significant discretionary training budget dollars if they are unproven. This budget increase is evidence that Social Selling is working.

Social Selling has the highest lead-to-close conversion rate of all prospecting methodologies. In fact, Social Selling sees about a 15% prospecting conversion rate, at least 5 times greater than the 3% prospecting success rate from marketing activities.

What are your top tips for improving sales productivity?

The most effective way to improve sales productivity is to transform territory models to allocate opportunity based on social proximity. Given that people buy from people they know, like and trust, why wouldn't you assign opportunity based on the strength of existing relationships?

Reach out to learn more.



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