Expert Advice on Transforming Your Sales Team

The most thought provoking articles by the world’s most influential writers
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Dear Reader,

Over the last decade, sales has transformed from SPIN selling and cold calling, into a highly complex and sophisticated discipline. The issue is that buyers today are highly-informed and socially-empowered, meaning they are resistant to interruption, intrusion and pre-fabricated inauthenticity. This means that the old sales techniques are becoming less effective — but many sales leaders are stuck, uncertain of how to equip their sales team and transform their processes in order to adapt and succeed in the new sales environment.

Adding to this challenge is the prevalence of misconceptions regarding new selling techniques. Questions remain unanswered about whether a sales transformation is really needed? How quickly will an investment in sales enablement technology see ROI? What is the right way to social sell and is it really worth the time and effort?

To provide you with the answers to these questions, we have compiled a selection of the most thought provoking articles written by the world’s most influential writers. Read on to dispel your uncertainty and misconceptions regarding Sales 2.0, the decline of cold calling and the rise of social selling.

To learn more about these topics and meet the sales transformation experts, don’t miss our upcoming event, Sales Transformation Summit Asia which is running 14th - 17th September here in Singapore. Click here for more information.

Richard Pain
Digital Content Editor
IQPC Singapore
Social selling is in the process of replacing phone selling/cold calling in Singapore.

Here's why:

1. In Singapore the only calls I get which I don't recognise are from cold callers. I ignore them all. On the odd occasion I lapse and think that I might be missing out on something magical, I instantly regret it when it's either a wealth management sales person or a bank. Both get hung up on pretty quick.

I am not alone. 90% of C-suite executives say they never respond to cold calls (source: Harvard Business Review). Cold calling is dead.

2. There are almost 2 million people on LinkedIn in Singapore. Basically you can reach anyone who is anyone on LinkedIn either directly or indirectly through a connection.

78% of sales people using social media like LinkedIn outsell their peers (source: Social Media and Sales Quota Survey). You are almost 5x more likely to schedule a first meeting if you have a personal LinkedIn connection (source: Sales Benchmark Series).

3. LinkedIn enables you to learn everything you need to about the person who wants to do business with you. Once you receive a message from them on LinkedIn, you can check out exactly who they are and whether you wish to do business with them:

   a) Their profile – no photo and they are a no, less than 100 connections and they are a no.

   b) Connections – are they connected to people you know, can you ask your connections about them.

   c) Their company page – no company page and they are a no.

   d) Their content marketing strategy – no blog, no recent updates, they're a no and then and only then you will find an answer about whether you feel that person and that company is one that you wish to be doing business with.

Chris Reed has one of the world's most viewed LinkedIn and is currently the No.1 Social Seller in APAC according to LinkedIn rankings. Chris has 25 years of senior marketing experience on both the client and agency side and he is the CEO and founder of Black Marketing.

To read more of his articles click here
To visit his LinkedIn page click here
4. 75% of B2B buyers and 84% of C-level/vice president (VP) executives surveyed by IDC use social media to make purchasing decisions and 56% decide to buy before they even meet the contact.

In other words, before you even meet someone they have already decided whether to do business with you. The rest is down to you, your personality, and the rapport you build. It’s also down to price. The rest is done.

5. Social buying correlates with buying influence, according to the IDC survey. The average B2B buyer who uses social media for buying support is more senior, has a bigger budget, makes more frequent purchases, and has a greater span of buying control than a buyer who does not use social media.

This makes sense when you just think of the data that is at your fingertips on LinkedIn. You can find anyone in any country, in any position, in any company, with any number of years’ experience, with any specific keywords, even down to the city, university, and your mutual connections.

The data is all there on LinkedIn, it’s how you use it that is key. Anyone would trust someone using this kind of data on LinkedIn to spend their money over someone not using social media.
I keep reading this one: “buyers complete 75% of their sales cycle on the web before ever talking to a sales person”.

But just over the last few weeks of selling for our Internet start up I've found several examples where taking this data is best ignored. I've been on a wide-ranging mission to get into new accounts – most of them in the Fortune 1000. This campaign has been going quite well [in my biased opinion because (a) I'm using Social Calling techniques and (b) we have an interesting product.] On meeting with some of these accounts, I found that some of them did indeed have needs and a few may indeed end up becoming customers.

But a big majority of them had not concluded “75% of their sales cycle on the web” before meeting with me. They had not defined their need formally. They had not gotten to that stage.

When we met they brought up something in their area of responsibility that they thought could be improved by something like the product we were discussing – the one I had brought to them. Some of them were then open to discussing this possibility from there. So a group of companies entered our sales funnel without having completed their web research. They spoke to us first and put us in the driver’s seat. Sure they may decide down the line here to send someone out to do some web research on alternatives to our product but who has the edge then?

This happened because a sales person was proactively prospecting not because we have a great website, great SEO or a great blog.

OK, in some cases buyers have formalized their need and then they, or someone they delegate, go out and scour the web for solutions. This is when your SEO and inbound marketing needs to shine. This is the case where we sales people need great fellows in our marketing department.

The danger for sales people is interpreting this scenario where the buyer goes out looking for solutions as they only scenario. It's the ultimate excuse to ditch cold calling. Very tempting. I mean it's backed by fact, right?
But it’s not always true and I’m finding evidence that it’s most often false with the “whale accounts” we all strive to land. Every now and then, execs from these “whales” will find their way to your website but if you look at the statistics of business sizes out there you’ll see it’s one big “iceberg” with the huge majority of businesses being tiny. By pure statistics your website is likely to gather far more “sardines” than “whales”.

I’m no fan of traditional (aka dumb) cold calling. But I am a fan of smart prospecting. For sales people to rely on inbound leads to make their numbers is tantamount to professional suicide unless you work for an exceptional marketing company like a Hubspot where buyers flood to your website.

So sales people if you hear “buyers complete 75% of their buying cycle on the web before speaking to a sales person” you might want to stick in some ear plugs while you carry on prospecting.
I read another article this morning predicting that by 2020 fifty percent of sales people will be looking for new careers.

By the way, some pundits predict that number will be much higher. With a buyer’s ability to do early stage product and solutions research, and often a disdain for being forced to work with salespeople (who waste their time) just to make a purchase, I believe it.

While the buyer’s journey has been evolving, salespeople have been slow to wake up and change how they do things. Now that the concept of social selling is being touted as the ONLY thing you need in selling, I fear that salespeople are in danger of making themselves even more irrelevant. After all, it takes more than a well written social profile or a few connections, clicks and likes to achieve sales objectives.

There is no easy button called social selling. Like all aspects of being good in sales, how you utilize social channels as part of your sales process takes work. Patience, planning, the right mindset and sales and technology skills all factor into the success equation too. In response to a different kind of buyer, salespeople and their leaders need to change their mindset and selling behavior. You cannot slap new technology – social channels – onto outdated sales approaches and expect to win. Cheesey selling, or is that sleazy selling, is still cheesey and buyers hate it. Adopting a new type of selling mindset means change. It means doing things differently, regardless of what worked back in the day.
Like anything new, there is a learning curve. Adoption takes effort, time and planning. As I’ve written about often, jumping straight to tactics is one of the primary reasons that many salespeople are floundering around trying to figure out how to make social selling work for them. From my point of view, you need three things to succeed: strategy, skills and execution.

**Strategy** – It is tempting to want to skip right over this important first step. You may be thinking that there isn’t time to create a strategy; you need more sales now. Make time. If you want different sales results, you need to do things differently. In less than thirty minutes and on one page, as a salesperson you can determine the ideal characteristics of your buyer, what social channels they are likely to use, figure out what training help you need, determine your core goals and establish metrics that you will track.

If you are a sales leader, do not assume that your marketing team has this covered. Even if they have a plan for using social media on behalf of the business, it probably does not address the specific needs of your sales organization.

The Planning Process Should Answer Questions Like This and More:

- Are our sales and marketing goals aligned?
- Who is our target audience and what do they care about?
- What social channels are our prospects likely to be engaging in?
- How can we make it easy for salespeople to track their online connections and track conversations as part of our current CRM process?
- Do we have a process for capturing leads that come from non-traditional sources like Twitter?
- Have we created and clearly communicated social communication guidelines to our salespeople?
- What social networking platforms should our salespeople use?
With more variables to consider in today’s selling environment, there is great risk in ignoring these questions and others. Blindly jumping forward is not the answer.

**Skills** – Sellers today need a combination of great sales skills and the ability to use technology to strategically support their goals.

In a Digital Marketing Digest released by Silverpop last year, they say that “Buyers, fed up with crowded inboxes and irrelevant advertising noise, are shutting out content that isn’t relevant to them and using search and social to control their own buyer journeys.” Salespeople need to develop a completely different approach, but don’t throw the baby out with the bath water. If you are a cold calling fan (I’m not) and it works for you, so be it. But ignore what buyers are telling you – loudly – at your own peril. They’ve had it with salespeople whose only approach is to pitch through feature/benefit/demo dances. Those routines are out of date and waste their time.

Without training and guidance, many salespeople are short circuiting sound selling principles by using social media to cast a wider net to reach prospective buyers while simultaneously trying to sell to them. This spray and pray mentality only serves to push buyers away. Second chances are hard to come by.

**To solve the skills gap, implement a training curriculum focused on:**

1. Teaching salespeople consultative selling skills, which includes focus on communication, listening, good questioning, strategic thinking, planning and presentation.

2. Teaching salespeople the effective and strategic use of social media to support their sales process.
Win with Social Selling

**Execution** – This is the step that brings everything else together. Execution is about disciplined behavior – salespeople engaging in the right activities consistently and using technology in the right way. It takes sweat equity and any expert who tells you otherwise is a fool. Don’t believe them! A variety of sales and social media activities must be well executed. Salespeople need to represent the brand online, generate new leads, reach decision makers fast, differentiate themselves from competitors, present solutions, demonstrate business acumen, manage multiple relationships with decision makers, negotiate deals and close them quickly. Social media plays an important role in today’s selling process, but it is NOT the only thing you need.

To determine what’s working and what isn’t, sales leaders must diligently monitor and measure the effective execution of sales activities, which includes constantly evaluating the skills of their people and providing the ongoing training, coaching and support that they need to succeed.

I will close by saying that I’d like you to think of social selling as you might a winning sports team. You need a strategic play book, salespeople with the right skills who execute well at all phases of the game. Would you send a football team out on the field with players in no particular order, hand them a ball and expect them to win the Super Bowl? Without the trinity of Strategy, Skills and Execution, salespeople may be seen by more prospects or bring in a few new leads, but they won’t win the big game over time!
Sales Enablement and Technology – The Change Gap

Tamara Schenk currently serves as Research Director at the MHI Research Institute, an organisation that is dedicated to improving the sales performance and productivity of complex, business-to-business sales organizations. Tamara has twenty plus years of international sales and consulting experience across different industries and she is frequently ranked as one of the top writers on the topic of sales enablement.

To read more of her articles please click here.

How many Microsoft Word or Excel features do you really use? Ten percent, 20 percent?

Most Office users will never write a book and they will also never use more than the basic arithmetic. It’s similar with sales enablement technology, but it doesn’t need to be like that, if the change gap can be closed.

Sales enablement technology is a growing industry

The sales enablement technology industry’s big providers offer sophisticated services that go far beyond the initial enablement and collaboration platforms focused on content: There are sales process modules, integrated to marketing automation, collaborative, workflow based plug-ins for CRM systems, and all services are available on all devices – a perfectly integrated world. Furthermore, niche providers join the market with shiny new apps, etc. But there is a gap between creating good value with technology and being able to leverage technology’s full potential to create much bigger value.

Sales enablement’s core challenges

Listening to the customer success stories at a recent conference, I noticed that the speakers mostly talked about implementing enablement and collaboration solutions, providing and improving content and developing interactive playbooks. The big integration projects to CRM and marketing automation with instant feedback from buyers were not the primary focus of their stories. Their challenges were people and change related, e.g. how to establish cross-functional frameworks to drive change across the sales force to be able to leverage technology’s full potential. They shared how they removed collaboration barriers and how they organized and improved content creation, publishing and localization across the organization; all that to create significant more value for the sales force. Those topics define the necessary foundation to drive change, to leverage technology’s full potential, to create significant business impact.
“People don’t leverage the enablement platform”

Whoever worked with salespeople experienced a simple truth: They only use what creates an immediate value for them. Everything else gets little to no attention. Most of them won’t spend much time to rate content or to share their best practices. If they don’t immediately find what they are looking for, they will close the system and call their buddies for immediate help, as they always did. If people don’t understand why they should change to be more effective, they will use new technology like the old one. This is where change management comes into play.

Sales Enablement is change management

Never start an enablement initiative without a change story. It has to answer the why question from a sales professional’s perspective, plus the question what’s in it for me before you explain the what to do, the how and the when. Change requires internal selling, and salespeople are the most challenging customers.

Even if technology is intuitive, it won’t work without training. Provide short video lessons how to leverage technology and how to use content effectively. Collaborate with front line sales managers, work directly with salespeople and develop “evangelists” to get traction.

Change requires vision, leadership and consequent execution. But leadership is not only a must for the enablement leader. If sales enablement is not a sales leader’s strategic issue, the enablement team alone won’t be able to drive the necessary change. Creating this strategic relevance – driving change from top to bottom – is key to leverage technology’s full potential successfully.
14th - 17th September 2015, Singapore

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