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Sales Talk: Social media has changed buyers and salespeople

The world's leading research and advisory company, Gartner, Inc., declared in 2011 that by 2020 customers will manage 85 percent of their buying without interacting with a human.

That leaves us one year. Is it happening?

According to the sales experts at Accent Technologies, it hasn't happened quite yet, but it's on the way, especially if you consider how comfortable people are with automation. Even 10 years ago there was some hesitation with highly automated online sales, something you don't find today.

About 25 years ago, most customers still made their purchases in a physical environment--and salespersons were the go-to professionals.

Not anymore. With an estimated 2.5 billion social media network users throughout the world, consumers are five times more dependent on digital content than the early 2000s. The purchasing process is dramatically different for consumer and seller alike.

What does that mean for sales? Everything. When the buyer calls, they either (1) need information they cannot get online, or (2) they're ready to make a decision--and want to make it now. As a result, salespeople must be sure they can respond swiftly to whatever the buyer needs and are prepared to accelerate the process from there.

In today's connected society, people have more voice than

ever before. Customers can discover just about anything they want to know about a product or service by talking, texting, or emailing each other.

Recent research by PwC discovered that social media influences the buying of 78 percent of consumers, and nearly 50 percent said its reviews and feedback impacts their purchasing behavior.

According to LinkedIn, salespersons believe relationship-building has the most significant impact on revenue, with more than 70 percent citing LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook as their most effective social media tools. Ninety percent of leading salespeople use these tools, compared to 71 percent of all sales representatives. Ninety percent of the top performers also said social media with digital channels influences 92 percent of business-to-business buying decisions.

Clearly, reviewing a prospect's social media presence should be standard practice for every salesperson.

Still another prominent force in digital technology is sales analytics, a big data process which can identify, interpret, and anticipate sales trends. Relevant data is also mined from different pipelines to detect relationships and potential opportunities.

Sales analytics can help sellers close more transactions fast while also furnishing the customer with hyper-relevant messaging and resources.



How to scale the company ladder

It takes more to get ahead in a company than just doing the basics.

“Simply meeting expectations is not enough if you want to get ahead,” writes business trainer and consultant Cy Wakeman in her book, *The Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace*.

If you want to climb the ladder, strive to be a low-drama, high-value employee, Wakeman says.

Victor Lipman agrees, and he’s an author and management specialist with more than 20 years of Fortune 500 experience.

“Be relentlessly reliable,” he says. “Reliability is a cornerstone of business and a fine core personal attribute. Businesses may not often need brilliant bursts of artistic creativity, but they always need the trains to run on time.”

For example, try to become a go-to person by developing as many skills as possible. The more you can do within a company, and the more you can learn about its operations, the more relevant you are to its goals.

Your attitude and willingness to work do matter too. Try to be consistently collaborative. In projects involving multiple participants with conflicting views and opinions, the person who can react effectively with all kinds of people is appreciated.

Also, create strong, enduring relationships. In the corporate world, networking has been and always will be an influential factor regardless of an individual’s status in the company. As much as others may profess that professional advancement is based on merit, individual relationships do have their roles in any company, large or small.

Think about ways and means of resolving an issue that may have been gnawing at the company for years. Although some of these problems are unique to each organization, the more common challenges include containing costs, improving production processes, and discovering new markets for established products.

Be a self-starter. Try to identify obstacles before they get worse. Try to be valued as a team member tries to make difficult decisions easier.

Keep in mind that any solution you propose is likely to be met with skepticism; if not, the issue most likely would have been solved long ago. Should you succeed--or even make noticeable progress--your efforts could advance your career in ways you had not imagined.

Finally, try to make your boss look good (and if possible, his boss too). This sense can set you apart, showcase potential, and promote an ability to think beyond current circumstances.



Empathy + Ego = Sales

Among the wealth of extraordinary articles in the Harvard Business Review Classics series is one, published in 1964, entitled, “What Makes a Good Salesman.”

Before writing it, David Mayer and Herbert M. Greenberg spent seven years pursuing the clues. During that time, a fellow HBR contributor, Robert N. McMurray, wrote, “We must look into the mysteries of personality and psychology if we want the real answers.”

Mayer and Greenberg’s conclusions: “Based on the insights we gained about the basic characteristics necessary for a salesperson to sell successfully, our basic theory is that a good salesperson must have at least two basic qualities: empathy and ego drive.”

According to Webster’s, empathy is “understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing” the feelings of others. Moreover, according to Mayer and Greenberg, no salesperson can sell consistently without the skilled use of empathy.

Mayer and Greenberg declare that empathy is vital to the process of obtaining honest, accurate customer feedback. Once provided with a strong sense of the customer’s feelings, the empathetic salesperson can react accordingly. With the use of his or her ego-driven techniques, the agent can alter the pace of discussion and weigh alternatives and options before making whatever creative adjustments are necessary to close the sale.

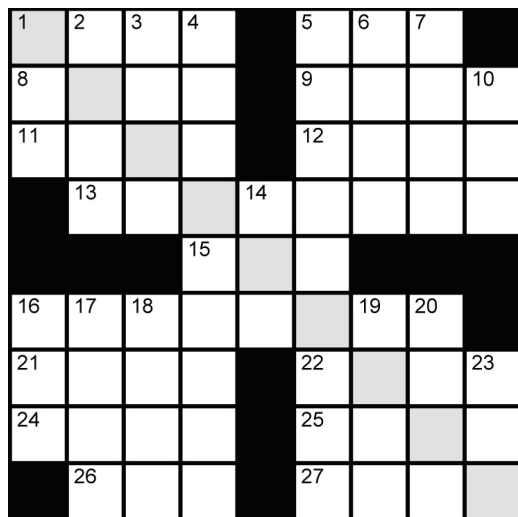
On the other hand, the authors assert that ego drive -- a subtle need to conquer--pushes a salesperson to make the deal or else. It becomes a mission, a mandate.

Mayer and Greenberg conclude, it is an active blend of empathy and ego drive -- each reinforcing the other -- that will best serve the interests of a salesperson’s career.

Trek into the unknown

Across

1. ___ Misbehavin'
5. Keep out
8. Jewish month
9. Distinctive flair
11. Raise, as an anchor
12. "The ___ Ranger"
13. Most wary
15. Cable channel
16. Supplied with fluid
21. Diamond Head locale
22. Hilo feast
24. Agenda
25. Blunders
26. Antlered animal
27. Overdo the TLC



The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.

Down

1. "I see!"
2. False god
3. Church part
4. Spot for carved initials
5. Disparaged
6. Hand cream ingredient
7. Namesakes of Bert Bobbsey's twin
8. Spot for carved initials
9. Disparaged
10. After expenses
11. Genetic material
12. Short flight
13. Bush's alma mater
14. Indian lentil dish
15. After expenses
16. Continental currency
17. Feathered missile
18. "It's no ___!"
19. Continental currency
20. Feathered missile
21. "It's no ___!"

Parents finally insisted their college graduate leave the basement and get a job. So the kid decided to hire himself out as a handyman and started canvassing a wealthy neighborhood. He went to the front door of the first house and asked the owner if he had any jobs for him to do.

"You can paint my porch. How much will you charge?"

The kid said, "How about \$50?" The man agreed.

A short time later, the kid came to the door to collect his money.

"You're finished already?" he asked.

"Yes," the kid answered, "and I had paint left over, so I gave it two coats."

Impressed, the man reached in his pocket for the \$50.

"And by the way," the kid added, "that's not a Porch, it's a Ferrari."



Sit-stand desks: Studies find some benefits, but drawbacks, too

Work is increasingly stationary: 10 hours at a desk, for example, where people write, code, and communicate.

The new trend is to move this computer work up into a standing position with sit-stand desks.

The latest research from the University Hospitals of Leicester, England, found that, after one year, height-adjustable work stations prompted workers to sit 82 minutes less per day than those without such desks. When the workers were later interviewed, they said they had less anxiety, improved job performance, and work engagement.

Using a standing desk isn't for everyone, however, and there are best practices that increase satisfaction.

1. Stand regularly, but not all the time.

The idea of an adjustable desk is that you change position from sitting to standing, not that you stand all the time.



Quoted in U.S. News, Alan Hedge, professor of design and environment analysis at Cornell University, points out that standing all day introduces new problems. Back problems can increase over time as your spine compresses. Varicose vein and cardiovascular problems increase since the body has to work against gravity.

A 2017 study in the American Journal of Epidemiology confirmed this, pointing out that more than 7,000 people in standing-only professions had double the risk of heart disease over a 12-year period.

The best combination, according to Hedge, is 20 minutes sitting, 8 standing, and 2 moving.

2. Movement while sitting or standing is helpful.

While standing, use a foot rest to switch weight between feet. In a chair, try reclining to a 135-degree angle or

try stretches. Even small movements help. But treadmill desks probably don't help with tasks that involve typing or learning, according to a 2015 study by Brigham Young University.

3. Sit for longer periods of concentration.

Hedge says brains perform highly concentrated tasks better when the body is seated. While in a state of concentration, don't suddenly stand to work. This can cause a disruption of thought that lasts about 20 to 25 minutes.

4. You could just try standing up sometimes.

If you are talking on the phone or if someone approaches your desk, you could use it as a signal to stand and stretch.

If you do have a sit-stand desk, you could use the standing position for work that doesn't require intense concentration.

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~ *Empathy + Ego = Sales*



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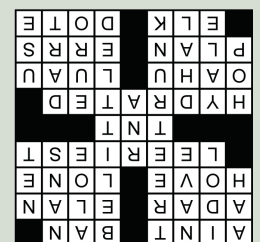
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