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DIGITAL SALES ENABLEMENT

Where the market is headed, new approaches and latest technologies

INTRODUCTION

The way buyers and sellers interact and exchange information has changed dramatically over the past 20 years as the Internet and other digital technologies have enabled people to be more informed than ever before. According to CEB (now part of Gartner), on average B2B buyers are 57% of the way through a purchase decision before even engaging with a supplier, and sales and marketing teams can now only influence 12% of the customer's total mindshare along the purchase path.

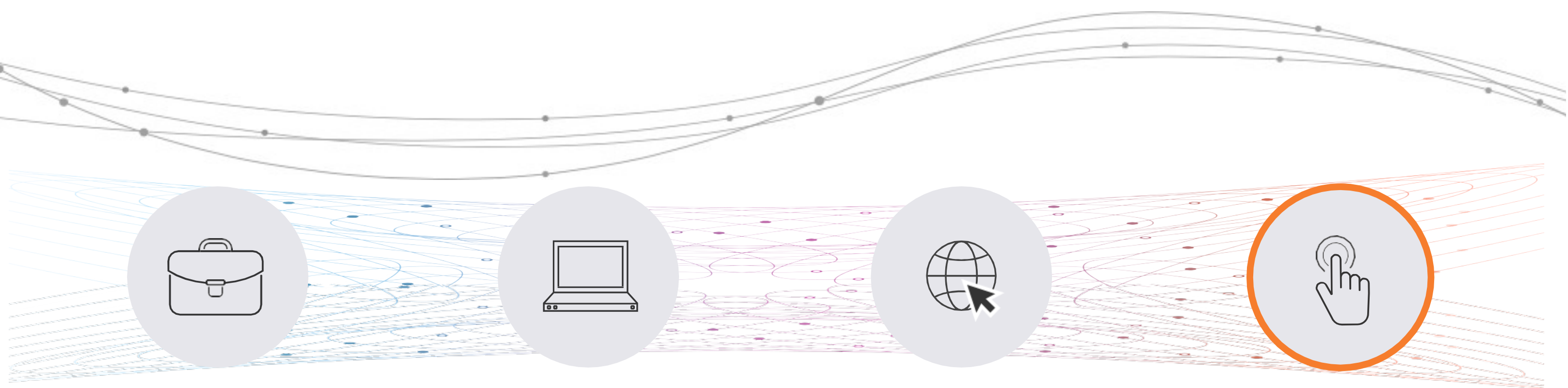
This fundamental shift in how business is done requires organizations to think differently about how they empower their sellers to ensure they have the knowledge, materials, collateral, understanding and techniques necessary to have an impact on a buying decision.

It's no longer enough to expect each individual seller to 'just work it out' – that strategy won't work in the digital economy. It's time to embrace the power of digital to help a seller be more effective, and to close the gap between buyers and sellers in a way that will drive improved sales results, and more satisfied customers.

The digital economy has changed the buyer – seller relationship

Today's highly digital economy has changed much of how we live our lives. From following friends on Facebook, to using text messaging to change how we engage, through to the emergence of self-driving cars, everything is now more digital than ever before.

This phenomenon is seen as much in the corporate world as in our own personal lives. Business decisions happen faster than ever before and are based on more data and science than was ever imaginable only a few years ago.



1990'S

Sales show brochures, inform buyers

2000'S

Buyers discover basic data on the Internet

2010'S

Internet becomes the main source for content, data, and reviews

TODAY

Sales reps are less effective/efficient and losing the information battle with buyers

Even the way organizations look at investment decisions has changed. The vast quantity of information available on the Internet means these decisions are now based on far more investigation (even in some cases using internet-based reviews) than in the past.

In the 1990s, the way businesses made investment decisions was often based on information that was provided to the buyer by a seller. Salespeople were vital to the process of information gathering undertaken by the buyer. Fast-forward to the present, and the buyer – seller interaction has changed.

Buyers use the Internet and other digital tools to access the information they need to get through a large part of the buying process before reaching out to vendors. Critically, this means the opportunity a sales person has to influence the customer's thinking on the challenges they face and how to address them is significantly reduced.

To change this dynamic and engage customers earlier in the buying process, sellers have to be able to provide valuable information to the buyer that they just can't get online.

This paper examines how digital technologies can be turned to the advantage of the sales person, by equipping them to have more compelling conversations with customers and reset the buyer – seller balance of power in this new digital world. From learning and knowledge development, to accessing sales content and information in new ways, there are techniques that can be used to change the game and help sellers to become more powerful and relevant in the new economy.

MORE KNOWLEDGE EXPECTED BUT LESS TIME SPENT LEARNING

The way people learn is changing

Sales people won't take classroom training or do eLearning any more. What happened?

It's simple - we can Google how to do something or watch a video on YouTube. Many of us have lost the habit of reading through materials to accumulate and store knowledge.

The preference now is to search for bite sized pieces of knowledge when we need it, consume that information then and there, and perform the task.

Sales people are no different. In fact, many of them are at the extreme end of the 'spend less time learning and more time doing' spectrum!

Customers expect more from their conversations with sales people

But here's the problem. These days, as everyone knows, before you get your first conversation with a buyer, he or she has done loads of research using the Web. Start searching for a solution to a business problem and very soon your inbox will be awash with white papers and free 'how to guides' from vendors.

As a result, when a buyer is finally ready to talk to a sales person, they now expect much more from the conversation. They expect sales people to know about companies like theirs and the markets they operate in. Buyers want to learn something useful from the sales person about their situation, options for addressing the challenges they face, how other companies like theirs have adopted new approaches or technology, etc.

Need for knowledge has never been greater – but how?

So the need for sales people to have deep knowledge of customers and how to solve their problems has never been greater.

But how do we get that knowledge into the heads of sales people as they prepare for their next call or meeting with a customer, if they won't read materials and store knowledge?

Just-in-time learning and sales playbooks

What if we could give salespeople access to relevant learning, on-demand when it's needed? Some people are calling this 'just-in-time learning'.

One form of just-in-time learning that's been around for a number of years is 'guided selling', usually delivered in the form of a 'sales playbook'.

Sales playbooks are designed to equip sales people with the critical chunks of knowledge they need to successfully interact with customers at different points along the sale. They are typically organized by stage in the sales process, making it easy for sales people to access just-in-time learning for the call, meeting or communication they are focused on now.

There's a critical distinction to be made here. Some playbooks just articulate a way of selling (sales methodology). What we're talking about here is a sales playbook that combines guidance on what you're meant to be doing at a particular point in the sales process with what you should know about the typical customer, their challenges, questions to ask, how to position your company and products, and so on.

What about digital?

Traditionally, sales playbooks have been delivered as PDF documents, but the arrival of sales enablement platforms and HTML5 has spawned a new generation of 'digital sales playbooks' that delivers a far more engaging experience including on screen filtering of content, video, and interactive tools to help you prepare for meetings and calls.

SALES PEOPLE OVERWHELMED WITH INFORMATION

Type of knowledge required

The different types of things you need to know to sell effectively depend, of course, on where you are in the sales process and the selling methodology you follow. For a typical consultative selling approach, reps will need to equip themselves with information such as:

Sales Stage: Prospecting

- Insights into the markets served by the customer
- Possible top of mind issues for the persona concerned
- How to position your company as relevant and of potential interest
- Conversation openers and questions

Sales Stage: Exploration

- Likely goals, issues and pain affecting the persona(s) concerned
- How we've solved problems for similar customers
- How to articulate 'what life could be like' with a solution

Sales Stage: Needs Analysis

- Needs discovery questions
- How our products address particular customer challenges
- Challenges solved for other customers and value delivered

Sales Stage: Solution Evaluation

- Top points of differentiation for our company and products
- Corporate credentials
- Positioning vs competitors

This is in addition to the research they'll need to do into the individual prospect.

How much knowledge is this?

If your company sells one product into one industry segment to one main buyer, then you could fit this type of information into one PDF of perhaps 2-4 pages. On the other hand, if your reps sell into more than one segment, to multiple personas and have several products and services to offer, then they are going to need access to a whole load of knowledge to sell effectively!

Putting all of this into a 20-40 page PDF, even one that's designed around the sales process and has information separated out by persona, will ensure it gathers dust in the bottom drawer of the sales person's desk!

When sales people see a multipage playbook like this their immediate reaction is 'information overload'. And the typical request from sales managers is, "Put this onto one sheet so my team can consume it".

But you can't put all the required knowledge onto one sheet!

Why a knowledge portal isn't the answer

In recent years, many companies have looked to address this problem by building a knowledge portal to hold the critical information sales people need on industries, customers and propositions. But frustratingly, they just don't seem to get used by sales people.

After an initial flurry of logins when the portal is launched, usage falls off and after 6 months only new starters are visiting the site. Why is this?

As discussed in the previous section, this may have a lot to do with the way learning behaviors have changed. People see a knowledge portal as a place to go to read and accumulate knowledge – a resource for new starters but not something for experienced sales people.

Other typical comments from sales people include:

> *"The information is static on the page – there's no easy way for me to use it and adapt it for an individual call or meeting."*
>
> *"I need to access this information on my phone or laptop, online and offline, so I can prepare for my next call wherever I happen to be."*

How can digital technologies solve the problem?

The new generation of sales enablement platforms, which deliver interactive HTML5 content, offer a different way to give sales people access to the information they need to prepare for customer interactions.

HTML5 offers designers a much wider range of components to use to build more engaging user experiences which deliver interaction, embedded video content, etc. So, for example, you can build a digital playbook that allows a sales person to 'dial-in' the relevant industry and persona for their next call and instantly filter what's displayed on the page so they just see the information that's relevant to them now.

Sales enablement apps and playbooks can run both on and offline using a local datastore on the device. This means you can store bite sized pieces of knowledge in a central repository and automatically send updates to the local device, as information is changed or added by marketing and product management.

This ability to synchronize content between a database in the cloud and the app running on a person's tablet or smartphone, also makes it possible to build experiences that allow sales people to use and adapt content as they prepare for an upcoming meeting or call. And the great thing is their thinking is then updated to all the devices they use so it's available to look at on their smart phone just before the call, or to refer to on their iPad during a meeting.

The result is a sales tool that doesn't overwhelm sales people with information but allows them to 'dial-up' just the nuggets of knowledge they need and then select and adapt insights, questions to ask, and messages to use as they build up their thinking for the next call.

TRAINING NOT CONNECTED WITH CONTENT

Having the best sales insights and content recommended and easily available to sales people will immensely help them to be more successful in their conversations with buyers. But there is still a gap.

For people who sell, providing learning and training in a standalone platform or Learning Management System (LMS) misses the mark. It's not associating knowledge and learning with sales activity, and the behaviors of others in the sales team.

Having learning and sales content existing in two different worlds makes it hard for the seller to prepare for that critical buyer interaction, where everything – knowledge, insights and content – must come together.

The future of an empowered sales person is one where learning content and sales content are unified and informed by each other.

Imagine a seller is about to visit a new prospect who has a job function they are not familiar with, which means they don't know how to link the value of the products they sell to that customer. In the world of multiple disparate systems, the sales person would have to draw their own links between the available learning courses, micro-leaning pieces, videos, sell sheets, presentation decks etc. on the product and the customers need – something that most sales people, constantly pushed for time, are unable to do. The result? The sales person seems ill-informed to the customer, and is unable to influence the buying process.

Using Artificial Intelligence to make the connections

The digital era provides a unique opportunity to bring those two worlds together, using new machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems to make the connections between knowledge, content and the sales process. The latest sales enablement platforms deliver both sales content and collateral, as well as learning and knowledge development, in the same system, using AI to make smart recommendations relevant to that user at that time.

Modern AI technology can understand the skills and knowledge of the sales person, and the available content/information/collateral available to them and can create recommendations that guide the sales person down a path that enables them to prepare and present with the best likelihood of engaging customers and moving deals forward.

Closing the learning – content gap could be one of the most transformational and valuable changes an organization can make to improve the success rate of their sales people in the digital economy. Provide the right information to buyers and you turn sellers into 'advisors' who can influence the customer's thinking early in the buying process.

B2B SELLING IS A TEAM SPORT WHERE PREPARATION IS CRITICAL

It's no longer just about the Sales Hero

In the past, many companies relied on a small group of experienced and highly successful 'Sales Heroes' to drive the revenue numbers.

In today's B2B world, however, customers are looking for vendors to solve ever more complex sets of problems for them, which demands input from multiple players within the vendor organization. So sales teams may comprise an account manager, new business sales rep, solution specialist (who may do the product demo), representative from professional services, alongside others.

It's official - selling is a team sport, and as with any successful team, preparation is critical!

This doesn't mean you no longer need highly motivated, talented and knowledgeable people to lead the charge on a deal – you still do! What it does mean, even for relatively modest deals, is a number of people from different parts of the business have to work together effectively to be successful.

But how do you work with colleagues in a structured way to prepare for customer interactions?

Key collaboration points in the sales process

Let's take a look at some of the points in the sales process where collaboration is becoming critical to success.

Exploratory Meetings

Getting traction at an initial meeting is, of course, fundamental moving forwards. But how do you do this?

You demonstrate knowledge of the customer's marketplace. You ask insightful questions that show you understand their business and regularly work with and solve challenges for other, similar companies. You position your company as being potentially relevant to a strategic objective, goal or initiative they have.

You don't get a second chance at an exploratory meeting. You need to prepare carefully in advance and get input from other experienced sales people and perhaps your manager.

Needs Discovery Sessions

This is your chance to really demonstrate your company's expertise to some of the key influencers and decision makers in the prospect's buying team.

Although it's called 'Needs Discovery' actually it isn't about asking the prospect what their 'need' is. If you only do that, you simply reinforce the way the prospect is already thinking about solving the problem – which may have been suggested to them by a competitor!

An effective sales team comes pre-prepared with knowledge of the area of the customer's business concerned, the key workflows and some of the typical issues similar companies face. This means the sales rep can work closely with the solution specialist to orchestrate the discussions, drill-down into the apparent need, undercover the true business issue and pain, and explore potential solutions – in a consultative way.

Unfortunately, preparation for Needs Discovery sessions often comprises a half hour conference call or a quick chat in the coffee shop right before the meeting! And don't fool yourself that you're all ultra-smart and can wing it – customers know when a team walks into a room unprepared!

Demos

How many of you have booked a sales specialist to do a customer demo and then don't quite get around to talking the demo through in advance?!

Hands up, we've all done it and the results are always 'sub-optimal' to put it mildly!
The customer ends up getting the standard canned demo and you fail to make the all-important connection between the customer issues you've uncovered through needs discovery and the capabilities of your products and services.

If you're lucky, the customer will ask you to show them certain features of the product to figure out for themselves if it will solve the problem. But 9 times out of 10 they will simply remain quiet and will leave the demo having no idea whether the solution you're proposing could meet their requirements.

Presentations of the Proposal and Business Case

This is your big opportunity to play back to the customer the issues they are looking to address, the pain they feel, how your solution will solve these problems, and what value the customer will get. The stakes are high as the key members of the decision team are in the room.

You need to make sure you assemble insights, key messages, value delivered, points of differentiation, etc. and communicate all this as effectively as possible in the meeting.

Right now, the main tool sales teams use to work collaboratively together on something like this is PowerPoint. The starting point is often an old presentation for a similar deal, which gets adapted and sent round by email for review and comment. Often key members of the team don't engage.

The result is, the presentation slides aren't properly tuned for the individual sale and the different members of the sales team don't get aligned on what they are going to say in front of the buying team. So once again, the buyers must figure out for themselves how well the proposed solution solves their challenges and why it's the right choice for them versus the alternatives.

Powering preparation with digital sales enablement

Implementing a sales enablement platform provides a common place for sales team members to find and share insights and ideas. Building and deploying digital sales tools on the platform takes sales preparation to the next level.

With an interactive playbook built as an HTML5 app you can, for example, allow a sales person to browse insights into market themes, questions to ask, typical challenges a certain type of company and persona faces, and then select what they might want to use in an upcoming call or meeting.

They can then send a copy of the relevant content to a place where they can assemble and develop their thinking for an individual opportunity. You can think of this as a type of digital notepad where you built up a structured set of ideas, insights and messages for the individual deal as you work through different steps in the sales process. This can we written to the opportunity record in the CRM system.

The breakthrough here is you are combining knowledge (delivered just-in-time at the relevant point in the sales process) with an easy way to use these insights, questions and messages and adapt them for use on a specific sales opportunity – all in one place. And as this is an HTML5 app which uses a local datastore synchronized with the cloud, your latest prep for a customer meeting or call is always available on your phone, tablet or laptop.

Structured collaboration

As a sales rep's thinking and preparation for individual deals is stored in the cloud, it's easy to give other members of the sales team access to the digital notepad for a specific deal and allow them to contribute to the preparation effort, in a structured and efficient way.

You can get input from your boss as you assemble the right insights, questions to ask and positioning for your company before an exploratory meeting. You can work closely with sales specialists in preparing for needs discovery sessions and demos. And you can get everyone contributing to and aligned with what you're going to communicate at proposal presentations.

CONCLUSIONS

With the digital economy impacting every part of how we learn, engage, and buy, the balance of power has shifted dramatically from seller to buyer.

In this new world, it's no longer good enough for successful business to leave it up to individual sales people to make the connections between the companies and buyers they sell to and the knowledge and materials they need along the sales process - to improve their performance. The only way to win is to embrace the power of the digital economy and to implement new techniques and technologies that can change the game for sellers.

It's time to shift the balance of power back in favor of the seller, empowering them to become trusted advisors to customers!

BIOS

David Keane – CEO and Founder of Bigtincan

With over 20 years experience providing solutions to Enterprise and Consumer Customers worldwide David Keane loves the life of creating new ideas and concepts and seeing them grow. David is the CEO and co-founder of Bigtincan - a global provider of sales and service enablement software based in Boston.

David was a pioneer in the mobile applications business starting in 2008 with the release of the first iPhone SDK and having overseen the creation of three key consumer apps in BuzzMe, AdFree and Mapper, and then seeing them grow to over 6,000,000 users globally. Now with Bigtincan David is taking his experience in enterprise and adding his knowledge of how mobility works to take Bigtincan into a leadership position in the sales and service enablement market.

David is married with two children, and holds a Bachelors Degree in Economics from ANU, and a Masters of Arts in Management from Macquarie University, and lives in the town of Lexington MA in the USA.

Robin Griffiths – Managing Director and Founder of BPM Works

Robin's background includes Director of Projects at industrial group Birmid Qualcast and Founder and Director of Cambridge Consulting Engineers. Robin went on to start Force12 Software and led the company for 6 years; securing £3.2m in venture capital funding and establishing operations in the USA and Europe. Robin left Force12 in early 2004 to found BPM Works.

Robin is an expert in product proposition and go-to-market messaging development. He has also developed programs for some of the world's leading companies to equip sales people with the knowledge they need on customers and propositions to be more successful.

Robin has a First Class Honours Degree in Mechanical Engineering from King's College, London and a Masters Degree from Glasgow University.