TABLETS

SHOULD WE PROVIDE TABLETS FOR OUR SALESPEOPLE?

Whenever new technologies are introduced, the Chief Sales Officer, CSO, must evaluate them. Ignoring a new capability may cause the sales team to lack a valuable ability. Embracing an inappropriate new technology can create distractions and lead to lost sales.

The same principle applies to any other area of sales development and leadership. Any new sales process deserves consideration. A new book or training program on sales deserves an initial look at least. Sales tools, like calculators, need to be assessed just as anything coming out of marketing. This includes anything that you see in your competitor's organization or in other players in your supply chain.

The process:

- Is this right for your organization?
- How would it affect sales ?
- How would it affect salespeople?
- What impact, positive or negative, would it have on customers, etc.?

As a CSO, how do you *typically* respond to new technologies, processes, etc.?

0 (Zero) Probably do not need it	<< Somewhere in between >>	10 Always want the latest

There is no one right answer. Some business models are most effective when they stick to the tried-and-true. For others, not having the latest capabilities can be a barrier-to-entry for future sales. One of the roles of the CSO is to evaluate new capabilities and determine when and how they should be incorporated in their organization.

It's even lonelier at the top for the Chief Sales Officer

One of the capabilities that should be addressed is the use of tablets.

The definition of what a tablet actually is changes with each new innovation in the designs and functions of the devices. Essentially, a tablet is an adjunct to a personal computer. It does not replace the computer.

Like many new technologies it has evolved from being a unique curiosity to now becoming an essential tool in many situations.

In sales, the primary use of the tablet is to assist in sales calls. The inherent functionality of the tablet gives it a unique place in professional selling.

> Even the local flea market and art festival vendors have learned that having a tablet is essential for processing credit cards, demonstrations and other functions. Not having the capability can result in lost revenue.

Portability – The size and design of the tablet makes it an inviting tool for both the sales professional and the customer. It is easier to open (turn on), position and operate than most laptops. Being smaller, it is less intimidating. As tablets become more and more a part of the customer's buying experience, many buyers will expect the salesperson to use them.

Sensitivity – Think about it; how much information is on the typical laptop? Is it okay if your customer sees any of it? On a webinar the participants were watching a salesperson's laptop screen. When the salesperson switched from one presentation to the next, his desktop appeared. The background image was a picture of the salesperson in an inebriated state holding up a bottle. In the tray at the bottom of the screen was the icon for a video game. Needless to say, the salesperson's credibility and image were damaged. Tablets typically display less information and only reveal what the presenter wants to show at any given moment.

Capability – The choice of tablets for salespeople needs to consider how the tablet will be used immediately and in the future. When in doubt, more is more. Eventually, even the most technology-averse seasoned salesperson will find the tablet to be a useful tool. Consider any or all of the following as potential uses for the tablet:

- Slideshow presentations
- Specification pages
- Sales prompts (openings, overcoming objections, etc.)
- Calculators (ROI, TCO, etc.) used for cost justification
    - Salesperson can enter data
    - Customer can enter data

A tablet can bring new capabilities to the sales environment – including some that emerge later as the tablets are implemented. It is the type of technology that grows in capability over time.

As customers develop new objections, buying strategies and other roadblocks to selling, tablets can be updated immediately to provide sales professionals with the messaging and tools to counter the customer's new buying tactics.

Generic and proprietary apps give tablet users an advantage over competitors and an advantage over customer tactics. There are many resources for developing apps including vendors who will develop and host apps quickly and economically.

DISADVANTAGES

Be careful not to allow the tablet to become the message. The tablet assists the messenger; it is not the show. Specific training is needed to help salespeople understand how to utilize the tablet capabilities most effectively.

Some customers will be reluctant to enter data into any device controlled by the vendor. This includes websites and laptops as well as tablets. The salesperson must be able to conduct a comprehensive sales call without using the tablet.

Professional speakers know they must be able to deliver a high quality presentation even when their slide show fails for any reason. Sales professionals need the same confidence.

Presentations that require internet access may not be a good idea. Even with coverage as strong as it is now, mobile and Wi-Fi, the connection to the web is never guaranteed.

Be sensitive to visual and audible limitations of the buyer. Font sizes and sound volume requirements can vary widely.

Examine the tablet your organization has chosen. What capabilities does it have and how can those capabilities be used to:

- Position you higher in the client's organization?
- Give you a competitive edge?
- Provide additional information to the buyer in order to
  - Shorten the sales cycle
  - Eliminate the price objection
  - Increase the average sales size/revenue/volume
- Provide additional information to internal team members
  - Show customer applications/problems
  - Record customer comments
  - Allow the salesperson to hear/see what the customer experiences
- Does it integrate seamlessly with your CRM, ERP or other systems?

Many organizations are finding ways to shorten their sales cycles by completing more and more of the sales process at the time of the sale. The ability to respond with something other than, "I will get an answer and get back to you," can greatly accelerate the sales process.

> The difference: instead of telling the customer, "I will get that information and get back to you," your salespeople can say, "I just sent that information to your inbox."

An increasingly popular use of tablets has the salesperson asking specific questions in a defined order, entering data provided by the buyer, instantly creating a quote and emailing it to the buyer. While sitting across from the salesperson, the buyer sees the quote on their computer, makes whatever changes they like and clicks a button. The changes appear on the salesperson's tablet, the customer initiates a purchase order, an invoice is created and the customer signs their name on the tablet. Before the salesperson can leave the buyer's office, goods can be loaded on a truck for delivery to the customer.

Real World Example

A manufacturer developed a proprietary app. They issued their salespeople a tablet with the app preloaded, accompanied by specific tablet-based sales training. The app reduced a portion of their sales cycle from three weeks to three minutes. Since 40% of their business is in disaster recovery, and since they could have replacement parts being loaded on a truck immediately, their customers would sign the tablet and begin restoring their lost production three works earlier than any other vendor. Occasionally their salesperson would walk out of the customer's building and see one

of their competitors coming in to make a sales call. The competitor's sale was a non-starter because of the tablet.

There is more. Because of the effectiveness of the app, the manufacturer started another company: they build similar apps for others!

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PROCESS

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How do you determine if tablets are right? How do you determine which tablet to select? How do you training your sales professionals to use it?

The key word is **_outcome_**. What outcome do you want? What outcome will your salespeople expect? What positive outcome will result for the customer?

Begin with the customer's outcome. Based on input from your salespeople, what are customers demanding – other than lower prices? Make a list of the most common issues your salespeople are hearing – especially those that do not relate to your product or service.

For example, if you sell a component for something your customer produces and they are looking at a lower-priced offering. You learn that increased labor costs is driving this decision. How can your salespeople develop a cost justification based on reduced man-hours? Or, can you develop a calculator that shows how your inventory management or supply chain efficiencies will offset other increased costs? (Remember, in value-added selling we think cost, not price.) With the aid of a well-equipped tablet, your salespeople could be prompted to:

- Ask specific questions
- Provide specific responses
- Show quantified results (using a calculator)

Once you have some ideas about the obstacles your customers are facing, you will better understand why they raise the objections they do. More importantly, you will understand what outcome they are seeking. Now you want to determine how the tablet can help your salespeople address the customer's issues with a value-added approach. Do they need a list of qualifying questions? Would a calculator help? Is there an opening for a proprietary app here?

Armed with this information, develop a list of criteria your tablet must meet. Break your list into two columns: **Must Haves** and **Wish List**. When evaluating all of the tablets that meet your "Must Have" criteria, use the Wish List to reduce the number of options. As a

last selection criteria, look at long-term potential capabilities. Specifications like existing or expandable memory, future upgrades and accessories can be used here.

With the rate of growth in technology, your selected tablet will probably be obsolete sooner than you would like. Do not use this as a consideration for delaying implementation. It is better to begin using something now than to continue to wait for the next new thing.

Your tablet selection team should include:

- **Sales Leadership** to provide input on future sales strategies.
- **Salespeople** to provide insights into real-world customer behaviors. For instance, if you have clients who confiscate phones and computers before allowing entry, this would be a factor your salespeople would know.
- **IT/MIS** needs to be represented to provide insights into technical nuances that might impact the functionality of the tablet and its interaction with other systems.

Are you currently using tablets you would like to replace? Consider donating them to a non-profit. The organization will receive a valuable tool and you will have a tax write-off. Even better, you will feel better about the conversion. Remember to clean the data off of the tablets.

SUMMARY

Like the internet, portable information devices are here to stay. Over time we can expect them to evolve in capability and complexity. The sooner your salespeople and your customers can embrace their use in your transactions, the sooner you will benefit from the value they bring.