

THE NEXT NEW THING IN SALES GIVES THE ADVANTAGE TO MIDMARKET COMPANIES

After establishing rapport, the salesperson launches a PowerPoint presentation both of them can view. The customer wonders how many slides are in the deck, how many will have little value for them and how long this is going to take.

So far, this is an all-too-typical sales call.

But then the scenario changes. Using a mouse, the customer takes control of the selling process – not the buying decision. Navigating through the presentation at their own pace and viewing only the items that of interest to them, the customer makes their buying decision. Whatever objections the customer had were addressed by the customer, including features, benefits and even a formal cost justification.

Meanwhile, the salesperson was hundreds of miles away and will be making another presentation to another client, miles away, in a matter of minutes.

Welcome to Blended Selling.

Overview

Sales is changing; it is changing rapidly and it is changing rampantly. Many of these changes are giving your customers the upper hand. Meanwhile, the countermeasures are giving SMBs an advantage over larger corporations. Implementing new processes in larger organizations can be cumbersome and may require approval from marketing, branding, legal and other departments – all of which are necessary but take time. Smaller organizations can often implement the new process much faster.

When you shop with an online retailer, such as Amazon.com, are you the buyer or the seller? When you choose between the lower-priced option that arrives in three days or the higher-priced one that arrives in one day, who is selling the advantages of earlier availability? In fact, when we shop online we are both the buyer and the seller. Buyers, then, are learning to sell and are practicing their “sales skills” more often than ever.

Corporate buyers are also personal buyers and have experienced the advantages of online shopping. As a result, they can use a similar approach to research a potential corporate purchase without engaging anyone from the vendor's organization. Your product or service could be eliminated from consideration without you even knowing it.

“Most buyers are better at buying than salespeople are at selling.” – Chuckism #29

Three key factors are driving the adoption of blended selling:

- Most buyers are better at buying than salespeople are at selling – they buy more often than the salesperson sells.
- Many buyers are better at *selling* than salespeople are; they have been observing sales tactics from multiple sellers and are now using them to control the sales process. Often, the salesperson does not realize the customer is in control. So sales deteriorate to price.
- The single, most important function of sales is to teach. When the customer knows the right thing to do, they will do the right thing.

“Today many buyers are better at selling than salespeople are.”

- Chuckism #30

We no longer sell to the customer the way they want to be sold. We now enable them to sell themselves the way they want to be sold by allowing them to control the sales process. When you and I buy online we are both the buyer and the seller. Blended selling is the key for putting sales professionals in a position to influence buyers who are selling to themselves in a B2B corporate environment.

Corporate America has embraced **blended learning** for all of the right reasons. There are times when classroom training is irreplaceable and other occasions when the costs, are measured in time and money, make it unviable. Meanwhile, e-learning is evolving into a sophisticated science with ever-improving results. The older technologies: podcasts, videos and webinars, for example, still have a place. Interactive multimedia e-learning with quizzing takes non-traditional training to a whole new level. The use of various training formats based on 1) corporate objectives and 2) learner requirements is known as blended learning.

Now comes blended selling. Its use is based on 1) corporate objectives and, 2) buyer requirements.

“You can't replace the face-to-face,” has been the mantra for many successful salespeople. Now the face-to-face approach is being used successfully in a declining number of sales calls. There are still some customers who expect or demand the face-to-face appearance if the vendor wants their business, and their numbers are declining. Younger decision makers prefer faster, technology-based sales presentations they can

access any time and from anywhere. In between these two are the traditional buyers who are finding more opportunities to take advantage of technological approaches for supplementing personal interactions with salespeople.

The customer or prospect must be approached the right way and at the right time. “Right” is determined by the individual customer (there is no one-size-fits-all) and their preferences change as their market, industry and competitors change. Their situations are changing as rapidly as yours. The way you closed the account will probably not be the best approach for growing the account. Your customer relationships are evolving and your interactions must evolve as well.

So how do you determine your strategy for your next sales call? There are two stages for implementing blended selling: Establish and Execute.

Establish

Begin with a comprehensive survey of the options that are available and then prioritize them for viability. Every blended selling approach may not work for every market. If you are seeing a shift in your buying demographics to younger people, you will want to factor in as many high tech approaches as possible.

If your corporate objective involves selling to the executive level, you may want to combine high tech with traditional packaging. As an example, send your C-Level client or prospect contact an overnight package with an e-presentation on a CD or tablet accompanied by a formal business letter.

In order to do this, you will need a library of presentations and tools your sales professionals can use. They will need to use a formal executive-level sales process when engaging the contact, of course; the package will be the tool for earning an audience.

Your checklist for establishing a blended selling capability includes:

- Survey as many options for communicating as you can find
- Prioritize the ones that will be the most viable in your market and industry
- Build the tools to support your message, such as ROI or TCO calculators
- Provide your sales professionals with the training they need to effectively execute the new sales paradigm

“We are not sure exactly when it happened. After becoming better at buying than most salespeople were at selling, many buyers became better at selling. At that point, they began taking control of the selling process, often without the salesperson even knowing it. They drove the conversation to price while unsuspecting salespeople helplessly capitulated. Blended selling puts the sales professional back in control.”

– Chuck Reaves in a presentation to CEOs

Executing blended selling in your organization begins with outcome. What outcome does your organization expect from sales? In order to achieve those standards, what outcome will be needed from each customer touch? Then, charge your sales professionals to do the following.

- What do you want this customer to do as a result of this interaction? The three objectives are: Buy, You and Grow. Are you introducing a new purchase for them to BUY. Or, are they already buying from someone else and the goal is a competitive win so they will buy from YOU. Finally, are they already buying from you and you want to GROW the business with them?
- What information will they need in order to do what you want them to do? Remember, this is a time for you to teach even though they may already have learned a lot about you and your competitors online. Some of what they have learned may be in error, so you may need to help them “unlearn” as well.
- How does each new contact want or need to be taught? If your only approach for differentiating your offering is a face-to-face approach and the customer is in a hurry, you may lose the sales to a competitor with a rich online presence. If you are relying on a web demo and the customer needs a face-to-face in order to understand what you have, you can lose. If the customer insists on buying online, how can you allow them to conduct a qualified and quantified cost justification?
- Pre-call planning is mandatory. There is no one-size-fits all and attempting to use the same approach with client B that was used on client A can be dangerous. Have a full account management plan for each sale: how will you make the initial contact? When and how will you follow up? What are your unique selling advantages against the competitors who are also being considered?
- Engage the customer. Begin with a needs analysis to determine what else they need to learn in order to sell to themselves. Use the SWOT approach for determining what they need to learn.
- Conduct a post-call critique. Blended selling is a work in progress. Every sales call is an audition for the next one and every call is a chance to learn how to be more effective with the next customer.

Smaller companies are able to capitalize on blended selling faster than many larger organizations. Some major corporations require standardization so any changes might need to be approved by marketing, branding, legal or other departments. So now you have the two stages for implementing blended selling but your plate is full. I'd like to help you. Email me and we'll set up a complementary phone call.

There is no one-size-fits-all in sales; what options are you giving your customers to help them sell themselves? Remember, if we make no changes in our behavior we can expect no changes in the results.