

Sales is a team sport

Collaboration is key

As buying committees seek valuable perspectives from multiple stakeholders to minimize risk, the buying process has become increasingly complex.

The 2015 MHI Sales Best Practices Study reveals that top performing salespeople engage with an average of 5.8 client stakeholders and 4.6 internal team members during the buying process. This has increased the average sales cycle by 22 percent over the past five years, according to Sirius Decisions. Yet even with this complexity, top talent outperforms moderate performers by increasing customer retention rates (+5.8 percent) and sales performance (+23 percent).

How do they do it?

To answer that question, it's important to recognize that selling has become a team sport, requiring collaboration among sales, marketing, sales operations, product engineering and finance. In 2011, Aberdeen Group released a whitepaper titled, "Introduction to Sales and Marketing Alignment" which showed that companies with "superior alignment" between marketing and sales experienced a 32 percent growth in annual revenue, compared to a 7 percent decline in organizations that were lacking this alignment.

Only 13 percent of customers today believe that salespeople understand their needs, according to TeleSmart Communications. This may be why the average company loses between 10 and 30 percent of its customers each year.

Forrester's recent survey of B2B buyers shows that up to 70 percent of the information buyers saw before making a purchase decision was self-discovered and

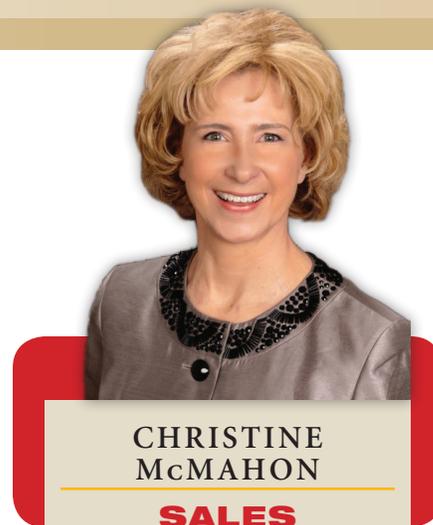
89 percent of sales calls provide no value to the buyer. This justifies why salespeople spend an average of 30 hours per month searching for, and creating, their own sales material (less than 10 percent of marketing materials are ever used!). What they need is relevant, customer-specific information that helps the buyer make an informed and smart decision.

This shift in how clients buy and what they need underscores the growing sales enablement movement. A Google search for "sales enablement definition" produces 91,500 results. There are many definitions and interpretations available, but the one I like best was developed by Tamara Schenk: "Sales Force Enablement: A strategic, cross-functional discipline designed to increase sales results and productivity by providing integrated content, training and coaching services for salespeople and frontline sales managers along the entire customer journey, powered by technology."

Let's take a closer look at what this means.

Schenk leads her definition with **"strategic and cross-functional"** to show that there must be alignment between business goals and sales strategies to support effective sales execution. Considering the urgent need for salespeople to sell the way their customers buy, companies today must be nimble in how they support different buying processes.

Powerful content and fact-based information in the right format, at the right time, is what salespeople need to advance the conversation forward. More assets – whitepapers, case studies, data sheets, product demonstration videos, etc. – make it easier for the salesperson to customer-ize his or her message.



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"Increased sales results and productivity" focuses on the desired outcomes achieved by leveraging sales enablement. Salespeople who are strategically better prepared for customer meetings are also more empowered to engage at the highest level of conversation and better able to advance the sale. They understand how to communicate the value message so it appeals to each of their customers' needs. The process is efficient and frees up time so salespeople can invest more time in doing what they love – selling more!

"Providing integrated content, training and coaching support" ensures that consistent messages are communicated to the entire sales organization; this bolsters confidence and execution. When the team is armed with strategic information that it knows will be useful to its buyers, its members are eager to engage, explore possibilities and move the conversation forward.

Ongoing training and coaching ensures that blind spots are eliminated before they become bad habits. Salespeople are appropriately challenged, tested and their skills refined, which keeps their mental and strategic mindset sharp. The American Society for Training & Development reports that continuous training yields 50 percent higher net sales per employee; sales enablement allows this to happen easily

and with accountability.

“Along the entire customer journey” is a mindset high performers understand and take ownership of. They recognize that client engagement is much more than likeability; it’s about building trust by providing fact-based evidence that makes the buying decision easier... through the entire journey. They know when it is right to engage and when it is best to sit tight. High performers handle this delicate process with grace.

“Powered by technology” is the mechanism that enables both salespeople and sales leaders access to the right information and training when it is needed. According to Forrester Research, 40 percent of a salesperson’s time is spent searching for tools and resources (that’s more than the time he or she spends selling!). Rather than tolerate “random acts of sales support,” a term coined by Forrester, embrace technology to create a systematic approach to training, delivering content and reviewing analytics so salespeople have what they need, when they need it.

Given the breadth of information available to buyers today, gaining a strategic advantage means providing them with information that is specific to their business. This requires collaboration between marketing and sales, and potentially other business functions.

Committing resources to sales enablement is proving for many to be an essential function. Companies that recognize its value and embrace the power of strategic alignment are experiencing double-digit growth. ■

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