kuno CREATIVE

Business 2 Business

SELLING IN THE AGE OF THE CUSTOMER

by John McTigue, EVP & Co-Owner

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"IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET, it seems to me that information is more 'symmetric' in the B2B environment, so that by the time a customer 'self selects' and engages in a conversation with a representative, they are pretty well educated. This dynamic makes it all the more important to have B2B reps that can enlist customers to talk candidly about their problems, listen, listen some more, and then describe their products in terms of their prospect's problem.

Brian Halligan

2006, Hubspot CEO

"IF YOU WANT TO GROW SALES IN 2014,

you have to stop selling.
Stop yelling and start telling.

Rick Roberge

2013, Trusted Advisor

FOREWORD

Rick Roberge, Trusted Advisor to 21st Century Sales Rock Stars, RainMakers, Founders, Entrepreneurs & Startup Executives **– rickroberge.com**

My wife told me, "I'm going to the paint store to get some paint chips." I asked for what, and she replied that she wanted to paint the kitchen and the store was having a sale. Off she went. If I had been paying attention, I could have saved her the trip. When she returned, she put dozens of paint chips up next to the cabinets, woodwork and tile to start to visualize. All of the paint chips were in the beige/rust/brown color spectrum. I looked at the outfit she wore shopping (capris, blouse, jacket, scarf, sandals) and it was in the beige/rust/brown spectrum.

This story exemplifies two relevant lessons for sales and marketing. The buyer's process starts way before the store has a sale or the buyer consciously starts shopping. The subconscious mind sees and remembers images from magazines and colors we see in other settings as 'possibilities,' and the conscious mind may not be aware. Observant salespeople will notice these clues and offer them as suggestions to the buyer, and the buyer will begin to feel a synergy in the salesperson's helpfulness.

21st Century B2B is no different. The buyer's process starts way before she fills out a form on our website or reaches out to us directly, and, because some of the memories will be created by their subconscious, the buyer may not be aware of her predisposition.

This is the challenge John explores in this eBook. How can salespeople and marketers alike help the buyer uncover the memories their subconscious has created? What questions need to be asked? When? How? By whom?

Enjoy the read as John shares from his experience as well as insight from a dozen other 21st Century experts.

FOREWORD

Frank Belzer, Kurlan and Associates–Sales Leadership, Coach, Strategist, Author of **"Sales Shift"**

The era of inbound marketing was ushered in quickly, much faster than its predecessor outbound marketing had been. Outbound had time to develop and grow, create paradigms and generate its own rules and regulations over decades. That of course didn't make it better; it just made it older. I bring up this obvious contrast between outbound and inbound techniques to simply demonstrate the massive chasm that has arisen over the past 6 years or so. Many "traditional marketers" immediately tried to jump ship and simply translate their tried and true techniques to Inbound—that failed.

When I met John and Chris Knipper (Kuno Creative CEO), I realized they were not attempting to mix old methods with new. They realized they were on the cusp of something entirely new and different. They realized the approach was new and different, and this was obvious every time we engaged in a conversation.

There is another great attribute at play here—they were never anti-sales. Many who jumped on the inbound bandwagon were, but the folks at Kuno realized inbound marketing would only provide a complete loop if the sales strategy and execution were correct. Completing the loop, after all, was vital; if we merely generate leads, interest, content and calls to action, but we see no impact on actual revenue, then surely the investment would dry up. They, like most of us, live in the world of business, and this was clear by the way they approached inbound marketing.

Some of the great messages in this eBook include points related to the shared responsibility of sales and inbound marketing, the fact that buyers need to be treated as real people and the fact that a process is as vital to managing the lead as it is to finding a lead. John has done a great job at combining some of the best tips from the best experts and compiling these takeaways into one simple and easy-to-read document—enjoy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We started this journey in 2000 when my partner, Chris Knipper, founded Kuno Creative. I joined in 2003, bringing my web development bag of tricks to add to his deep knowledge of marketing. We've always done sales for Kuno, but in recent years, we've been building a sales organization to grow the company. In 2008-2009, we found inbound marketing the way most people did: by searching for better solutions and finding HubSpot's great content. Now it's what we do.

We learned early on that sales was changing as well as marketing in the early 2000s, and we needed to hone our skills for the new paradigms. The HubSpot guys introduced us to Frank Belzer and Rick Roberge at Kurlan & Associates, and they became our mentors. We owe much of our success to their coaching and strategies, and now we find ourselves in the position of passing that knowledge on to our own people, as well as our customers and followers. We've put our own spin on B2B selling since the early days of inbound marketing, and that's what this eBook is all about.

We have also benefited from countless conversations with great people who know a lot about sales and marketing, including Pete Caputa and Mark Roberge at HubSpot, Mark Gibson at Admarco and many more. Our inspiration also comes from many of the great thought leaders in B2B Sales, including Jill Konrath, Trish Bertuzzi, Dave Kurlan, Greg Alexander, Brian Carroll, Tony Zambito, Adele Revella and many more.

INTRODUCTION

This eBook isn't another attempt to school you in sales 2.0 best practices. Instead, I want to talk about the B2B sales landscape in 2013-2014, the role of marketing and new ways of thinking about the sales process. Why? Because I'm in a unique position as an owner of an inbound marketing agency who happens to also be responsible for B2B sales. I live the challenges of converting leads into customers just like you do, but I also see a bright future if we can break down some of the barriers that hinder us right now. There really aren't any rules that stand the test of time in sales and marketing. What worked yesterday probably won't work today and certainly not tomorrow. We need to find ways to adapt to the ever-changing conditions.

Think about the word "target" we use all the time in both sales and marketing. We're still thinking about customers as objectives or even adversaries in a generally painful process, which ends up separating them from their budgets or leaving us frustrated. We're still waving our arms to get their attention, and when we do, we're hounding them into submission. From our own experience, we know this approach no longer works. Customers want us to be their preachers, teachers and support staff all rolled up into one low-priced package—and they don't want to hear from us until they're ready to buy. Maybe we should rethink that fundamental relationship and come up with something new.

The B2B Customer

ARE THEY ALWAYS RIGHT & IN CONTROL?

We know this intuitively these days. We are totally in control of our own buying decisions, seeking help and research online via Google while blocking unwanted sales calls and emails. We make up our minds by reading reviews and asking our friends and colleagues for advice in social networks. When we go to buy a car, we hand the poor, unsuspecting salesman a quote we got from the Web – take it or leave it. Their job is reduced to haggling for a few hundred dollars here and there. We use this process across all of our purchasing decisions both at home and in the workplace. We have learned how to reject nearly all forms of intrusive marketing, and sales inquiries get sent right to the spam folder. We enjoy this power and would surrender it only under extreme circumstances. But those of us who are in sales are conflicted. **What do we do now? How do we get our jobs done without the tactics that once worked so well?**

For those of us who choose to ignore our instincts, even in B2B, there's plenty of evidence to support the new customer-in-control paradigm, for example:

> Empowered customers are disrupting every industry; competitive barriers like manufacturing strength, distribution power, and information mastery can't save you. In this age of the customer, the only sustainable competitive advantage is knowledge of and engagement with customers.
> **– Forrester**

> It is estimated that about 90% of prospects never respond to a cold call or email. We are no longer in an age of information scarcity, we are in an age of information abundance. But more information doesn't necessarily accelerate the lead-to-sale; the right information does. Inbound marketing through blogs, webinars and thought leadership should be used to attract prospects. Marketing is about generating a smaller number of higher quality leads. **– Ian Michaels**

In a **recent study** by the Corporate Executive Board Company (CEB) and Google, a key finding was that nearly 60% of the B2B buying process is complete before any sales rep is contacted.

> …and, to top it off, more than 50% of vendors are already eliminated before a sales rep ever has a chance to engage **– David Karel**

Why?

> In this world the celebrated 'solution sales rep' can be more of an annoyance than an asset. Customers in an array of industries, from IT to insurance to business process outsourcing, are often way ahead of the salespeople who are 'helping' them. **– Harvard Business Review**

THE NEW FACE OF

The B2B Sales Rep

Faced with these daunting challenges, many sales reps are adapting and flourishing. The CEB/Google **survey** goes on to list the apparent “winners” in the new B2B marketplace:

> …the news is not all bad. Although traditional reps are at a distinct disadvantage in this environment, a select group of high performers are flourishing. These superior reps have abandoned much of the conventional wisdom taught in sales organizations. *They:*

Evaluate

prospects according to criteria different from those used by other reps, targeting agile organizations in a state of flux rather than ones with a clear understanding of their needs.

Seek

out a different set of stakeholders, preferring skeptical change agents over friendly informants.

Coach

those change agents on how to buy, instead of quizzing them about their company’s purchasing process.

> The best salespeople are replacing traditional 'solution selling' with 'insight selling'—a strategy that demands a radically different approach across several areas of the purchasing process.

The diagram below illustrates the differences between these two approaches.

Solution Selling	Insight Selling
What kind of company to target	
Organizations that have a clear vision and established demands.	Agile organizations that have emerging demands or are in a state of flux.
What sort of initial information to gather	
What need is the customer seeking to address?	What unrecognized need does the customer have?
When to engage	
After the customer has identified a problem the supplier can solve.	Before the customer has pinpointed a problem.
How to begin the conversation	
Ask questions about the customer's need and look for a "hook" for your solution.	Offer provocative insights about what the customer should do.
How to direct the flow of information	
Ask questions so that the customer can steer you through its purchasing process.	Coach the customer about how to buy, and support it throughout the process.

Source: Harvard Business Journal and Corporate Executive Board (CEB)

Many of you will recognize this approach as the Challenger Sale. "While most sales reps focus on building customer relationships, the best [reps] focus on pushing customers' thinking, introducing new solutions to their problems and illuminating problems customers overlook."

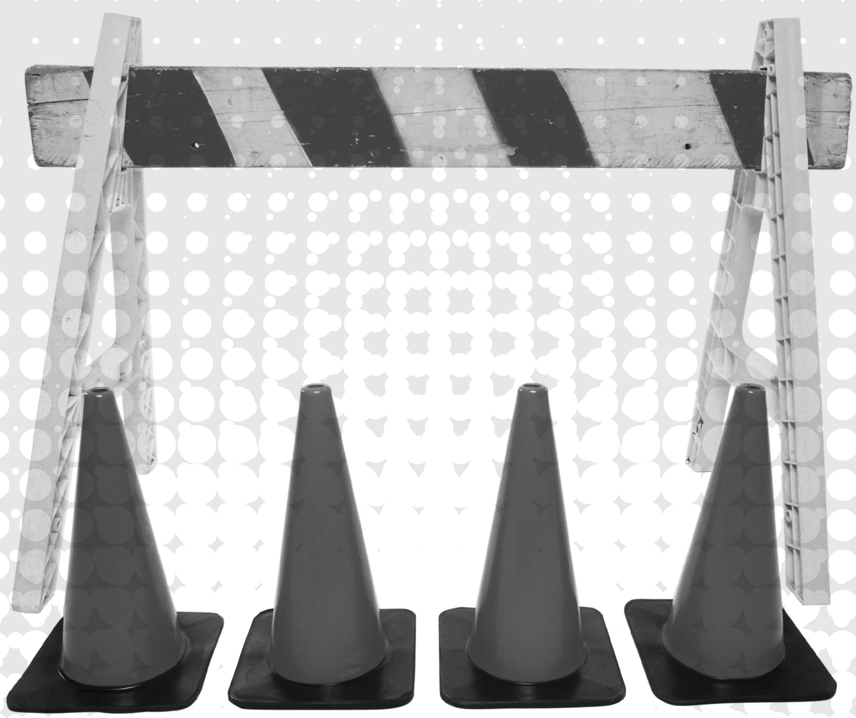
As Mark Gibson puts it in his blog, "…today, when buyers have an abundance of information about vendor products and solutions at their fingertips, any salesperson who brings insight to the table and can create new opportunities for the buying organization can have a relationship based on that value. Buyers simply have no time or need for relationships with salespeople who do not create value."

Today's reps must find the key insights that will transform the new buyer's journey and communicate them in a way that is helpful and non-threatening.

COMMON ROADBLOCKS TO B2B Sales

No longer in control of the "initiative" in B2B sales, the modern day sales rep also faces more traditional challenges. The B2B decision process typically involves a far more complex process and elongated sales cycle compared to the largely e-commerce dominated markets of B2C. B2B sales often involve six figures and up, even in the world of SaaS software and professional services.

The consideration and decision phases of the sales cycle often involve evaluation teams and Board-level approvals. These factors would tend to favor the heavy involvement of experienced sales reps toward the end of the sales cycle, but what roadblocks are sales reps running into these days? Even "rockstar" sales reps armed with the latest Challenger Sale strategies are likely to run into resistance based on human emotion and uncertainty.



According to an article by **Steve W. Martin** in the Harvard Business Review, sales reps most often complain about the following reasons for lost B2B sales:

No decision

customers have an innate fear of making a decision despite exhaustive research and professional consulting

No leads, poor leads

marketing isn't doing its job to send us qualified sales leads

Stalled sales cycles

almost any excuse will do to delay the purchase indefinitely

Commodity

there are many competitive products and little differentiation

Price vs. value

why is your product more expensive than your competitor's?

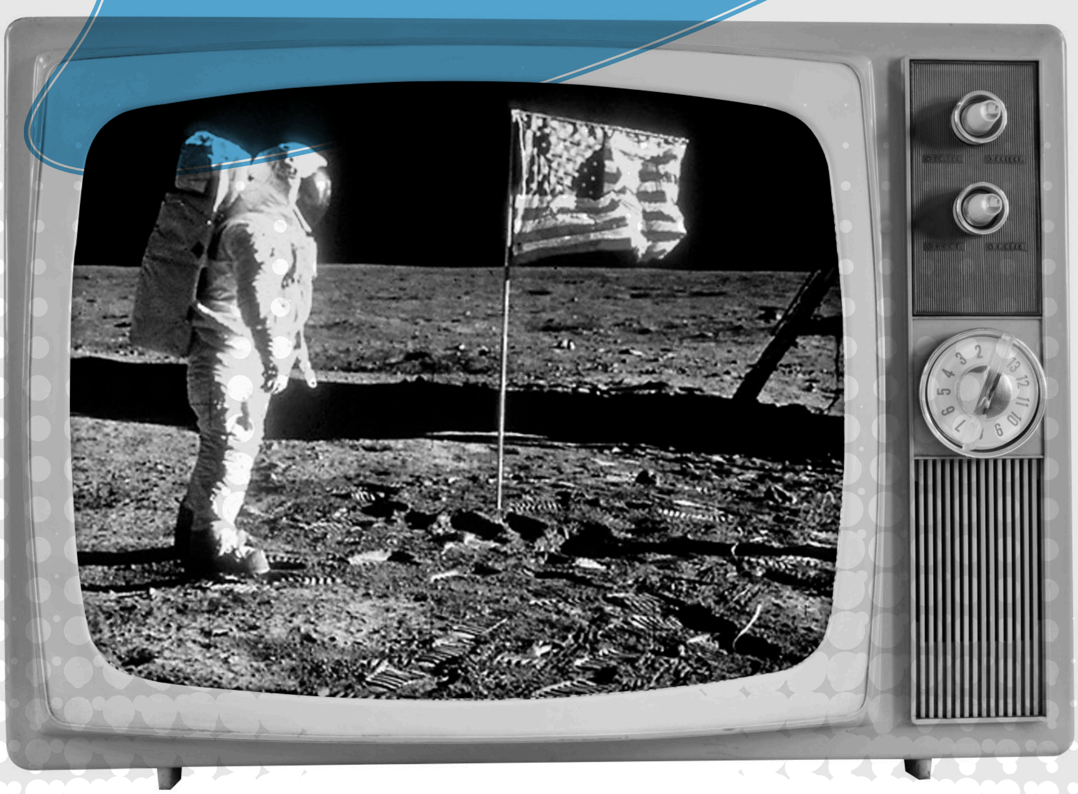
Internal sale

the decision maker must be "sold" and is naturally resistant to change

Faced with these common roadblocks, the experienced sales rep needs to dig deep to find the most effective ways to overcome them. This won't happen simply by virtue of a lead nurturing campaign or a timely "checking-in" phone call. Each of these objections is rooted in some form of emotion on the customer's part, be it fear or greed or politics or gamesmanship. The B2B sales rep needs to be able to recognize these emotional tells, put them into context through familiarity with the buyer and devise a strategy that will turn defeat into victory.

But how is this possible?

The sales rep isn't even involved until 60% of the sales cycle is complete.



Changes in SALES & MARKETING STRATEGY

The simple answer is to involve both sales and marketing in every step of the buyer's journey. The new customer may be in control, but the buyer can be and must be influenced with new insights delivered by the sales and marketing team. Thanks to rapid advances in marketing technology and inbound marketing strategies, we are learning a lot about our customers before they contact us for information and help. It's Marketing's job to influence the customer to gain interest and to track his "journey" through the sales funnel. It's Sales' job to continue that process through to closing. There is no clear break between these responsibilities now, but the danger lies in mixed messages and crossed purposes.

According to a recent Crain's survey, "the sales cycle has lengthened for many B2B companies, increasing pressure on the marketing organization to boost brand awareness to help deliver leads and effectively nurture them through a prolonged buying process. At the same time, marketers are struggling to optimize their online marketing mix, with many unable to segment and target the right decision-makers or measure program success across the entire marketing funnel."

Boiling this situation down to its essence:

Marketing needs to find and deliver more qualified leads to Sales' doorstep through targeted, personalized content and campaigns

Sales needs to be aware of those leads and their activities sooner in the sales cycle, even though leads aren't necessarily ready to speak to Sales

Sales reps need data and tools that allow them to quickly discover key insights about the buyer before the first sales call

Marketing and Sales need to be on the same page with respect to strategy, message and process for communicating with leads and nurturing them into customers

“**Brian Halligan has been quoted as saying the Internet has flattened the world.** If you, as a business owner, aren't good at getting found, you have no shot. Get good at inbound marketing. That being said, Brian's quote also says that when you get found, you could now be competing with 100's or 1,000's of competitors instead of the one or two guys around the corner. When your marketing gets you noticed and a prospect knocks on your door, you may only get one shot. You better have your sales game face on.”

– Rick Roberge

Marketing's role has evolved in recent years. It's no longer sufficient to evangelize products and services to a broad marketplace. Instead, marketing's new job is to find likely buyers and help them to discover your solutions through education and thought leadership.

How is this different from Sale's role? It isn't. They both share the same goals and role now – to build relationships with customers by challenging the status quo and helping buyers discover better approaches. In fact, they need each other's help to be successful. The difference is how and when they get involved.

What's often missing is knowledge of the customer. We can no longer afford to wait until the first sales call to gather vital information about them—by then a decision may already be imminent. How can today's sales rep gain earlier access to the decision-making process?

STOP SELLING.

Start Helping.

This classic line from Zig Ziglar has never been more true. What do customers want from you? The evidence suggests they don't want much because they think they know what they need and how to get it – or they aren't even aware they have a problem! They won't reach out to you until they have identified a need, done their homework and made a decision. **The new B2B sales rep needs to disrupt that thinking, not in a violent way, but in a helpful way by:**

Zig Ziglar

- **Understanding the buyer** (buyer persona)
- **Understanding the buyer journey** (sales cycle)
- **Challenging the buyer** (challenger sale)
- **Leveraging content marketing** mapped to the buyer and the buyer journey
- **Using personalized, relevant communications** and content

Three out of five of these activities are usually assigned to Marketing, but in my view, they should be merged into an integrated sales and marketing process aimed at engaging with buyers and finding ways to stimulate conversations that lead to sales.

TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE B2B BUYER

Buyer Persona

This is a BIG topic, and I will only provide an overview here. The general idea is your buyers are real people, but they have certain traits and behaviors in common. If you can learn to recognize those traits and behaviors, you can adapt your approach to better meet their needs and become a valued resource. That, in turn, allows you to generate sales that benefit both you and your customers.

What is a buyer persona?

"Buyer personas are not demoGRAPHIC profiles. You're not interested in how many kids your buyer has or which magazines he reads [in the B2B space]. You're interested in his behavior as it relates to your products or services… Buyer personas are also not guesses or assumptions about who your buyers are. You're looking for the real buyer, not who you think the real buyer might be. Prepare for surprises. What you find out might be game-changing. That's why, as tempting as it might be to use surveys and focus groups, etc., it's worth it to do one-on-one interviews. Conversations are the best way to find out what happened before, during and after the buying process."

– Stephanie Kapera

But who to interview?

Adele Revella, founder of The Buyer Persona Institute, recommends interviewing "the person who did most of the work." In this case, that's the member of [the] buying team who did most of the digging and explained your product or service to everyone else. This might be someone in a mid-level position—not the end user, but a consultant to or manager of the end user. **Christine Crandell** suggests interviewing more than one person to get a clearer picture of the buyers you'll be interacting with at each stage. Obviously, this depends on your marketing department's capacity, but if you can manage it, do multiple interviews.[1]

Some of the questions you might ask in a buyer persona interview:

- What were you looking for?
- What were your problems?
- What were your goals?
- How did we get your attention?
- What specific content or conversations stimulated you?
- What surprises or new revelations made a difference in your thinking?
- Why did you continue to take an interest?
- How did the relationship evolve?
- What did we do right?
- What did we do wrong?
- How could we have done better?

But don't stop there. Ask for stories that relate to their challenges and process for solving them. According to **Tony Zambito,** "Buyer persona work is not a worksheet or a template to fill out. It's a communications platform to communicate deeper insights based on your qualitative research. It gives you a communications vehicle to help the rest of your organization understand who buyers are at the deepest possible level. You are enabled to develop a common language about buyers in your organization. Then, you're executing on strategies informed by the insights and the buyer personas themselves."[2]

Buyer personas are useful for both Sales and Marketing. They enable Marketing to create content that appeals to different members of the buyer team at different stages of the sales cycle. They allow both Sales and Marketing to identify likely buyers based on the content they consume and other behaviors, such as visiting product and pricing pages or requesting information. Sales can view these behaviors in historical context and make judgments on next steps, message and timing.

[1] How to Create Meaningful Buyer Personas for the Buyer's Journey

[2] Buyer Persona Thought Leadership Series: Q&A with Tony Zambito

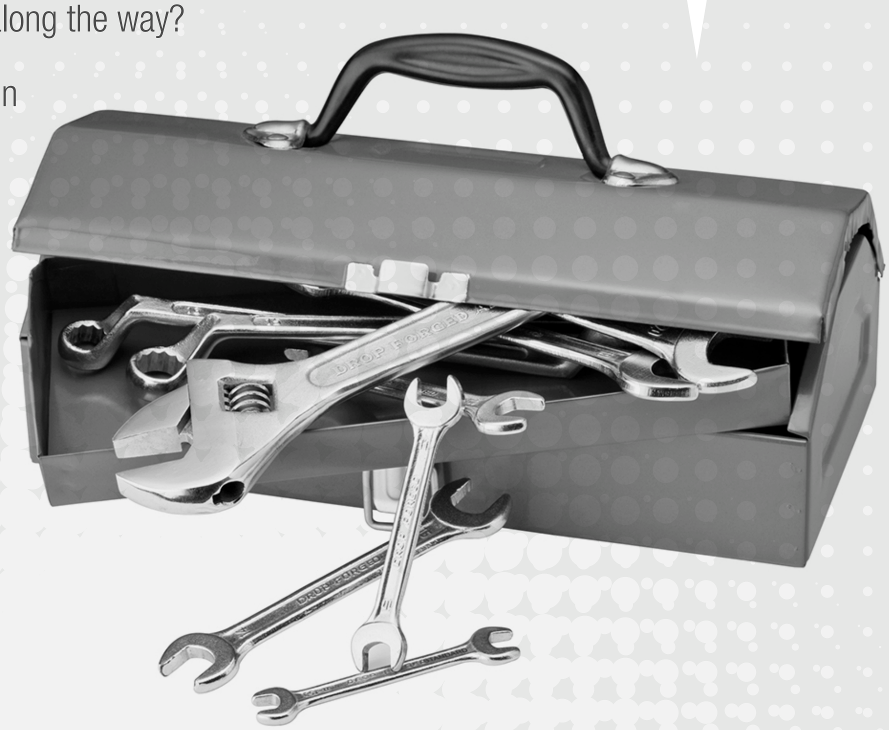
TOOLS FOR UNDERSTANDING

The Buyer Journey

Now we want to put buyer personas into context with respect to the sales cycle, often referred to as the "buyer journey." Through the buyer persona interview process, we want to understand their behaviors and patterns for decision-making that led to a sale or a lost sale.

Additional buyer questions might include:

- What was your process for discovery and evaluation?
- How did you evaluate options at each stage?
- How long did each step take?
- Who was involved in decisions along the way?
- What role did each person play in moving forward or delaying the process?
- What were the key factors in making a decision?
- What was the critical element for the purchasing decision?



What do we do with the buyer journey?

At the most basic level, we want to model the buying process so that we can:

1. **Create content appropriate for each buyer journey stage** or buyer behavior to be deployed in blogs, website messaging, social media updates and as premium content for demand generation campaigns

2. **Update lead status (sales readiness)** as they move through the buyer journey (lead scoring) and trigger notifications to both Sales and Marketing to take action

3. **Create and deploy responsive content** that adapts to the buyer persona and buyer journey, i.e., what is displayed for you depends on who you are and what interactions you've already had with our online presence

There is a danger to becoming too analytical with buyer information, however. As **Tony Zambito** puts it, "…once he or she makes that transition into 'lead' behavior, it's important to figure out what his or her goals are. What does it mean to us when buyers are not ready to buy? It's more about getting in their head and the choices being made. There are so many choices they're making along the way, so it's important to understand those choices and their values. What counts is underneath the buyer journey framework and the path to purchase." The insights we derive from buyer behavior should be triggering conversations between Sales and Marketing, which then lead to action.

Salespeople today need to look at things more like van Gogh did and not like the realist artists of his day. They need to be open to the idea that not everything is as it appears, not everything can be taken at surface value, and not everything can just be obvious or fully available to you. You must look deeper to really find out what's happening. One of the great things about developing an inbound lead generation strategy is that this can be a window into the soul of your prospect. Now salespeople, if they are smart and if they are creative, can learn more about the people who are learning about them and thereby defuse some of the skepticism and some of the concern we all know exists."

– Frank Belzer

VISUALIZING THE BUYER
During the Journey

According to InsideSales.com, the early bird gets the worm. More than 50% of sales go to the first person to contact the prospect. If you follow up with Web leads within 5 minutes, you're 9 times more likely to convert them [to a customer]. I'll amend that a bit. It's the first sales rep that contacts the buyer at exactly the right time that wins most of the time. If a prospect submits a form or sends an email requesting a consultation, that's a no-brainer. Call him immediately. What if potential buyers don't reach out directly? This is a job for marketing automation and sales insight.

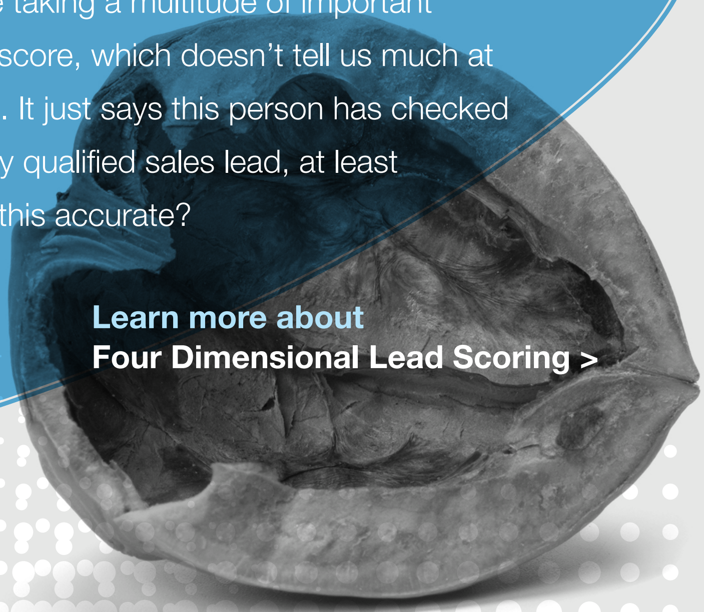
> "We've audited over 14,000 companies, and we've found that the average company takes 46 hours and 37 minutes to respond to a lead for the first time. Also important to note, sales reps are only attempting contact 1.4 times before giving up."
> **– Ken Krogue, InsideSales.com**

Most people associate marketing automation with automating the process of marketing by email or other forms of communication, but its real power is in sales enablement. **Lead scoring** allows you to automatically assign a cumulative value to each transaction or behavior by a buyer during the journey. For example, the first time a visitor converts on a lead generation form, she becomes a lead you can continue to track, and she receives a positive score for the transaction. Subsequent visits, email interactions and form conversions accumulate positive or negative scores according to your schema for rewarding or penalizing those behaviors.

You can set thresholds for lead scoring that indicate buyer readiness and automatically send a notice to the appropriate sales rep. By drilling down on a lead's specific behaviors via the marketing automation system, the sales rep can gain insight into the buyer's interests and intentions and establish both relevance and fit prior to the first sales call. Working together, Sales and Marketing can establish working criteria for lead scoring and sales readiness and notification using marketing automation tools. This enables both timely response and a more effective first impression once the connection is made.

The Problem With Linear Lead Scoring:

In a nutshell, the problem is that we are taking a multitude of important factors and combining them into one score, which doesn't tell us much at all about the person who is our lead. It just says this person has checked enough "boxes" to become a truly qualified sales lead, at least in our scheme of things. But is this accurate? Is the lead really qualified?



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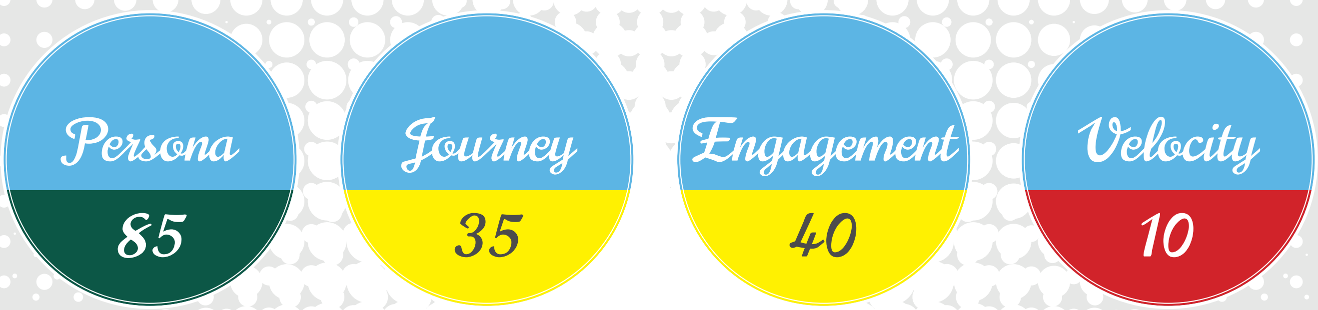


INFLUENCING
The Buyer Journey

Even if we attract qualified sales leads through inbound marketing, if we stand by and wait for our leads to become sales-ready at their own pace and without any guidance, we will probably lose them all. **Some telling statistics from Technically Marketing:**

- **50% of leads are qualified** but not yet ready to buy
- Companies that excel at lead nurturing **generate 50% more sales ready leads at 33% lower cost**
- Nurtured leads **make 47% larger purchases** than non-nurtured leads

Lead nurturing...

is a process designed to help the buyer achieve her goals during the buyer journey. Most often we think of drip email campaigns, triggered by an initial lead conversion offer that provide additional helpful, relevant resources. The most effective campaigns are spaced evenly and unobtrusively over the average sales cycle, for example, once a week over 6 weeks for a 6-week sales cycle. Each ensuing email in the campaign adds new information that helps the buyer answer her questions and serves to move her closer to a purchase decision – in effect, moving her along the buyer journey. Best practices include personalizing communications via marketing automation and tailoring content based on buyer behaviors rather than assumed content progression.

In reality, the B2B buyer journey can be complex and involve multiple personas with different roles. Each buyer journey can change with new conditions and demands. Lead nurturing strategies need to be flexible enough to accommodate changing conditions and provide timely, relevant content and conversion opportunities for sales when they are appropriate. Simple content mapping and editorial calendars may not be enough to be responsive to the dynamic B2B buyer journey.

Complex buyer journeys call for new strategies to nurture leads

Four dimensional content mapping is one possibility.

Learn more >

The bottom line is B2B sales reps need to be ready to respond quickly (at exactly the right time) with insights from lead intelligence that stimulate purchase decisions based on relevance and fit. Marketing needs to collaborate with Sales to design and utilize an effective lead scoring and lead nurturing process to enable the Sales process.

Working Together

THE NEW ROLES OF SALES & MARKETING

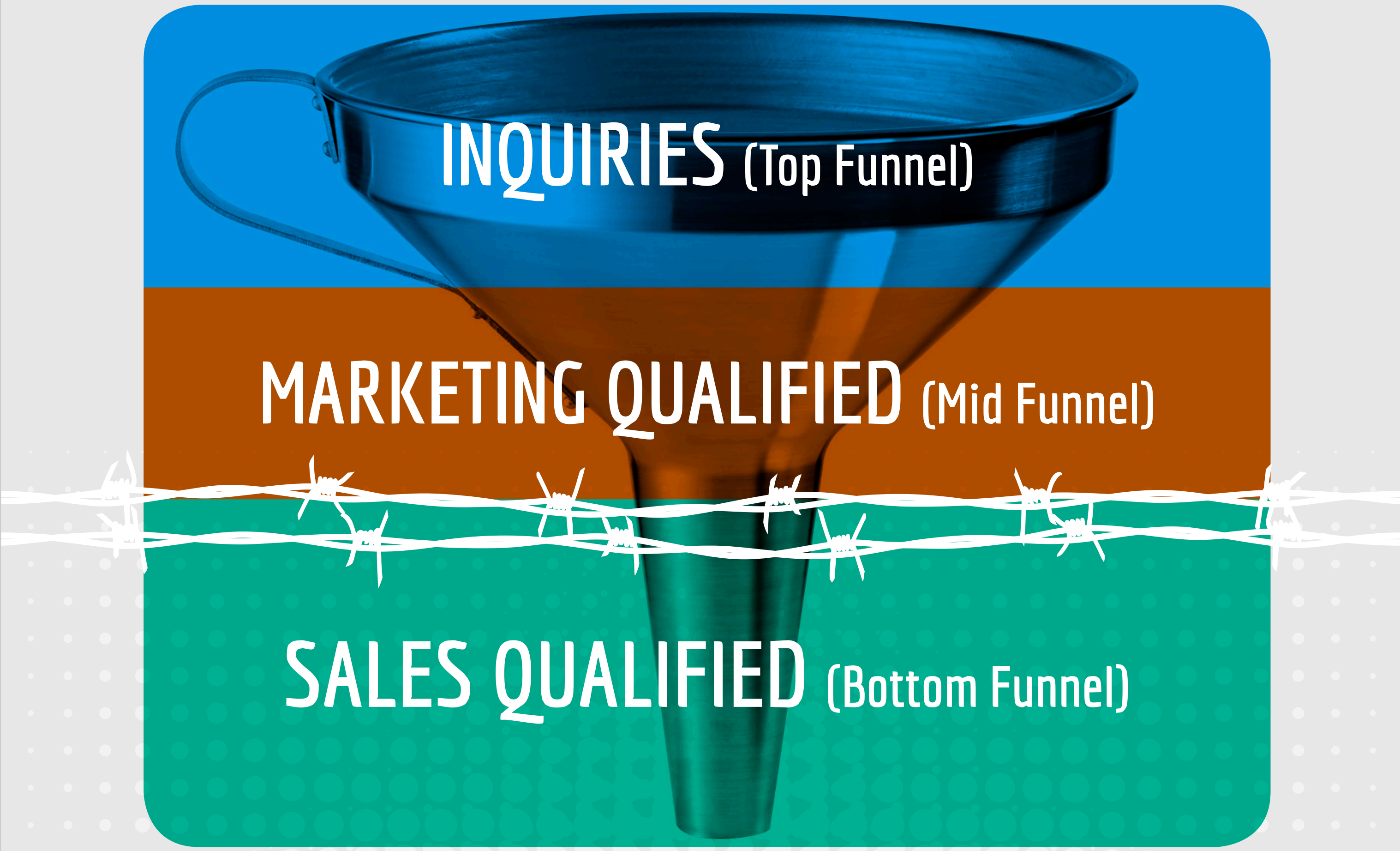
Many of us are still getting used to the idea that Marketing plays a bigger role in Sales now than ever before. If you think about the new customer-empowered paradigm, it makes sense. Customers are demanding information that they can evaluate without interruption from Sales – at least until they are ready to be contacted. This is a role Marketing fills through inbound marketing, demand generation, lead nurturing and marketing automation.

“**Looking at more data surrounding inbound leads,** our cost per new lead generated is $7.00. For our other paid/advertising leads, we pay an average of $25.00 per lead. Not only are inbound leads much cheaper, but we close those leads at a rate 3x higher.”

– Mark Roberge

Inbound marketing is good news for Sales, since it frees up the sales rep from having to do prospecting, and it should (in principle) deliver a higher proportion of qualified leads that are ready to buy. But there is still a divide, or a wall, between Marketing and Sales.

The graphic below illustrates the current, generally accepted, sales and marketing funnel, with the roles of Marketing and Sales viewed as a linear process with a distinct boundary at the point where Marketing hands off leads to Sales. In this process, it's Marketing's responsibility to develop buyer personas and journey, create appropriate content, capture and nurture leads and "throw them over the wall" to Sales when they are ready to be contacted. Sales is responsible for qualifying and closing or returning unqualified or premature leads back to the funnel for more nurturing.



The problem with this approach is Sales doesn't necessarily agree with the criteria set by Marketing for sales readiness and often has no way to view the Buyer Journey in context.

Leads that come over the "wall" need to be re-evaluated by Sales, and many will be considered unqualified. This leads to finger pointing by both Marketing and Sales. Marketing accuses Sales of not pursuing valuable leads, and Sales considers Marketing's efforts a waste of time. This is not a healthy scenario for any organization, but its prevalence is well known throughout the B2B world.

"**Sales and Marketing are on the same team.** Okay, let's be honest: At most companies, it doesn't actually feel that way. According to a Corporate Executive Board study, **87% of the terms Sales and Marketing use to describe each other are negative.** Sales calls Marketing arts-and-crafts and irrelevant, and Marketing calls Sales simple-minded and incompetent."

– Ellie Mirman

What could we be doing differently?

Sales and Marketing alignment (a.k.a. **"SMarketing"**) is another BIG topic that deserves its own eBook (and several have been published – see Resources Section). The general idea is that a process and rules, even a service level agreement (SLA), need to be negotiated between Sales and Marketing in which they agree upon the following:

TERMINOLOGY

customers have an innate fear of making a decision despite exhaustive research and professional consulting

PROCESS

how will leads be handled, and by whom, at each stage of the sales cycle (and to what degree is this process automated, and how)

SERVICE LEVELS

for example, how many of each (leads, MQLs, SQLs) does Marketing need to deliver each month, and how many touch points (calls, emails) does Sales need to perform each month (and how quickly)

TRANSPARENCY

both Marketing and Sales are responsible for reporting on progress toward reaching their goals on a daily, monthly, quarterly and annual basis

While most thought leaders in Sales and Marketing are now recommending this top-down approach, it has some significant drawbacks. It doesn't solve the "we-they" divide between Sales and Marketing. It only forces both sides to agree upon a minimum set of acceptance criteria and fundamental rules of engagement. This approach will likely result in increased productivity, but it doesn't necessarily foster collaboration and unified purpose between Sales and Marketing.

A better approach may be to merge the roles and create a new hybrid Sales and Marketing Team with staff from the two disciplines working together, or even a team of sales and marketing hybrids, individuals who have (or learn) the skills and experience to fill both roles. In either scenario, there is no physical divide and no clear separation of responsibilities, only a unified team and process for creating and closing sales opportunities.

Redefining the role of the B2B sales rep involves more than collaboration with the Marketing Team, however. **John Jantsch** describes new skills and responsibilities that enable the successful inbound sales rep:

PERCEPTIVE LISTENING

customers have an innate fear of making a decision despite exhaustive research and professional consulting

INBOUND ATTRACTING

develop your own thought leadership through blogging and other content creation

AUTHORITY MAKING

stop selling with brand and product, start selling with knowledge and trust building

PROBLEM BUILDING

challenging buyers to explore new ideas and question their assumptions

CHANNEL GUIDING

get involved in lead nurturing strategies and communications, personalize them and seek insights from results

"**The cornerstone of the shift I'm suggesting** is the need for individual sales professionals to create content and build expertise that attracts opportunities through a more personalized approach that is over and above, but hopefully in chorus with, the efforts of the marketing department."

– John Jantsch

Sales and marketing alignment,

or “smarketing” should be high on any company’s list of priorities. “According to Peppers & Roberts Group, 81% of companies with strong customer experience competencies outperform their competition. CEOs that build their organization’s processes, technology and culture around the experience buyers want and value outperform their peers. That starts by aligning sales and marketing, not by resolving differences between them, but by resolving differences between them and the buyer.” **- Forbes**

According to the Aberdeen Group,

in 2010, companies with poor marketing and sales alignment **saw a 7% decrease** in annual revenue, but companies with good alignment **saw a 20% increase.**

Learn more >

Revisiting the sales funnel,

at the top of the funnel "SMarketing" reps work together on Buyer Personas and Journey based on their experience and with the help of the Content Team that interviews customers and other customer-facing stakeholders. They develop a joint engagement plan to attract and nurture leads. They share marketing automation and CRM tools to monitor the progress of demand generation campaigns and to watch the progress of high value prospects move through the funnel. They use additional tools (see Resources Section) to discover meaningful and timely insights that support the Challenger Sale approach.

What advantages...

will this new SMarketing Department have over traditional split Sales and Marketing departments?

SHARED GOALS, strategies and incentives for success

FASTER, MORE FLEXIBLE RESPONSE TO OPPORTUNITIES as soon as they develop

MORE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE to individual buyer needs at the right stages

IDENTIFY BUYER PATTERNS SOONER in the sales cycle and accelerate sales

FEWER LOST LEADS AND OPPORTUNITIES, increased productivity

What challenges...

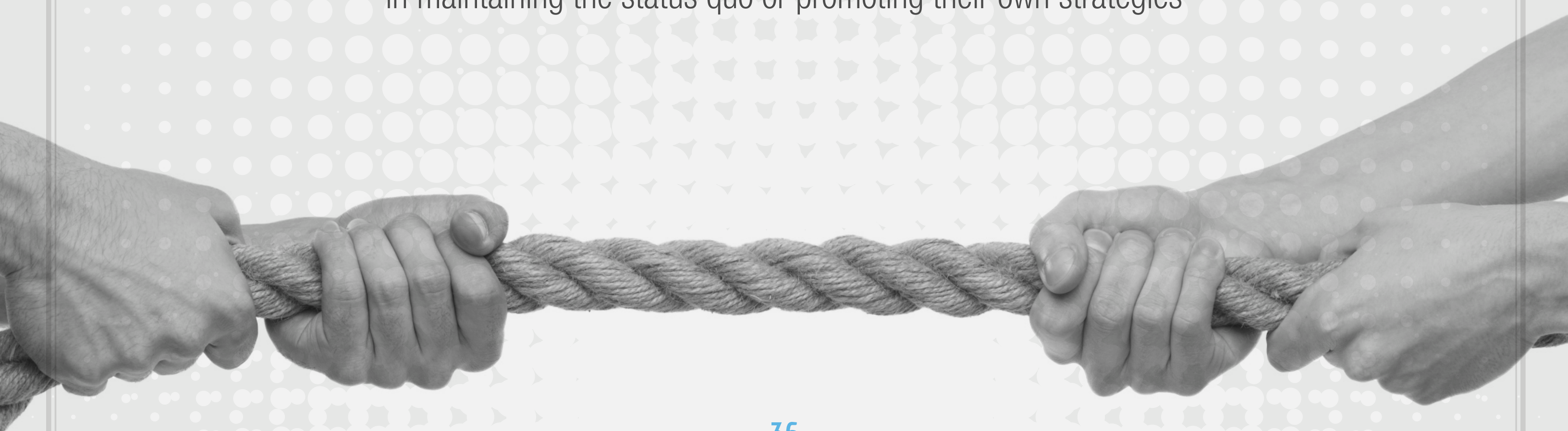
will team leaders and architects face?

RESISTANCE BY THE MANAGEMENT TEAM to try something radically different

RESISTANCE BY DIE-HARD SALES REPS AND MARKETERS who are entrenched in the old ways

SKEPTICISM BY THE REST OF THE ORGANIZATION (if it ain't broke, don't fix it)

SKEPTICISM (AND ATTACK) by outside or inside consultants who have a stake in maintaining the status quo or promoting their own strategies



Human Touch,

THE IRREPLACEABLE SALES ELEMENT

By truly aligning Sales and Marketing, i.e. merging them, we can see immediate benefits, but individual challenges remain. Members of the team are still faced with buyers who don't think they need assistance and a buying process filled with obstacles. Even if we greatly assist the B2B sales process through effective inbound marketing and lead nurturing, the crucial step is still the direct, personal relationship established between the sales rep and the buyer.

With marketing automation guiding the way we market to, qualify, and convert leads,

it's becoming all the more important that customers receive the personal touch needed at the right time in the buying cycle. We know that in a complex sale, deals will not be closed by email alone; prospects will eventually speak with someone directly. In an attempt to ensure that all leads receive a live touch, too many AQLs [Automation Qualified Leads] are passed directly to sales, where they end up receiving ill-timed attention or sitting in large, difficult to manage silos of undeveloped leads.

– Winn Technology Group

If you consider personal touch the most important Sales aspect of the new SMarketing process, many of the classic approaches to sales calls still apply (with a couple of new twists and tools), for example:

The classic line *"always be closing"* from Glengarry Glen Ross no longer applies.

The new sales mantra is *"always be helping."*

Sales should always be closing. I don't think that it's entirely true. Part of it is. I always say, don't always be closing, always be helping. And that tends to accelerate things much better. One of the first things you need to do is build trust with your prospects. So you can really get down to what's bothering them and really work side by side with them to help. That's what inbound really allows you to do."

– Mark Roberge

A key advantage of inbound marketing and lead nurturing

is that your leads are already familiar with your products and services and, most likely, they know about your value proposition, positioning, pricing and everything else they need to know to do business with you. Your job is to confirm that information, further qualify them and explore ways to work together. Your approach should be to treat the call as a conversation, not a sales call.

When I'm teaching a sales class, I often put the group through an exercise that I call three conversations. Here's how it works.

The first conversation is the one that prospects are having in their own head. It's happening before you ever speak to them, and, in the world of inbound marketing, it's happening while they're in the privacy of their own home or office, doing research and reading your content. This is the conversation where they presume things, assume things and draw conclusions based entirely on what they're reading and the information provided in the content that's available to them at the time.

The second conversation happens with you, the salesperson. This is when they make human contact and start to have a meaningful dialogue about how what they're interested in may actually help them fix a problem or reach a goal they have set for themselves.

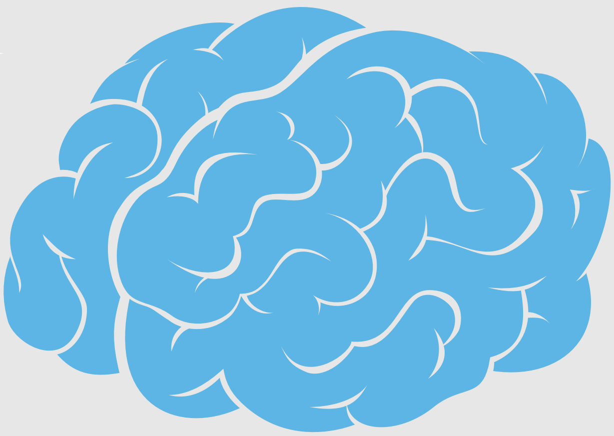
The third conversation is perhaps the most interesting one— it's the one the prospects have when you are done talking. It's the one they have with themselves when they are piecing the two chunks of information together, conversation one meets conversation two.

So the question for modern salespeople is this: What do I want my prospects thinking after conversation number two? What do I want conversation number three to sound like? What do I want the outcome of conversation number two to be?

– Frank Belzer

A good sales conversation surfaces the buyer's challenges and intentions compels them to think about possible solutions—ideally, your possible solutions. Without being too pushy, the experienced sales rep becomes a trusted advisor by asking questions.

> "**Consultative selling requires that salespeople ask an awful lot of questions.** Good, tough, timely questions. They might even know the answers to some of the questions they need to ask. Some salespeople worry that by asking all of these questions they will appear dumb. The reality is that the better they listen, the more questions they ask, and the better the questions are, the smarter they will appear."
>
> **– Dave Kurlan**



SMART

Information alone is not the objective, however. At the end of the conversation there should be mutual agreement on where we've been and where we're going.

"**One of the biggest problems most salespeople talk to me about has to do with opportunities that are stalled and with opportunities that refuse to get back to them after they've gotten what they need.** Those salespeople, in my experience, are usually failing to set the proper expectations. That is because setting expectations with a prospect, especially an inbound marketing prospect, can be difficult because most salespeople now feel like they are heading down that road of sounding too pushy and asking for a premature commitment. But there are many nice ways to do it. One of the things I recommend salespeople do is to start telling the prospect how things usually happen. So it might sound something like this: 'Usually at this point, I get questions related to ____ and ____.' Or I tell them to bring up time lines. For example, 'From today to the time we will decide if we are moving forward usually takes ______. Does that sound like we're on the same page, or are you in a different place than most of the people I work with?"

– Frank Belzer

At the end of the sales conversation, both the sales rep and the buyer should be satisfied that they have accomplished their goals for the call. The sales rep is responsible for guiding the call, setting expectations, summarizing main points and gaining permission to take next steps. By the end of the call, both parties should feel a sense of trust and desire to move forward – or to move on in other directions. To achieve that end, the sales rep must be aware of the buyer's challenges early on in the sales process through close cooperation with Marketing. The buyer must be informed with lead nurturing content and should be ready to commit to next steps following a successful call. **This means that the modern "sales call" is no longer about "sales." It's about solutions and relationships.**

SUMMARY

I've covered a lot of ground in this eBook, and I'm sure I haven't done the topic justice. I'm hoping your takeaway is the status quo in B2B selling isn't working, and we need to seek better ways. My view is that we need to transform the sales process as a whole and merge it into marketing. That allows us to engage buyers throughout the buyer journey and help them reach their goals. By merging sales and marketing, we get the best of both worlds – great content to stimulate action and great conversation to turn action into desired outcomes. We also need to adjust our thinking about traditional consultative selling. Our buyers are already aware, but they need to be surprised. We need to find their emotional tipping points and help them move to the other side. By doing so, we not only create happy customers, but we also create great business partners for ourselves.

RESOURCES

Inbound Marketing

Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah – Inbound Marketing

HubSpot – 2013 State of Inbound Marketing Report

HubSpot – The Ultimate Resource for 2013 Inbound Marketing Stats and Charts

Marketo – The CMO Guide to Inbound Marketing

Marketo – B2B Inbound Marketing Success Kit

Kuno Creative – Inbound Marketing Resources

New Sales Paradigms

Frank Belzer – Sales Shift

Jill Konrath – Snap Selling

Dave Kurlan – Baseline Selling

Perry Marshall – 80/20 Sales and Marketing

Brian Carroll – Lead Generation for the Complex Sale

Aaron Ross – Predictable Revenue

Robert Miller – The New Strategic Selling

Matthew Dixon – The Challenger Sale

Tools & Forums

G2 Crowd – Marketing and CRM Software Reviews

LinkedIn – Inbound Marketers – For Marketing Professionals

LinkedIn – Friends of the Funnel

LinkedIn – B2B Lead Roundtable

Quora – What advice should an introvert new to B2B sales keep in mind?

Quora – What are the most effective strategies when it comes to both selling and prospecting via email in B2B sales?

Quora – How can I learn enterprise/B2B sales?

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