



SELLING Has Always Been Social

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

Is it just me, or does anyone else have some confusion or even a problem with the buzz words “social selling?” A Google search revealed 505,000 hits with this phrase, and every time I hear it, my literal brain retreats to this question: When did people stop buying from other people?

Selling has always been social. People, to the best of my knowledge, do not buy from robots. There may be some people who act as robots, but that is a conversation for another time.

The most common definition of social selling is when salespeople use social media to interact directly with their prospects. Herein lies the problem. Social selling is not selling at all but, rather, marketing.

Back in the late 1800s, stores like Montgomery Ward and Sears used a prominent social channel, the U.S. Postal System, by sending mail order catalogs to market their items from clothing to even pre-fabricated homes. Through those social marketing efforts, they made sales.

No one can sell anything to anybody without first having someone who is interested in the product or service. This interested person is called a prospect. To maximize the salesperson’s time, prospects can be better qualified. For years, the following four criteria defined prospect qualifying: 1) want or need, 2) decision making ability, 3) allocated budget, and 4) urgency to make a decision.

Through my own experiences, there has surfaced a fifth criterion: commitment to take action. If the qualified sales lead lacks the commitment to take action, then it truly does not matter how much effort the salesperson initiates. The sale will still linger in the “La La Land” of no decision.

So why the huge jump on the social selling bandwagon? I think the answer is relatively simple. Salespeople do not want to be considered marketers. Marketing is for that other internal department or some contracted outside marketing company.

SALESPEOPLE BELIEVE MARKETING IS BENEATH THEM

For years, sales training firms and sales training consultants focused their energies on the big guns. These firms, like IBM, had hundreds of salespeople. They also had their own separate marketing departments or high-priced advertising firms to bring in the sales leads.

Today, the marketplace landscape has dramatically changed. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, firms with over 99 employees represent only .4 percent of all U.S. businesses. The majority of firms have under 100 employees with 78.2 percent considered to be non-employed, meaning single office/home office or no employees.

These small businesses do not have the resources for hiring expensive advertising firms or separate marketing departments. Marketing is and has always been part of the sales process. To increase sales for these sales training to marketing firms, owners are turning their attention to the other 99.6 percent of all businesses through the buzzwords social selling. But reviewing the basic three phase sales process that every business has shows selling is always social.

FIRST PHASE: MARKETING

Regardless of business or industry, unless someone (a potential buyer) knows about you, your company, or your solution, the fact is you will remain pocket poor. The purpose of marketing is to build a solid relationship by attracting attention. From this purpose, there are

also two goals to be achieved: 1) make a friend and 2) be asked back for that initial face to face meeting or have the person visit your website to walk into your brick and mortar store.

The behaviors for this first phase of marketing can all be considered “social” from the smile and handshake to positive body language to even asking to proceed. By these social

interactions, a solid relationship begins to be constructed. This relationship may take months to even years to be fully developed or nurtured.

SECOND PHASE: SELLING

If the marketing phase is completed successfully, then it is time to engage in actual selling. The purpose of this phase is to successfully earn a client

with the goal of a signed contract (sale) or commitment at the end of the meeting(s). Within the selling phase, there are specific steps to be undertaken. Each step must be completed before the next step because a missed stage may keep the salesperson pocket poor.

The first step is to uncover specific gains or pains for the qualified prospect. What pains is the client suffering, and what gains would the client like to have happen? After discovering as many gains and pains as possible, the salesperson may have to schedule a second meeting to adequately prepare to present the case to take action. This presentation revolves around the whys and why nots if action (agreeing to the salesperson's solution) is taken or not taken.

During this interaction, the salesperson continues to work to earn the sale by answering all questions and, when appropriate, asking questions. Finally, the seller, after the selling presentation is completed, may simply say, "Where do we go from here?"

Upon agreement to the solution, the salesperson now must make sure the sale is delivered on time and with any other stipulations. Unfortunately, some salespeople skip this step and then cannot ask for a referral.

Social behaviors continue within this second phase. However, this is where the emphasis is on more technical sales skills such as asking open-ended questions to overcoming objections.

THIRD PHASE: KEEPING

For many in business, this third phase is not clearly articulated or may be included within the selling phase. But ignoring this final phase may present lost opportunities for increased business.

After the sale is delivered with 100 percent satisfaction (on time, exactly what was ordered, etc.) to the newly-earned client, the salesperson returns to just follow-up. The purpose of this phase is threefold: 1) facilitate loyal customers via top of mind awareness, 2) obtain referrals, and 3) create sustainable business growth.

Once again, the salesperson ensures the newly-purchased solution is working well. Then he or she has the ability to ask for a referral. Depending upon the size of the business, eventually



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earning three referrals over a course of time should not be that difficult.

During this third phase, the salesperson regularly reaches out to communicate with the client. These communications can range from happy birthday cards to sending relevant articles. Here is where a customer relationship management (CRM) system may help to keep track of all interactions. These interactions, however, should never include bland "what's going on?" types of questions.

MARKETING EXPANDS

With the Internet, marketing has indeed expanded. Through technology, people can communicate almost instantaneously via instant messaging and texting with others.

This expansion has not only helped small businesses to reach more of their ideal customers, it has created more educated buyers. Many of today's buyers have already entered into the decision-making process before having any conversation with any salesperson. In fact, buying research suggests 40 to 60 percent of the buying decision has already been made by the customer before making any outreach.

Forward thinking salespeople use

an education-based marketing approach to reach customers through the sharing of information. Much of this information is found within content marketing. Blogs to article postings such as in LinkedIn Pulse all serve to educate while attracting positive attention.

Writing is now probably the most valuable sales skill. I recently participated in a Google Hangout sponsored by Pipeliner CRM with the focus on writing as a sales skill. More and more other sales trainers to small business experts are recognizing the power of the pen or keyboard to attract attention.

Unfortunately, many in sales, including small business owners, believe marketing is selling. Their social marketing activities are a stream of sales pitches of "buy this" or "check this out."

Today's buyers are seeking innovative solutions to solve their pains and to propel their gains. With the majority of businesses having fewer than 20 employees, their budgets cannot support high-priced solutions. Those salespeople who understand business operations, including cash flow, can better tailor their solutions to meet the needs of these small businesses.

Marketing has always been essential to business growth. Peter Drucker recognized that "business has only two functions: marketing and innovation." He further noted that outside of marketing and innovation, all other activities are costs. Drucker also believed that "the aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself."

Selling is the end result of effective marketing. Social marketing has returned marketing to the front of the sales process, and, in Drucker's own words, "The aim of marketing is to make selling unnecessary." **N**

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