

EXPERIFY

The Future of Sales: Supporting a Fairer, More Sustainable and Prosperous World



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Have you ever been to a crowded buffet at an all inclusive hotel and been overwhelmed by the experience?

Between the people plunging in and out of lines and the drastic number of low quality options, the meal just doesn't live up to what you expected.

Today's sales market really isn't much different. The ocean of emails and avalanche of phone calls - not to mention the junk mail - all contribute to an impersonal and overwhelming sales experience.

Sales tools and automation capabilities are more advanced than ever before.

And with advancement, comes confusion. The **graphic** below from Smart Selling Tools illustrate how insanely crowded the SaaS sales and marketing landscape has become.



We need a new approach to sales

To mitigate the risk of failed purchases, companies have increased the number of stakeholders involved in their buying decisions. The diversity of responsibilities, points of view and authority among these individual buyers creates conflict and buying dysfunction.

CEB conducted a survey of 3,000 customer stakeholders involved in B2B purchases. They found that going from one to two decision makers dramatically drops purchase likelihood from 81 to 55 percent. When six people are involved, purchase likelihood drops even lower. Yet, eliminating certain decision makers from the buying process puts a successful implementation at risk. All the stakeholders must buy into the new solution along the way.

In this multi-stakeholder buying environment, often the only things a buying committee can agree on are to minimize risk, avoid disruption of the status quo, and save money. Consequently, suppliers often find themselves competing on price. This is true even for suppliers who've clearly communicated the premium value proposition of their solutions. "Good enough" drives margins down.

Procurement of the future will not be about purchasing. It will be about the management areas of supply, risk, and brand. Our world is not stable. We are living in an era of increased technological disruption.

Sales organizations need to understand this to become excellent in helping companies to invest and buy.

Going forward we need a sales philosophy that supports a fairer, more sustainable and prosperous world. Far from the intrusive sales cultures of the 20th century, the 21st century offers other ways of engaging and working collaboratively with customers, suppliers and each other.

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The short term thinking needs to be evaluated and challenged. Companies need to be more long-term focused in their planning and strategies because the long-term approach is far more sustainable and profitable.

Account-based sales becomes the norm

Aligning sales, marketing and account management is no longer recommended, but demanded. Organizations must ensure that teams are in sync with their counterparts.

During the last couple of years, account-based marketing has been in the spotlight. And now, it's time for account-based sales to enter the center stage. With modern technology, identifying highly defined ideal customer profiles is easier than ever before and sales leaders should make the most out of this.

Account-based selling is a multi-touch, multi-channel strategy coordinated across the entire company to pursue a target number of high-value accounts.

We will now see sales and marketing teams start approaching these most wanted accounts in creative ways. Emails and ads are more personalized, and more scalable content creation processes allow salespeople to target new accounts with value-added content from day one.

The winning companies will also put simplicity at the heart of their sales and marketing processes. They will focus on systematically executing well defined sales playbooks with a deep understanding of the market and the customer at its core.

What CEB think about future sales trends

CEB, part of Gartner, helps customers grow by harnessing their untapped potential and channeling it toward high-impact, proven results. In the thousands of conversations that CEB had with leading sales teams around the world last year, certain themes and topics emerged again and again. [These five trends sum up the major ones.](#)

Trend 1

Renewed emphasis on cross-selling and account growth: By far, the issue that heads of sales bring up most frequently is sluggish growth from their existing customer base. Despite having made significant increases in products and service offerings, only 28% of surveyed sales leaders report that their existing account channels regularly meet growth targets.

There are a number of factors putting added pressure on companies to seek more revenue from existing customers:

M&A activity and the expansion of solution sales are increasing cross-sell demands.

The shift towards added services and digitization is increasing focus on recurring revenue streams.

Preliminary CEB research on the topic suggests that group-to-group buying and selling dynamics are changing the classic rules of account management. It's likely that the most effective sales teams have long since abandoned the traditional relationship-building practices that yield broad understanding of customer needs in lieu of account team structures and incentives that promote a different approach towards existing customers.

Some of the best sales organizations spend time finding critical information about the customer's business and use that to create more meaningful and targeted commercial opportunities that actually help customers accomplish something important to them.

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Trend 2

More disciplined spending on sales enablement: Sales organizations spend an average of \$4,797 per quota carrying rep on enablement technology annually, according to CEB analysis. And despite the promise of many vendors in the rapidly expanding sales enablement technology landscape, firms still struggle to see good returns on these investments.

In fact, the very tools sales organizations give sellers to help them cope with the increasing complexity of the sales job and make them more productive, actually slow them down. This added burden on the seller is costly, leading to decreases in conversion rates of as much as 12%.

In a world where sellers now have to process more information, involve and align more internal stakeholders, and engage with more technology every day, the most successful teams will be the ones that are able to rationalize their investments in technology and target support to the moments when sellers need it most.

Trend 3

Rethinking “customer centricity”: Most companies’ commercial teams devote significant resources to improving the customer experience and making it as easy as possible for customers to buy their products. Which is all well and good, but where these teams really need to focus is on the aspects of the purchasing process that customers struggle with before they start engaging with a particular supplier.

Customers often find it hard to progress through the purchase process due to the sheer number of decisions they must make along the way – most of which are independent of their choice of supplier. A supplier who can help customers overcome these roadblocks, however, is better positioned to win when it does come time to choose.

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To do this, commercial teams need a new approach to customer understanding. Companies will likely trade in traditional “voice of customer” methods, such as loyalty surveys, in favor of newer tactics such as developing “mental models” to understand customers’ business goals, and mapping out buying group dynamics to understand points of agreement and disagreement.

Whether employing newer tactics or repurposing old ones, the secret to success lies in looking past the traditional model of capturing how customers think about “us” as suppliers, and instead capturing how customers view themselves and their challenges.

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Trend 4

Marketing’s role expands across the entire funnel: For a couple of years now, the most successful commercial organizations have been aligning sales and marketing efforts ever more closely. And in 2017 Marketing’s role will continue to expand beyond traditional early funnel activities to cover the end-to-end commercial process for a number of reasons.

First, progressive B2B marketing companies now manage a portfolio of marketing technology that deal with all aspects of the commercial process, from the standard content production systems to newer data analytics, content delivery, and account-based marketing software.

Second, marketing teams are doubling efforts to develop customer buying journey maps so they can provide better content to support sellers, and that improves the entire purchase experience for customers.

Finally, more and more firms have set-up sales development representative (SDR) roles that report directly into the marketing function. In many companies this emerging role focuses on improving lead qualification and sales productivity. 2017 will almost certainly see more organizations follow suit.

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Trend 5:

Simplification at the heart of sales strategy: Making a business purchase has become far more complex for both buyers and sellers, and the most successful commercial teams will be those that are able to simplify internally while at the same time simplifying their customers' world.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that the best sales teams must now deal with customers who are empowered with information and options. These customers are in fact overwhelmed with the information and options available to them. In this world of "more," suppliers that bring simplicity to an otherwise complex process by guiding customers through the purchase can reap enormous commercial benefits.

On top of that, those firms that deliberately simplify the seller experience – such as by streamlining workflows and rationalizing sales support – will see big commercial benefits.

Summing up

It's clear that sales and marketing organization need to step up their game to continue to be relevant in a globalized and disruptive world. At its core lies a strong focus on customer centricity and sales process simplification.

Customers are risk aware, even their early stage, short-listing is dominated by the goal of avoiding poor decision versus optimizing for the best choice. In this environment the company that wins is the best at mitigating risk, building a wide spread support inside the buyer's organization and systematically helps the customer to buy and implement solutions.

Simply making it easy to buy.