

Sales 2.0: Are You Ready for the Revolution?

Stand aside Solution Selling – Sales 2.0 is revolutionizing sales! Since the mid-80's solution selling has been the mantra to redefine business-to-business sales. It was a seismic shift from objection handling and always-be-closing tactics to a process of developing meaningful, win-win customer relationships. Solution selling offered a methodology for sales people to move beyond pushy tactics to consultative strategies.

That being said, solution selling is showing its age. The web has changed the game. We have access to more information than ever before, and we take it for granted. It's amazing how quickly we have adopted the power of the internet. Look back to pre-2000 – highspeed internet was virtually unheard of. A site like YouTube could not exist without broadband. With this power comes high expectations. Users are intolerant of poorly designed web sites, and have high standards for how they want to interact with a company online.

The sales and marketing tactics of the 80's and 90's are quickly becoming irrelevant. Why? Access to information allows customers to make well-educated buying decisions. Quite often the buyer is better informed than the sales person. With the power of Google, they can get as many proof statements as they require. This is not an article about why you should have a web site. Rather it is a bigger question of what everyone else is saying about your industry, your company and your services. This chatter is a road map for customers to find and evaluate your business. By using tools designed for Web 2.0 you can develop a customer experience that builds rapport, and allows them to engage your sales person when the time is right.

As customers have more control over the buying process their expectations of how they want to work with a vendor is elevated too. This is the crux of a Sales 2.0 approach. Solution selling is a methodology to help a sales person understand their customers and present their product or service in a consultative manner. Sales 2.0 goes a step further. It is an organizational methodology that tailors sales and marketing to fit the customers' buying behaviours. Rather than putting the sales person as the center point of a sales process, it suggests that the sales person is an integral part of a larger customer buying process.

If Sales 2.0 is about connecting and engaging to the customers' buying behaviours, then we must take a macro view of the sales process. To be successful you have to be very clear about your target market and brand position:

1. Who are your customers, and why do they buy from you?
2. How do your customers go to market and shop for solutions?
3. What triggers them to shop?
4. What are their options?

Obviously these questions cannot be answered by the front-line sales people. It is a broader organizational question that must be tackled at each and every customer touch point.

Just as companies are using web-tools to make more informed purchasing decisions, Sales 2.0 companies are using these same tools to engage their market. At every touch

point web-tools can be used to increase your reach, stickiness, efficiency and customer experience. When put together they make sales people far more efficient and effective: they can sell more stuff. A buyer that has found your organization on Google is often a far better prospect than a company you just cold called. When someone engages you from your web site they have already initiated a relationship with your firm, formed an opinion and are receptive to entering into a sales dialogue. You face none of the buyer resistance that comes with cold calling.

Web-tools are easiest to connect to awareness campaigns, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. By understanding your customers' buying behaviours you can gain a great deal of efficiencies throughout your sales process. For example, companies are employing tools like WebEx, and other online conferencing tools, to enable the sales force to conduct product demonstrations virtually. This benefits both the sales person and the customer. The customer gains immediate gratification by seeing how this product works and allows them to get educated on its benefits quickly. From a sales perspective it is huge tool. The sales process is dramatically reduced, because you don't have the delays and costs incurred by travel to book a face-to-face meeting.

There truly is no obstacle for a company to improve their sales process. From awareness campaigns to customer service – everything can be made more efficient and effective with modern web-tools. But, and this is a big BUT, you have to have a clear sales process that serves the customer buying experience. You cannot automate a system that does not exist, and you don't want to create a system unless you know it works. So getting into Sales 2.0 is not for the faint of heart. It takes a real commitment to understanding your customers, and to developing sales processes and tools that meet the needs of your customers' buying habits.

Sales 2.0 is not just another buzzword. You are going to hear a lot more about it. Every company is going to face the changing needs of their market. The early adopters of Sales 2.0 will be handsomely rewarded. If you are able to embrace your customers and develop an organization tuned to their needs, you can build a powerful sales engine that outstrips the solution selling approach. Sales 2.0 is the new mantra for business-to-business selling.

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