

## 4 LEADERSHIP TRENDS IN B2B SALES & MARKETING

### OVERVIEW

This paper reveals four key trends in B2B selling based on the influence of the Internet and outlines how those changes will likely impact the way sales executives lead, manage, and drive their teams to achieve.

*Insights and statistics are taken from keynote speakers and panelists who presented to an audience of more than 500 VP- and C-level sales executives on March 7–8, 2011, at the Sales 2.0 Conference in San Francisco.*

Recently, *Selling Power* magazine publisher Gerhard Gschwandtner predicted that, of the 18 million salespeople currently employed in the United States, only 3 million will be needed by the year 2020. The predicted drop in number is by no means evidence that salespeople will be less important to the growth of competitive companies in the future. Rather, it is a reflection of the fundamental way the Internet has altered the sales landscape, particularly in these key areas:

- customer relationships,
- selling methodologies,
- sales-management metrics,
- collaboration with support teams, such as marketing, sales operations, customer service, and inside sales teams.

### KEY TRENDS IN B2B SELLING

#### TREND #1

Today, up to 70 percent of a customer's buying decision is now made based on information he or she finds online well before a salesperson has a chance to get involved.

*Implications:* The salesperson of yesterday is becoming extinct. Good content stimulates discussions, and customers who talk happily about you, your company, or your solution can ultimately help drive revenue. But because conversations are happening on social media, you have even less control than ever over the what, where, when, why, and how customers talk about you.

*Leadership challenge:* Sales leaders need to take steps to

leverage their company's Website to track inbound leads, adopt marketing automation practices, create high-quality content (including video, blogs, Webinars, and podcasts), and establish an active social media presence.

#### TREND #2

Peer-to-peer discussions about brands and products are now the biggest influence of purchasing decisions in a B2B market: A 2010 DemandGen survey showed that up to 59 percent of B2B buyers engaged with peers who addressed their challenge, 48 percent followed industry conversations on the topic, and 37 percent posted questions on social networking sites looking for suggestions.

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*Implications:* Success for sales reps will mean acting more as sales facilitators by talking less

about offerings and instead connecting prospects and clients with their peers online.

*Leadership challenge:* Accepting that customers are in control of both information and sales velocity will be difficult for generations of marketing and sales executives; success will lie in focusing on long-term results, rather than on short-term gains.

In a digital age, every part of the sales and marketing process can be automated.

#### TREND #3

In 2008, 1 out of every 10 people had a smart phone. In 2010, that number moved to 1 in 2. Rates for retaining information shoot from 10 percent if the information is shared verbally to 65 percent if viewed in a video.

*Implications:* Tablet devices – like the iPad – will become vital to field sales reps who must engage with customers and prospects on the fly. Marketing teams will have to become more proficient in producing engaging video content.

*Leadership challenge:* Sales leaders must invest in tools and devices that will help their sales reps become more efficient and effective in their client presentations. Collaboration with marketing leaders will be essential to creating content that attracts and engages prospects.

#### TREND #4

CRM systems are evolving to adopt social networking capabilities and the power of predictive analytics. In much the same way Amazon.com can track a user's digital footprint, salespeople will soon be able to leverage their CRM capabilities and marketing data in order to predict what prospects and customers are likely to buy in the future.

*Implications:* Sales leaders should expect to see 1) a dramatic acceleration of both the buying and sales cycles, 2) the end of selling by instinct, and 3) an increase in sales management based on metrics. Inside sales and "hybrid" sales reps will become vital to the success of the traditional field sales rep and in some cases may replace the field sales role entirely.

*Leadership challenge:* Sales leaders will need to be both agile and strategic in anticipating customer needs and wants, as well as in tracking existing patterns. Processes and technologies used to create and operate online activities will be mission-critical. The sales operations role will become central in improving and enhancing productivity.

#### THE FUTURE OF SALES LEADERSHIP

Last year, research firm CSO Insights released results from an in-depth survey that revealed the following industry trend: While most sales teams failed to make quota in 2009, companies still planned to raise quota levels in 2010. Similarly, *Selling Power* magazine reported in its July/August 2010 cover story that the average tenure of a Sales VP is now between 24 and 32 months. The rapid pace of change and the introduction of real-time information to a business environment means that sales success equals customer success.

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There is a growing awareness among top-level executives that a successful sales culture is one that embraces the way future decision makers are already thinking and operating. They must provide the solutions and devices that younger generations are already comfortable with in order to empower them to sell more effectively and

efficiently; however, sales teams still need the direction and wisdom of midcareer executives who are skilled in the unwavering fundamentals of selling.

In an era when the Internet offers unparalleled potential for creating efficient and effective sales teams, it is unwise for sales leaders to wait to innovate. Active attempts to find best practices through conversations with peers and exposure to the latest solutions are imperative for keeping pace with change.

[Click here to see the date and location of the next Selling Power event.](#)

#### FURTHER READING

[Six Reasons "Salesperson 2.0" Will Grow Your Business](#) [Selling Power blog]

[Social Selling: How to Connect and Engage with the Modern Buyer](#) [free white paper download]

[8 Impressions & Some Practical Tips from the March 2011 Sales 2.0 Conference](#) [Sales 2.0 Conference blog]

[The \(Strange\) Case of the Vanishing Sales VP](#) [Selling Power magazine, July/August 2010 cover story]

#### ABOUT GERHARD GSCHWANDTNER



Gerhard Gschwandtner is Founder and CEO of Selling Power Inc., a multichannel media company that produces *Selling Power* magazine, the number one industry resource for sales management executives. He is also the host of the Selling Power Sales Leadership Conference (held twice a year) and the Sales 2.0 Conference series (also held biannually). Over the course of three decades, he has interviewed some of the most successful leaders and experts in sales, business, sports, entertainment, and politics, including Mary Kay Ash, Marc Benioff, Michael Dell, George Forman, Seth Godin, Jay Leno, Bill Marriott, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, and Colin Powell. He has trained more than 10,000 salespeople around the world and is the author of 17 sales management books. He is a recipient of the Sales & Marketing Executives International Inc. 2010 Ambassador of Free Enterprise Award. He blogs at [blog.sellingpower.com](http://blog.sellingpower.com).

#### ABOUT SELLING POWER

Founded in 1981 by publisher Gerhard Gschwandtner, *Selling Power* magazine is read by more than 420,000 sales leaders. It is available in print by subscription. Today, Personal Selling Power Inc. maintains a book-publishing division; an audio-publishing division; a daily five-minute executive video at [www.sellingpower.com/video](http://www.sellingpower.com/video); and the leading Website in the sales industry, [www.sellingpower.com](http://www.sellingpower.com), with more than 100,000 visitors a month.