



salesengine

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RIP Consultative Selling

A Discussion Document from Sales Engine

> The sales game has moved on from consultative selling

> Introduction

Traditionally great salespeople focused on need creation, using a process that was based heavily on the fact that the salesperson is armed with more information than the prospect and knows what the customer wants before they do. Now the customer has often answered those questions for themselves before even picking up the phone.

Unlimited access to information 24/7, across multiple platforms, has created a customer that is more likely to have done thorough research on their needs, your solution and have explored competitor comparisons before ever engaging with you.

This leaves sales people with less opportunity for direct customer engagement and means that when interactions do occur they need to be thought about and handled differently.

Relinquishing control of so much of the sales cycle presents new challenges that have to be met.

Thriving in this new environment requires radical shifts in thinking about the role your teams are playing in the early phases of the engagement, and how and when they are deploying collateral to help build their case.



> 3 questions

> What's changed?

Increased buyer education means they no longer look to salespeople to explain a solution.

They engage with suppliers further into the sales cycle, so our influence is less.

Far greater use of formalised bidding routes, tender portals and even e-auctions lessens our ability to steer and guide customers.

> What's needed now?

Good salespeople must now have 2 core skills:

- 1) They need to demonstrate they truly understand the issues the customer is tackling
- 2) They need to challenge customer thinking and show new perspectives and ideas

The sales process is no longer about need creation, it's about communicating the insight and innovations that make your solution individual to that customer and different from your competitors.

> Has the collateral kept pace?

A lot of organisations have spotted this changing trend and have spent time working with their sales teams to help them make the shift. Training on new meeting structures, re-evaluating how they question and what they uncover have all helped.

But addressing half the problem is as bad as not addressing it at all; what about the rest of the supporting material? Linear and pre-prepared PowerPoint presentations don't work in this new paradigm that calls for greater flexibility.

Similarly, a standardised proposal that looks 90% the same for all opportunities is also going to let you down.

On a wider bases, Sales teams who have been taught to sell but now need to act as bid managers and compete in a more structured procurement led environment are going to struggle.

Each of these things on their own will damage conversion rates, but all too often businesses have failed to address all three, which will combine to have a massive effect. We're not saying that money invested in sales training is wasted, as good core skills are vital in a sales team, but you won't see true ROI on your training investment if you haven't given the team all of the tools they need to deliver.

> 3 changes that will have a dramatic impact

1> Change the way you present

Get away from pre-prepared slides in a standard format.

Technology now allows you to equip your sales teams with every piece of collateral they could want, but without the need to show it all.

Embrace this to give your team toolkits which they can deliver in collaboration with the customer.

Give them the ability to show insight, understanding and innovation from the first meeting.

2> Don't just have a proposal

We need to demonstrate that we understand their needs as they see them and show how we can use our expertise to provide more than they were expecting.

Your team need access to (and the knowledge of how to deploy) a wider range of documents, from summary of understanding, capability statements and discussion papers, all the way through to final proposals.

These need a new structure to better share the insight they have gained about the customer and focus less on you and your business.

3> Treat bids differently

Salespeople often struggle with the transition to managing a bid process.

The rules of the game in managing a tender are different, and not always clearly understood by all salespeople. It also demands a different skillset, not just from the account manager but also from the wider corporate support.

This requires a blend of people with attention to detail, good authors, proven processes and strong core content.

> Conclusions

We have less customer-facing time now than ever before, which means all of our collateral has to work harder on our behalf.

We have more influencers involved in the process and less access to the top decision makers, so material needs to be pithy but to also be able to work hard for us without a salesperson in the room to explain it or put it in context.

So, if you've invested in your sales team to help them navigate their way through this new paradigm you need to give them access to the right tools, processes and support team to ensure they can put it into practice.

Our role now has to be to help the buyer through their buying cycle, and to ensure that they haven't missed any tricks along the way.

Take a step back from your processes and collateral and evaluate whether they have all been built around this approach, or do they date back to the days of consultative selling when there was a higher proportion of tell than challenge.

> To learn more about how Sales Engine supports businesses of all sizes with the bid and pitch requirements, visit our website here



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