

Emerging Best Practices for B2B Sales and Marketing

How to Help Reps Win in Today's Selling Environment

BY LISA GSCHWANDTNER AND MATT HEINZ



Sales 2.0 Conference Reports reveal how top sales leaders are using new best practices, insight, and Sales 2.0 tools to create highly effective and winning sales forces. See a [full schedule](#) of Sales 2.0 Events this year.

This report is based on information presented at the Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference, held on October 22–23, 2012, in San Francisco at the Four Seasons Hotel.

SUMMARY

Information presented at the October 2012 Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference indicates emerging best practices for sales organizations in two key areas. The first area is the buying cycle: successful sellers are using customized content and messages to capture the attention of today's buyer. The second area is coaching and training: top organizations are pairing traditional sales metrics with personality profiles to customize and significantly improve the impact of sales training.

Bonus material: Leadership insight from Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference host Gerhard Gschwandtner on how to fix an outmoded sales culture.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR BUYER?

Many B2B companies have not yet adapted to a buying cycle powered by the digital customer. The Center for Marketing Research recently reported that only 28 percent of Fortune 500 Companies have public-facing corporate blogs, despite the fact that 92 percent of businesses that do blog see successful results from their efforts.

This statistic is merely one indicator that sales leaders are not necessarily doing all they can to remain competitive. Here are three basic questions that sales leaders should be able to easily answer about today's buying cycle:

1. How well can your sales team build relationships with customers via a variety of channels?
2. How well does your sales process map to the buying cycle?
3. Are your reps empowered to have compelling and relevant online conversations with qualified prospects?

Not too long ago, sales leaders who heard the word “content” would probably think “marketing collateral.” Yet highlights shared by Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference speakers indicate that content now influences almost every aspect of the sales process. Today, if sales teams are going to engage effectively with customers, build trust, and convert prospects, they need good, compelling content on their side.

Social content in particular – including company blogs, online newsletters, video channels, online presentations, and social-networking sites – represents a vital entry point to engage with customers. Previous generations of sales professionals could define and own the sales process because buyers weren’t able to do significant research on their own. They relied on the seller to educate them on key decision-making criteria.

According to the Sales Executive Board, however, 57 percent of the B2B buying process is now complete before a salesperson comes into the picture. And Gartner has predicted that, by 2020, up to 85 percent of the buying cycle will be complete without any interaction with sales reps.

When buyers are free to make their own assumptions and assertions about what they need, they’ll treat sellers as a commodity – and the final buying decision will likely be made on price. Several Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference speakers indicated that great content is a means to avoid this scenario. Content should accomplish the following:

- Engage prospects well before they’re ready to buy.
- Offer expert advice.
- Remain free of product pitches or blatant self-endorsements.
- Speak to the customer’s unique problems and pain points.
- Address their desired outcomes and objectives.

BOOSTING ROI ON COACHING AND TRAINING

As sales teams take steps to address buyer needs via personalized and customized content, reps need coaching on how to successfully execute a customized interaction with prospects. Speaker Chuck Penfield, VP of CRM Cloud Applications at Oracle, said that 89 percent of Oracle reps said they wanted more coaching from their sales managers.

In her keynote address, Nancy Martini, President and CEO of PI Worldwide, revealed that, when combined with analytics, coaching can yield consistent, predictable results among sales reps. Specifically, she outlined how to combine traditional sales metrics and personality profiles to customize and significantly improve the impact of sales training. Sales will remain a mix of art and science, but new technology makes it far easier to precisely diagnose and respond to prospect needs.

Drawing from research published in her book, *Scientific Selling: Creating High Performance Sales Teams through Applied Psychology and Testing* (Wiley, 2012), Martini revealed that organizations today can leverage tools to understand the unique drivers of their internal sales staff in order to help them sell at peak productivity.

“Sales is an incredible balance between art and science,” Martini said. “One way to think about this is the balance between nature (art) and nurture (science), regardless how much each factor contributes to a sales rep’s success – today we know that both are measurable.

“The best way to understand and navigate the two is to leverage science and apply it to the business of selling. Sales-skills data let you know exactly what your reps ‘know,’ and behavioral data inform you on how they will ‘execute’ on that knowledge. I like to call this the ‘scientific power pack’ for sales managers – an unstoppable combination of sales analytics to increase sales performance.”

Martini also outlined three trends that apply equally to sales and marketing professionals:

1. Buyers have more information.

Today's buyers can gather hard data (products, company, competition, industry) from Websites, and they can get soft data from friends, colleagues, and strangers (anonymous reviews) on social-media sites.

Bottom line, buyers are theoretically better educated before they talk to a rep – or at least they think they are. Marketing teams can position the company prior to the rep interaction with a strong online presence and by entering the “conversation” with prospects early.

2. Selling is more demanding.

Today's buyer has less tolerance for old selling tactics, and today's reps need to possess all the core sales skills of a top consultant: the intelligence to assimilate information rapidly and the stamina and resilience to excel under pressure.

Most of all, today's sales reps require the wisdom to manage the sales process rather than “do something to” their buyers. Marketing teams can arm the reps with marketing tools and resources to help them be more effective as each opportunity becomes more important.

3. Buyers are more risk averse.

As the economy has become more unsettled, customer reactions have become more cautious, spending has become more conservative, controls have increased, decision making has become the responsibility of high-level executives, and reps have less access to those decision makers.

Gatekeepers are more likely than ever before to create barriers to stakeholders. Marketing teams can produce collateral that builds confidence and manages the perception of risk to help position the rep as the prospect's best option.



Will Wiegler

@WillWiegler

89% of sales reps want more coaching said
Chuck Penfield @Oracle #s2oc

FIXING AN OUTMODED SALES CULTURE: FOUR TIPS FOR SALES LEADERS

Contributed by Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference host Gerhard Gschwandtner



Sales 2.0 Conference

@Sales20Conf

Selling is very unpredictable and requires tolerance for ambiguity. It requires being authentic and innovative. @Gerhard20

#S2OC

The sales leaders I spoke with at the October 2012 Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference expressed deep concern about their ability to continue to match the productivity and agility of their competitors. I see one common reason for this concern: an outmoded sales culture.

Sales teams look to leaders to set the tone for performance. If your sales process is stale and your technology is outdated, you're failing to enable them to win. Here are my four takeaways for sales leaders based on current industry trends and insight.

1. Learn to adapt your sales process to the buying process.

Many sales teams are struggling because they work for companies that are failing to respond to the new ways that customers are buying. I routinely talk to sales leaders who do not see the need to optimize their B2B Websites to capture and follow up on inbound leads. They don't take advantage of marketing-automation software. They have no online sales channel. They think social media is a waste of time and have little or no presence on Twitter. They'd rather have their reps out selling than blogging or connecting with new prospects on LinkedIn. Yet these are all steps that leading companies are taking to engage an audience and turn prospects into loyal customers.

Keep this in mind: Good content stimulates curiosity, sparks online conversations, and encourages "Likes" and online engagement. Seize the opportunity to become the conversation and content leader in your field.

2. Arm your reps with intelligent information.

Right before a meeting, your reps should be able to pull up vital information about the prospect's company and industry in order to set the stage for a relevant dialogue. Access to the right information is the first step. Translating this information into messages that engage and persuade customers is the second step, but that's where many salespeople come up short.

Many sales pitches today lack traction. In an era when customers expect personalization and customization at every

step of the buying cycle, canned scripts just won't cut it. Make sure your salespeople are able to deliver a message that opens their customers' minds. You also want to make sure they will follow up with a clear value proposition. If they don't, their clients won't open their wallets.

3. Plan to win the war for talent.

A few of our speakers indicated that top companies are relying on shorter and timelier training programs that can be disseminated online and accessed by reps around the globe, in any language, at any time. I recommend that all sales leaders empower their employees via training and start investing in creative modes of delivery. With so many sales teams working remotely, sales leaders cannot count on annual sales-kickoff meetings or in-person training programs to keep reps up-to-speed. Take steps now to create a winning sales culture – one that empowers reps to learn new skills through training, share collective knowledge, and tap internal resources that can help them sell effectively. If you do, the top performers will come knocking.

4. Hold everyone responsible for the sale.



Niki Gross

@NikiRane

All departments within a company should be focused on driving revenue - Chuck Penfield

#S2OC

Selling does not happen in a vacuum. Because today's customer has often completed anywhere between 60 to 80 percent of the buying cycle before even coming into contact with a sales rep, it's important that all departments be empowered to act as sales support.

If the finance and legal teams work in silos, it will be impossible to create an effective sales-negotiation strategy. If sales and marketing are not aligned, it will be hard to optimize your company's sales potential. Today, sales is social and mobile. You can't always control when and where customers find you, but you can control your social presence and level of engagement.

This is great news for sales managers who want to succeed. Sales success has long been an art, but it is now equally about science. As a sales leader, your job is not to get there before the competition or win the war on price; your job is to equip your team to find and follow the right opportunities, engage with prospects early and with intelligence, and create an overall culture of success.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Matt Heinz

Matt has more than 15 years of marketing, business development, and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries, and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success, and customer loyalty. Matt has held various positions at companies such as Microsoft, Weber Shandwick, Boeing, The Seattle Mariners, Market Leader, and Verdiem. In 2007, Matt began Heinz Marketing to help clients first focus their business on market and customer opportunities and then execute a plan to scale revenue and customer growth. Matt lives in Kirkland, Washington, with his wife, Beth, two children, and a menagerie of animals (a dog, a cat, and six chickens). You can read more from Matt on his blog, [Matt on Marketing](#), or [follow him on Twitter](#).

Lisa Gschwandtner

Lisa Gschwandtner is Editorial Director at Selling Power. In addition to *Selling Power* magazine, the leading periodical for sales managers and sales VPs since 1981, Selling Power Inc. produces the Sales Management Digest and Daily Boost of Positivity online newsletters, as well as a five-minute video series featuring interviews with top executives. Selling Power is a regular media sponsor of the Sales 2.0 Conference.

SPEAKERS QUOTED IN THIS REPORT

Gerhard Gschwandtner **Founder and CEO of Selling Power Inc.**

Selling Power is a multichannel media company that produces the Sales Leadership Conference series and *Selling Power* magazine, the number one industry resource for sales management executives. 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 <http://blog.sellingpower.com/gg/>.

Nancy J. Martini
President and CEO of PI Worldwide®

PI Worldwide®, an international consulting company based in Wellesley Hills, MA, specializing in leadership and sales development. Since 1955, PI Worldwide has helped companies improve performance, productivity, and profitability by utilizing the insight provided by their proprietary behavioral assessment tool, Predictive Index®, along with the company's Selling Skills Assessment Tool™ (SSAT) and its sales training program, Customer-Focused Selling™ (CFS). Martini is responsible for the entire PI Worldwide organization, which includes the corporate office, 45 locations globally, and more than 350 consultants serving more than 7,500 clients in 146 countries. Nancy is the author of *Customer-Focused Selling* and *Scientific Selling*. Nancy holds a Master's Degree in psychological studies from Cambridge College.

Chuck Penfield
Vice President, CRM Cloud Applications, Oracle

Chuck Penfield joined Oracle 13 years ago and has held various positions in sales and sales management within Oracle. Chuck has sold ERP and Human Resources software as well as Oracle On Demand Outsourcing service. In Chuck's current role, he manages Oracle's CRM On Demand sales efforts in the East Area. Prior to joining Oracle, Chuck spent eight years in Sales Management at Automatic Data Processing in Waltham, MA. Chuck holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Bentley University in Waltham, MA.

About the Conference

This report is based on information presented at the Sales & Marketing 2.0 Conference, held on October 22–23, 2012, in San Francisco at the Four Seasons Hotel. The Sales 2.0 Conference is held four times a year and draws an elite audience of high-level B2B sales executives. Speakers include industry thought leaders, authors, experts in sales and technology, and executives who have a proven record of success leading B2B sales organizations. Each conference hosts dozens of vendors who showcase how their technology solutions are helping sales teams streamline and increase revenue in a variety of areas that impact the sales organization.

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