

Selling is Changing... Not Really

by John Chapin

This past week I've received three separate e-mails from various sales gurus talking about how much sales has changed. While the internet, social media, and advances in technology have altered some of the peripheral aspects of selling, the foundational principles and keys that lead to sales success have remained the same.

Sales Facts that will Always Remain the Same

Fact 1: Sales IS still a numbers game

99.9% of the time failure in sales is due to a lack of activity. In other words, not making enough calls. Now that we have the internet, I know sales reps who spend hours looking up background information on prospects before they call them. This is a mistake. Look up the information a prospect would reasonable expect you to have, but don't spend hours being perfect. Just look up some quick information and make the call.

Another way technology can work against us is that some people believe they have to be technical experts before they call anyone. An insurance agent I know spent a full six months in the office studying cyber liability because he had to know everything before he could speak to anyone. The insurance agent is a producer (salesperson) first, not an underwriter (technician). The reality is: you will never know everything and this is usually just an excuse to avoid doing the hard work of making lots of calls. Also, just because you now have the internet to look up information doesn't mean you should be spending hours "preparing" at the expense of making calls. Just get some basics and make the call. Learn what you need to learn so you don't make any careless or "stupid" mistakes, but focus more on activity than on being technically proficient.

Fact 2: You're still the expert.

While it's true that today's consumer is, generally speaking, better informed than in years past, you're still the expert who has probably forgotten more than they will ever know. The famous author Malcolm Gladwell once said that it takes roughly 10,000 hours of study to master one's craft. While you may not be at the 10,000-hour mark yet, you are still far better off than someone who has spent 5, 10, or even 40 hours on the internet studying your industry and products. You live in your business every day, the prospect doesn't. People still need an honest, straight-forward salesperson who understands the subtleties and idiosyncrasies and can educate them on what's best for them.

Fact 3: Face-to-face and phone are still the most effective ways to sell.

Have you ever NOT received an e-mail that someone swore they sent to you? It just happened to me *again* two weeks ago. In addition to the fact that you can't always rely on an e-mail, LinkedIn in-mail, or other "internet" communication to reach the person, you also lose the most important parts of communication such as voice tone and body language. Couple that with the fact that electronic communication distances you and dehumanizes the experience. For these

reasons, in-person communication is always the most effective followed second by Skype, and other face-to-face apps, and third by phone communication.

Electronic communication serves its purpose which is: short-sweet, non-critical communication in which you are simply conveying information. What kills me is when I see salespeople using an e-mail for initial communication or during an important part of the selling process. In this case they are simply hiding behind technology because they are afraid to make a call. Also keep in mind that even non-critical electronic communication has to be backed up with a phone call or in-person contact to ensure it was received.

You have much more impact when people can see and/or hear you. Don't hide behind technology and spam people on the initial and other important communications.

Fact 4: It IS still all about relationships and doing what's best for the other person.

There is no "new relationship selling" or "solution selling." The best have always focused on the long-term relationship and the best possible solution for the prospect, even if it involved sending someone to the competition. The best have always been seen as a peer and business partner looking out for the best interests of the prospect.

The bottom line is: the only way sales has changed is for those doing it the wrong way.

Years ago you could pull the wool over someone's eyes, get away with not knowing as much, have subpar sales and people skills, and not work as hard. That said, the people who have always done it right, have found little has changed over the years. For them, being great at sales still requires that you work hard and make the calls, communicate effectively, build the personal relationships, are professional, knowledgeable, put the other person first, and embody the character traits of honesty and integrity.