

2018  
2017  
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2014

# THE END OF SALES AS WE KNOW IT!!

YOUR SALESPEOPLE NEED TO  
CHANGE WITH THE TIMES

BY TY SWAIN

In conversations with CEOs, presidents and VPs of sales in every industry over the last two to three years, one trend is consistent: as customers have changed considerably how they buy, the traditional concept of sales has died.

No, sales is not dead; it is alive and well! It is the concept that "I need a sales guy," or "Anyone can sell what we do!" that is dead. The traditional idea that any sales person can be a good sales person anywhere is simply untrue in today's world.

Sales, as a profession, is the most important role in a company and it is the hardest to recruit and hire for. To build the "right" sales team that performs, stays and succeeds requires a process and strategy. The wrong sales

team will limit growth, minimize profits and lose customers . . . all the things you need to run a successful company.

To successfully hire and develop a sales team today, the role of sales must be carefully and accurately defined to attract the right people as well as lead, train and develop the existing team. If a sales professional is the "right" person, that person will not fear the role realities, but will embrace them.

## THE MARKET, ECONOMY AND SALES

Across the United States, every type of company and industry is being affected by changes in the marketplace. We all know the economy, technology and market pressures have forever changed how customers operate and how they make buying decisions. Your sales team is deal-

ing with competitive pressures and may be struggling to adapt to the needs of customers who are seeking better pricing, support, product availability, etc. There is strong pressure to grow and develop customers before the competition does. This changes the business landscape and requires the sales force to adapt and find new ways to perform.

Why has this change evolved so quickly?

Simple answer – technology. Today, technology has transformed how customers communicate, how products are ordered, how information is tracked and, more importantly, how the sales team must support and service customers. As technology has evolved it has transformed every aspect of how people engage, work and sell.

Customers rely on your sales team to be the experts and the conduit to assuring that their needs are met by your company. And, they rely more heavily on the relationship, trusting the person they work with from your company. The customer will always want a relationship, conversation or someone they trust to support their business. The reason is simple: customers have no more interest in replacing you as a vendor than they do looking for a new one.

This is why the role of the “sales guy” is gone forever, and why the sales role is more complex. The complexity of the sales role in your company dictates that your company’s success will rely on your ability to effectively recruit, select, lead and retain the right sales professionals. It will require a strategy that defines the role of top performance today so you can select and lead the right sales force that performs and stays.

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The BIG question: why won't our sales team change how they sell?

This is a common question of CEOs and sales leaders. The answer is not simple. It may be that you have the wrong person in the "right" role and, as the role has changed, that person no longer fits the business as he or she once did. It's a hard reality.

We often hear it said that "our customers have changed, and our sales team is struggling to adapt."

Other reasons include:

- 1) They have gotten rusty and lack the confidence to try new ways to sell, so they don't.
- 2) They have no idea HOW to change and adapt their efforts to fit the role of sales today because they don't know what it is.
- 3) Leadership has not embraced the change in sales and does not lead them on a new path or direction for success.
- 4) Although they were the right person then, they are no

longer motivated or interested in the role today and need to find a new career.

The Sales Challenge: Sales professionals that have been in a role a long time struggle to change, adapt or modify their effort – not because they are older, but because their overall success was based on how they have been selling in the past, and they fear that changing will lead to failure. The reality is, no change guarantees failure!

**TOP PERFORMERS & WHAT THEY DO**

If you ask a top performer why they are successful, generally they may not really know why. The reason is how they engage customers and how they sell changes as the customer changes. They adapt constantly, modifying what they do to suit the customer. In retrospect (and you can tell them this) they do what made them successful in the beginning of their career. They constantly look at the role in a fresh new way, ask a lot of questions, learn what customers need, and influence customers with a solution that meets their expectations.

An example of change in sales: In the past, even up to three to four years ago, sales professionals in a particular distribution company were hired to spend 60% to 70% of their time supporting customers with new product introductions, solving problems, providing solutions and managing their needs. Sales success was based on supporting and selling existing customers rather than finding new ones.

One year ago, the distributor implemented a new e-commerce / website application that allows customers to not only see and learn about new products, but also place orders in the same system. The sales role has now changed. Today, that same sales professional now has a NEW requirement to spend 60% of the time focused on new customer accounts and new business development vs. managing current accounts. How do you help your team adapt and shift their focus to create success?

**HOW DO YOU DIRECT CHANGE IN SALES?**

Our research proves that 78% of all sales professionals have to adapt or modify their efforts away from their natural interests today to be successful. The best way to get a sales person to adapt and modify their efforts is not training, beatings or ultimatums, it is simply requiring them to re-engage their customer in a new way with a process that helps them define what customers want, how they want it, and then deliver just that. We call this gaining customer intelligence that drives sales.

How does your team spend their time? Is it in the right places? Often, they are spending too much time in the wrong places and wasting valuable time in areas where

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they are comfortable. Collaborate with your team to set clear expectations and actionable, realistic goals so they know what they need to do to be successful and hold them accountable for performance.

Help your sales team understand their strengths and how to adapt to changing customer scenarios. This will help them gain the confidence to do what is needed in the job for success.

Lead the charge and partner with your team to sell. By partnering with your team, you help them adapt and change how they perform in the role and build strong success in the team going forward.

### SALES LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE

Are you leveraging your sales organization for success today and in the future? As companies today seek to select, develop and retain top performers that fit the role, the sales team becomes more effective and the expectation is higher for increased leadership and support. Better performers expect better leadership, or they will leave because they can.

As sales professionals today look to change how they perform, sales leadership must ask their team, "What can I do to help?" Sales leadership must also look internally and ask themselves, "What should I do to better my skills, my efforts, and optimize the team?" Top sales leaders that eliminate obstacles and effectively coach, engage and partner with their team will win.

If your sales team understands the changes that are occurring and how to perform better, you can create the platform for transforming your sales organization for success today and in the future.

No, sales is not dead, it is alive and well! Select, develop, lead and retain the right top performers for your company to assure your company's success in the competitive marketplace. **IS**

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