

The Principle Of Social Selling



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Not Your Father's Sales Process

Social Selling Changes Everything

Or should way say gradually help you evolve to the next level?

Prospecting. Cold calling. Getting in the door. Getting around the gatekeeper. Overcoming objections. Controlling the prospect. Does that sound right today?

If your selling methods haven't changed in the last years, achieving quota in 2010 will become harder than ever. Why? Prospects don't buy the same way. They 'google' things, then ask their trusted networks, peers and friends and bring clear pricing expectations to their conversations. Ask yourself: "Is it getting easier for me to sell? Are my sales cycles trending shorter?" If you answered "no" to both questions, it could be because you're using yesterday's sales strategies and tactics.

Just look at the typical buying process just 20 years ago:



In case you want to research back in sales history, you will find that even in ancient Egypt the pot and rug trader knew – you sell where your customers are and in the way the prefer to buy.

Compare that to how your prospects buy today:



While the actual tasks are not that different, the source of information is very different. Prospects no longer consult the “expert”, instead they get educated through their “network”. This is hard core evidence why *inquiries* have dropped so much, in some cases to almost zero.

If there’s a gap, take action! Here’s what you can do about it. First, accept the new realities of selling:

1. Selling requires learning about influencers and reading the market
2. Successful sales outcomes are facilitated through *teams*, not individuals
3. Social selling must be supported by tools that support teams (we call it FLIGHTS)
4. KISS (Keep it Simple, Stupid) works!

If you keep going with your old processes, there is no way of ever being successful. Change is hard but change before you are either forced to change.

The following pages will help you explore the necessary adjustments to your process and what you can do to be successful in this new world.

I know. You're thinking "I send Tweets every day, and I write a blog that I send in an e-newsletter. Isn't that enough?" It's a start: but this is the marketing end of the spectrum. Sales PROs must have processes that match buying pattern. *Socializing* was something for the sales elite who went on the golf course with the buying elite. Social media will not change that – but the change comes in for everybody else who wants to begin a conversation—what we used to call "get a foot in the door." The door is now in networks, groups and communities. And the socializing which happened only on the golf course is now *accessible to everybody!* Look at a matching buy to sales process:



Here's what successful salespeople must do well in 2010 and beyond:

- 1) **Social Network Management**
The sales person needs to know and have easy access to the social sites of the clients where they hang out.
- 2) **Connection Tracking**
With hundreds or thousands of contacts it is very hard to remember where the sales person has been and how often. A tracking mechanism needs to be available.
- 3) **Activity Tracking**
Activities with prospects may vary based on products but even with campaigns. So the follow up and "action List" need to be highly flexible and able to be created or managed "on the fly"
- 4) **Outcome Management**
Business objectives may no longer be just mechanical steps and scripts, because they are just no longer acceptable by customers, instead defined on a per initiative basis.
- 5) **Instant Network Access (Via Social Site Management)**
While it is nice to get Twitter Streams directly into a system, it is soon so

overwhelming that it is more desirable to allow the sales person to see the actual Twitter stream, Facebook wall, LinkedIn status and much more around a client with a single click.

6) **Flow Based Forecasting Model**

With the new sales processes, planning pattern will change and as such the actual forecast. A buying pattern based forecast system allows management to manage a forecast without discounting the expectations from their sales people.

7) **Flight Sharing**

Very soon, as social relationships between sales people and prospects develop a whole new level of trust, data in the sCRM system maybe even shared in part with the client. In particular in B2B sales the Customer will have for the very first time access to the Customer Relationship system.

8) **Rules Based Openness**

Openness is a key aspect in order to be truly social. At the same time internal data need to be protected. As such Social CRM plays an interesting, bridging role by providing a company specific application with well defined data pipes that are open enough to allow the connection and closed enough to protect corporate data.

9) **Genetic Computing**

The amount of complexity, connections and attributes of all those objects may bring typical software development to its knees. Technically new ways need to be developed to manage that complexity. XeeSM developed a "Genetic Computing Model" to keep track of the "DNA" of all aspects and relationships.

10) **Integration**

Integration in the existing IT world may look differently as social systems are inherently open. API based system integration need to be more transparent to IT departments with more control over what data go where.

XeeSM/PRO was built from ground up on these principals. It is the first Social Business Application that supports the new sales processes, and reflects new buying patterns, and allows every sales person to socialize like the high-earning PROs.

To ensure success, you must re-align your sales processes with the changing buying behavior. The requirements of those new sales processes:

- Must be in alignment with the way people buy. No wasted time. No wasted effort. No friction.
- Need to allow leaders to more accurately predict revenue based on new buying processes
- Need to provide ways measuring success in addition to just revenue
- Needs to be simple and easy to adopt

The New Processes

Let's take a look at the new way how people buy. It probably starts with conversations that begin with "Couldn't we . . ." "What if . . ." Then:

- 1) **Search**
It all begins with an online search for "things"; whatever they look for.
- 2) **Referencing**
Once products or brands are of greater interest, the next step is to learn about the experience from current users/customers
- 3) **Evaluating Options**
Next step is to measure, imagine, compare and create a short list.
- 4) **Free Trials**
Once a product holds promise, prospects want to touch things, and see how it works for them in their environment. They want to identify their own risks and opportunities. "Try before you buy"—it's an old concept that works just as well today. Try a copy machine for 1 week. Return shoes you don't like. Test drive a car. Taste test gourmet items in Whole Foods.
- 5) **Best Practices**
Depending on the product prospects now seek to understand what the best way to use a product is. Obviously this may be not applicable in some industries. Prospects however will find information in online communities, groups and forums.
- 6) **Vendor Exploration / Negotiation**
At this stage the product or brand decision is pretty much set in stone and the prospect starts to explore and negotiate with the most interesting vendors
- 7) **Purchase Decision**
Whoever has the highest level of advocates and matches best with the needs will most likely win the deal. Customer is closing.

Again, the new process is built to match the customer in their quest to find the best possible solution. As sales pro you will want to help your client be successful.



Your obvious step is now to match the new sales processes with the buying pattern of your respective market. Before sales gets involved there is most likely marketing with a good social media monitoring program. Not only to get some sentiment analysis and brand presence reports but actually potential clients through online conversations.

Seven Steps to Selling through social media

1) **Identification / Networking**

Like in the old sales process, where prospect identification was a good start, that is true here too. But the actual process is very different. To identify a prospect the sales or marketing team needs to be in the social networks to “listen” to what is going on and who is looking for what. And if “Search” is step one on the buy side, looking for search is the identification process on the sell side

2) **Introductions**

As prospects are looking for the real story – the sell side needs to make sure that prospects get to those clients with no “preparation”. A large customer community would be the best place a prospect needs to be directed to. If the prospect can’t find a community of any size, , they assume that there are no customers and they move on. Vocal customers are always interesting. Regardless whether it is an argument about a product or excitement. Sales now need to make sure that the more customers they can introduce to a prospect the better it is. NOW THIS IS TROUBLE – again. Why? Because sales people have always tried to control contact with other customers. Sales need to keep in mind that customers are not dumb and companies have competitors. As such customers have choices. To provide a way to let customers communicate their choice is the best way to a reference. Those introductions may not be made by the sales person but actually by other people from their network. The level of trust a sales person brings to a new prospect is not that relevant at this stage. However the sales person will need to develop a social relationship by connecting with the prospect, understand what’s on top of their mind without selling anything.

3) **Listening / Discovery**

As prospects evaluate options it is important for sales people to simply know what is going on. Any activity on the sales side can at best delay the process, lower the probability or actually ruin the deal. Very socially savvy sales people may stay closer in touch with the potential client and be just helpful in the process.

4) **Providing Free Trials**

This may be the very first step a sales person actually gets in contact with the prospect. Offering a free trial or a way to somehow test a product.

5) **Community Involvement**

As a prospect is now seeking for best practices examples, again the in-house team may not have the trust level to be accepted by the prospect and so it may make a lot of sense to formally introduce experienced users or best practices material to the prospect. Depending on the product, an online community, forum, social network group may be the best anchor in this step.

6) **Negotiation**

At this point we are actually back to the old sales process where buyer and seller negotiate a deal, terms and other details.

7) **Closing**

Whoever believes is in the driver seat is closing the deal.

There are a lot of discussions around social media and social selling. There are ideas how to use Twitter as social tool for customer relationships and LinkedIn to professionally network. **Yet none of those suggestions matured in a way that a business leader could go ahead and execute. Why?**

Before we look into social CRM or any new tool or promising process, strategy or tactic, we need to understand the close relationship between sales processes and buying behavior or processes. Traditional CRM systems were built around a typical buying behavior as understood in the 70', 80's and 90's. Part of Tom Siebel's success was that he knew the buying behavior of customers and translated it into a sales process that was supported by a CRM system. That CRM system construct was then recreated many times by many other companies.

With the inception of the social networks and the ever more open Internet customers help themselves and ask around. In the so called social web – one of the most asked business questions is "Does somebody have experience with..." You fill in product, brand, technology. And once a prospect has a pretty good idea what they are looking for they don't wait for the well trimmed sales manager who just came back from his latest "reference selling training" to provide the customer with three references. No, the prospect figures out who is using the product and asks directly what the "real story" is. At the end the prospect starts talking to a small selection of vendors on their short list – basically "what can you do for me?"—but with a twist. They really already know. They quickly want to get to "give me your best price". Pitching your product and "proving the business case" has often been done without a single conversation with a salesperson.

Selling the "old way" in 2010?

Here are the consequence for sales :

Bad Planning

Even so the business is not so bad but forecastability is in the tank. Sales people who stick to their old processes just cannot predict a business as they used to with those old tools. A recent CSO Insights report concluded "More than 90% of sales deals did not close as forecasted"

Less Influence

Sales people today no longer have the influence they had just five years ago. 60% of purchases are based on recommendations from peer groups, colleagues, friends and other trusted sources. 70% and more of the traditional sales process are not in synch with today's buying behavior – that means a dramatic loss of influence.

Imploding Sales Efficiency

If we measure our sales teams based on efficiency like lead conversion rates or lead to opportunity conversion, those sales people look really bad. Because there is nothing to convert – so we fire them. If we measure sales people based on their nurturing process effectiveness, again it looks really bad because the nurturing process almost evaporates. If we measure sales effectiveness based on the progress of their sales pipelines – again: Bad news because the sales pipeline is not what it used to be.

Motivation

Even the good sales people today get frustrated when all they can do is "leave a message", hear: "No interest" or "Great you call, here is the problem with the product I have..." or "I'll

get back to you...". Spam filters deflect emails, and all the other promotions basically evaporate.

The shift on customer buying behavior requires new alignment of our sales processes. We may call it social selling, relationship selling or just new sales process, it doesn't matter, businesses are required to shift gears.

Without understanding the correlation between social media, new customer behavior and new sales processes we can look into all sorts of fancy tools but won't get any tangible results.

How would a Social Business Application look like in this environment?

The here and now is in the social web, not in a street address!

A Social business application, whether you call it Social CRM or anything else needs to be built from ground up to support the new processes. Instead of dealing with historical data, it needs to keep real time information and "intentional processes" in mind. That means a system need to support the intention of the sales person (future related) and not so much support the sales call based on historic data. A sales person need to find the prospect wherever that prospect is (like in which network) not what historic data tells him where he was in the past (he may have been in a group but no longer). The here and now is in the social web, not in a street address. It's no longer only the call and the face to face meeting but also the tweet, the group discussion on LinkedIn the latest personal interest on Facebook, the business presentation on SlideShare a video clip on YouTube and much more. On top of all this, the places and spaces vary by customer and even by person – plus they may quickly change over time.

In a B2C world sales people need to learn about influencers and to read the market. In a B2B world, sales projects may only be possible with a whole team. So Social Business applications or Social CRM systems need to be able to support team activities and share those projects (we call it FLIGHTs) with others. In indirect sales those FLIGHTs may actually be shared with alliance partners across company boundaries. A social business system must be flexible enough to support the needs of channel partners, but simple enough for all collaborators to adopt it.

Xeesm is a social business application that was created around the concept of helping sales and marketing teams match the new reality and create a better customer experience. Xeesm is a social media application platform that allows applications like social selling or social marketing as well as other social business process related activities inside and across company boundaries.

A Social Sales Application Example

With all the theory, there must be tools and systems supporting the new processes. Whether we call it Social CRM, Social Customer Management or something totally different, we ideally need an application that is build from ground with the new world in mind. Xeesm provides an all new software experience. It very much reminds a user to the ease of use of Facebook, LinkedIn or any other social media tool. The key however is that the tool increases productivity, helps its users to stay focused and reduce distraction from social chatter. Xeesm not only looks very different and is much more pleasant to use but is architected around the idea to match the new processes with a workflow. The focus is on people not columns and records. The content circles around social sites and activities not street address and Fax number. Xeesm is NOT a system where a sales person shall live in – unlike in his ancestor CRM systems. Xeesm was built as a spring board for sales people to go out and visit as many people as possible. Visiting means virtual visits on the customer’s sites, networks and groups. Already the opportunity (above) overview shows the people involved in an opportunity, team mates and possibly partners and influencer.



Opportunity Management

And while we focus more and more on our customers, we still have commercial objectives, we want to win new business and we want be better in forecasting and help management and production to plan their respective business. The social business application is no different. The opportunity detail screen again shows people not line items, but it also helps sales people manage time lines, sales process steps, helps calculate probability of winning a deal and more. In addition to the sales administration backend – the real focus is on relationship intensity. Xeesm helps sales people keep track of visits, comments, conversations – which at the end of the day is resulting in more or less business. Administrating an opportunity has never helped closing it.



just takes a few clicks to share contacts with product marketing or support, the marketing team or upper management. Others in your organization can provide additional insight and connections. Xeesm is not yet another departmental solution. <http://xeesm.com>

Tweetable summary:

Social CRM systems require that the respective sales processes are newly aligned with the changing customer behavior.

Custom Concepts

The above description is obviously not a cookie cutter model for any business in any industry but illustrates what needs to be done to enable strategy.. We predict that many sales and business consultants will be able to shift gears and work with business leaders to make this shift a reality. XeeSM is working with partners around the globe to help businesses implement a solution based on a strategy that matches the situation in their respective market.

Training Programs

We don't want to leave it at a theoretical level. Together with the Social Media Academy we will offer training and webinars to help implement social selling in your organization.

<http://www.socialmedia-academy.com/blog/index.php/us-program/relationship-selling-class/>

Proof of concept

You're in the driver's seat! Have meetings with your customers and chat about how they see this – you may even point to this post/document and ask what they think. Start with the social process right here before you invest anything.

Executive Summary

The shift in power towards the customer is healthy, because we are all customers of somebody else. Customers make many of their product and brand decisions without significant influence from their vendor's sales and marketing. In order to become an equal part in the product exploration phase business teams need to align their workflow with the way customers seek, explore and decide what they buy. The 20+ year old sales processes need to be realigned despite the fact that millions were invested in training, systems and process optimization. A Social Business Software is not the wonder machine fixing the problems but an important tool contributing significantly to execute the new processes matching with customer behavior.

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