

The Death of Personal Marketing

Salespeople have always found marketing to be expensive and difficult. Finding, contacting, and acquiring the opportunity to sell prospects has always been the most difficult task salespeople face. More salespeople failed in the 20's because of an inability to find enough prospects to sell than for all reasons combined. Same in the 30's, and the 60's, and the 90's, and every decade in-between. Of course, the idea that finding prospects and marketing to them is difficult isn't new.

Nevertheless, the sales environment is fundamentally different today than in the past. For most salespeople, the world has moved beyond them; however, they have yet to recognize it. They're still living in the past, in a world where prospects and clients needed salespeople. Today, many, if not the majority of prospects, will do almost anything to avoid a salesperson.

There was a time, not too long ago, in fact, when prospects and clients looked to salespeople for advice and guidance. Prospects knew they needed information. They knew they needed help in finding and evaluating alternatives and solutions to problems and issues.

For a great number of prospects, both individual and business, that need for information and guidance is gone—at least they no longer believe they need the information and guidance from salespeople. These individuals and businesses have passed over the divide from those who feel a need to rely on a salesperson for guidance, to those who believe they can make better choices without a salesperson involved in their decisions. Moreover, the numbers who are moving over to the do-it-yourself side of purchasing are growing larger everyday.

With the proliferation of the internet; the avalanche of books, magazines, and white papers addressing every conceivable subject; cable TV with programming covering everything from personal finances, to virtually every business subject one can think of, to the most intimate personal, family, and social subjects, a huge number of prospects believe they already have the information they need to make decisions. Now, all they need is someone who will provide the cheapest price for the product or service the prospect has determined will solve their problem or meet their need.

The sales environment is undergoing a swift and dramatic change. Over the past decade, prospects have become more aware of the bombardment of marketing they face everywhere they turn. Their mail is dominated by direct mail offers. Almost every internet site they visit is flooded with marketing and advertising. Newspapers and magazines are more than 50% advertising. Radio and TV are, of course, marketing driven. Everywhere one looks is marketing: billboards; the side of the car next to you may well have a magnetic sign marketing something; the license plate frame on the car in front of you advertises the dealership the car was bought from; the pen in your pocket may well have some company's logo; and the horde of cheap signs on the street corner advertising shops going out of business, cheap internet, cheap insurance, cheap everything.

Then, of course, the cold calls. Cold calls for investments, insurance, internet connections, phone service, you name it. Cold calls at work. Cold calls at home. How many do you get everyday, including weekends? 5? 10? More?

Of course, we're not done. Spam. How many spam messages do you get? How many lotteries have you won this week alone? How many dead princes, long lost relatives, and just plain old Good Samaritans died and their representatives have contacted you this week to claim your inheritance, or someone wants you to help them sneak ill-gotten funds out of some third world country? How many lonely hearts have you heard from this week wanting to become "friends?" How many offers for discount software, discount drugs, or incredible stock tips have you received this week? How many legitimate businesses have stuffed your e-mail box with junk that you didn't request and didn't want? I will typically get about 1,500 pieces of spam every week—over two hundred a day. Everyday.

And what do all of these things have in common? Well, besides being unwanted, all of the businesses pushing products or services claim to be the best. They all claim to have the best price or they give the most value. They all claim to be the answer to your prayers. They all claim to have the best customer service.

They all have the same message, which means none have any message. Every direct mail piece is virtually the same, only with different pictures. Every salesperson sounds exactly like all the other salespeople. Every ad is just like the others. None can be heard over the din of the racket made by all this marketing.

Is it any wonder people hate marketing? Is it any wonder people will go to great lengths to avoid salespeople? Is it any wonder that marketing and sales as it has been practiced in the past is dying?

Why are these millions of personal and business consumers convinced they no longer need you? They believe they no longer need you because they

are getting their information from "objective" experts, not from biased, commission-oriented salespeople. They are making their own decisions without need for you because they have read an article or book, or heard a report by an unbiased expert who gave them "objective" information that they will act upon. Rather than relying on the slanted and obviously prejudiced information a salesperson gives, they turn to the experts who they believe don't have a dog in the fight.

Prospects don't want to be sold, despite what some salespeople and even sales trainers think. They want to be educated. They want real information as a basis for making their own decisions. They don't want marketing; they want knowledge. They don't want sales brochures; they want reporting and facts. They want to be dealt with as educated people capable of making their own decisions based on reliable information. And whether they are right or not, they don't believe salespeople will provide that information. Instead, they rely on recognized experts.

Moreover, companies are reinforcing this belief by rushing to provide these prospects with the means to make their do-it-yourself purchases at the lowest possible price. There are companies in almost any industry you can think of that are catering to this growing mass of consumers. There are thousands of these companies, and the list is growing daily. Some companies even try to have it both ways by maintaining a traditional sales force while undermining their sales team by at the same time trying to lure prospects by providing a do-it-yourself internet site or 800 number where the prospect can purchase without having to speak with a salesperson.

Companies such as LegalZoom.com turn many legal document issues into a cheap, fill in the blank exercise. Esurance, AIG, Geico, Progressive, and many others encourage consumers to eliminate the insurance agent for auto insurance, and others for home, health, life, and even business insurance-after all, it's just insurance and who needs an agent to make the purchase more expensive? Mortgages, investments, real estate transactions, and hundreds of other products and services also have their version of the do-it-yourself product and service provider.

In reality, this change has just started. It will continue to grow month by month, year by year. And, unfortunately, this isn't simply a change in the way salespeople need to market. This is a fundamental change in the way people buy. This is a change in what sales is. This is the eventual death as sales as we know it for most consumers and most industries.

Does this mean the death of the salesperson? Yes, as we currently know salespeople. There will still be salespeople. Most will be nothing but order takers, customer service reps with the title of salesperson. It will still take years to come to full fruition. However, it is well on its way. The only conversation most "salespeople" will have in the future will be a variation of "Do you have it in red?" "Great. What's your price?"

Yet, the very nature of this change is offering a select few salespeople the opportunity to make more money than ever before. This change in the way people view marketing and their desire to make their own decisions based on knowledge and information give salespeople who grasp the opportunity the ability to become a dominate force in their local markets.

There will always be a segment of the market that understands they need guidance by experienced, skilled salespeople. No matter how dominate the do-it-yourself mentality becomes; there will always be those who want to work with experts. In addition, many who will be tempted to go the do-it-yourself way will gladly opt to work with someone they perceive as a genuine expert.

We are in the process of changing from a sales environment to an expert environment. Salespeople are becoming dinosaurs, relics of a bygone era. But just as dinosaurs were replaced with mammals, salespeople will be replaced with experts-publicly recognized forces in their industry within their local area.

What is an expert and how do you become one? How do you not only survive in this changing environment but also become a dominate force?

We must first understand what an expert is. An expert isn't the most technically capable in their field. An expert isn't necessarily the most technically capable financial planner, insurance agent, networking engineer, IT consultant, telephony consultant, or Realtor. Of course, to become an expert one must be a competent technician, but one doesn't have to be the best in the business. Experts are not the "best" in their industry. That is a myth. Thousands of the top technicians wash out of business every year because although they may be among the best technically, they have no one to sell to.

An expert is by necessity a good, but not necessarily great, technician; but that isn't what makes them an expert. An expert is an expert because they are perceived to be an expert by their target audience. They have the image and reputation of an expert.

If you want to become a top producer in the new expert environment, you must develop a public reputation as an expert. You must develop a local

reputation as powerful as the experts writing the articles, giving the interviews, and being quoted in the news media.

Developing that image and reputation doesn't happen by accident. Those who are recognized as experts work very hard at creating their image and their reputation not by using the traditional marketing techniques and strategies used by the majority of salespeople, but by using the tools and strategies that create a public image and then supplementing that image and reputation with well thought-out marketing. Marketing is still present; it is simply an adjunct to the salesperson's lead generation, not the focus.

Creating a public reputation takes time and effort to learn how to use the tools, then to create and implement a plan. It certainly doesn't happen overnight, nor is it simply using a couple of strategies. Creating a public image and reputation requires the use of a number of media and tools in combination, each reinforcing and branching off from the others.

Although it isn't necessary to use every possible reputation-building tool, an expert reputation requires the use of such things as press releases, blogs, writing educational articles and books, becoming an expert source for media and freelance writers, educational websites, public speaking, developing strong referrals from clients and customers, and creating alliances and partnerships with other experts. Of course, there are other methods and strategies available.

Creating a public reputation as an expert is moving from a marketing mindset to an educational and publicity mindset. It captures the power of education and combines it with a message of unique status and stature within the salesperson's field. It converts selling to education and eventually brings it back to selling.

If you want to thrive in the new expert environment, learning how to convert your business from being a salesperson to being a recognized expert is mandatory. Whether you are relatively new to sales or an old pro now is the time to begin to seriously work on moving your business to a recognized expert platform. The change in how people buy is well on its way and grows daily. Yet, the future is brighter than ever for those willing to invest their time, money and energy in learning the new realities of selling.

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