



Social media and related technology: Drivers of change in managing the contemporary sales force

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KEYWORDS

Social media;
Sales management;
Selling;
Sales technology;
Gamification

Abstract The selling environment has undergone tremendous transformation over the past 2 decades. Perhaps the greatest change has centered on changes and advancements in technology. The latest dramatic change has been the rapidly increasing use of social media and other related technologies in the business-to-business realm. The sales world began the use of technology through the use of Web 1.0, which was primarily webpage oriented; now we see the world of social media as the paradigm of how firms should implement technology. Although there has been some recent emphasis on how marketing might implement social media into their strategies and how the individual salesperson might implement social media into his or her daily selling routine, no substantive discussion on how social media is affecting the role of the sales manager has appeared in the literature. This article systematically examines how social media is impacting the sales management function and, in fact, may be dramatically revolutionizing the position. To help the marketing and sales organization better understand the changing sales world, we present eight lessons that every sales manager needs to embrace.

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1. Evolving sales world

Consider the following scenario: Burt, a 52-year-old veteran, U.S.-based sales manager in a mid-sized

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global B2B firm, has reached Friday night after a long and challenging week—knowing that Saturday will most likely be just another work day. He begins to recap in his mind some of the trials he's faced throughout the week. A few stand out:

- On Monday two of his salespeople came to him for resolution of a conflict about which one gets

credit for a sale that crossed geographic boundaries and was facilitated by both salespeople through social media.

- On Tuesday a Skype call with a European client, the salesperson, and himself that took place at 5 a.m. to accommodate the client became problematic due to in-and-out connectivity resulting in less than satisfactory resolution.
- On Thursday he had to have a discussion with a new salesperson that had not been making a lot of face-to-face calls, instead claiming that she could do a better job of selling and building relationships virtually through social media.
- And just this afternoon on his weekly call with the VP of Sales, he was discussing the company's newly mandated gamification platform for salesperson compensation, during which he was forced to admit to his boss that he really doesn't understand the system and how it is supposed to be used—a critical issue since his newer salespeople are all embracing and enjoying the new game-based system.

As Burt takes his first sip of Scotch, he begins to realize just how much things are changing in his world as a sales manager. And just as he begins to relax and think about his grandson's t-ball game at 9 a.m. on Saturday, he hears a ping on his smartphone, only to find that the European client from Tuesday has set up a redo of the failed virtual meeting at—of course—Saturday at 9 a.m. So now he will have to miss the t-ball game. What a week!

1.1. Evolution or revolution?

Ingram, LaForge, and Leigh (2002, p. 559) suggested that the sales function is in the midst of a “renaissance—a genuine rebirth and revival.” Although increased changes in the sales environment are not new, the rate of change and the level of change are such that we may no longer be in just an evolving environment—rather, we may have begun more of a revolution in the sales environment that redefines all aspects of the sales job and sales management.

Younger workers on both the selling and buying side are not just accepting the new technologies, they are embracing them. As a result, they are demanding immediate and extensive adoption of the new social media and related technologies (Rapp & Panagopoulos, 2012). The balance of power has shifted from the producing organization to the consuming organization, and sales strategies are

going to have to keep pace with the revolutionary changes that are occurring.

This revolution creates many new and heretofore unanticipated challenges and opportunities for managers in sales organizations. In this article, we discuss how sales organizations can manage the use of social media and other related technologies in the daily sales job. More specifically, we provide direction regarding how sales managers like Burt must incorporate social media into the selling process and how the sales manager must then lead his or her sales personnel's use of social media. We begin with a brief discussion of social media and the resulting impact in the sales environment, focusing on defining the various tools of social media and related technologies. We then look at the effects of the salesperson's use of social media on day-to-day management of the sales force. The next part of the article systematically examines basic sales management functions and how social media is transforming the manager's daily routine and job. Finally, we conclude with implications of using social media and related technologies for the first-line sales manager as well as upper management.

2. Social media and related technology

Relationship marketing and relationship selling has been a driving organizational philosophy since the mid-1990s. What better way to build a relationship between organizations or between an organization and consumers than by following what had revolutionized the social fabric of the world? However, social media and related technology changed the interactions between people: the new social dimension allows one another to keep up with friends, celebrities, and the latest ‘it’ product. Social media has been defined a number of different ways, but one working definition is that social media is digital content and networking interactions that are developed and maintained by and between people (Cohen, 2011). In other words, social media consists of a variety of methods to disseminate information and content through interactions between individuals or organizations.

The business environment of today faces challenges that didn't exist a decade ago or have been greatly exacerbated by the revolutionary, explosive diffusion of social media and related technology. Competition has become much more intense due to competitors entering the market from nations that 10 years ago were not competing in the marketplace. In addition, the Internet has allowed small, even 1-person organizations to enter the market and

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