

Sales in the New Normal: Adapt or Die!



Don't be afraid. Evolve instead.

Salespeople all over the world are currently facing one of the biggest challenge for generations.

It's one that is draining us physically, mentally, socially and economically, and it pre-dates the global pandemic we find ourselves in the midst of.

The issue is with selling.

In a traditional sense, sales methods have drastically changed. People say the skill is dying a death, which isn't strictly true. But it would be hard to argue that hard selling methods have all but capitulated to caricatures of a world we've left behind.

Taking a look at the dramatised picture of sales and believing in its truth, is a bit like watching Gladiator, and for a moment or two imagining you're in the Colosseum yourself; it may be a romantic idea but it's far away from the reality of today.

Yes, classics such as 'Glengarry Glen Ross', 'Boiler Room' and (of course) 'The Wolf of Wall Street', are fun to watch, but no longer have a correlation to the real-world.

Yet, some people – correction – so many people don't seem to have got the memo!

The reason we here at CPL Specialist Talent are documenting this, is for some hope of salvation. These 'old school' tactics are giving all salespeople a bad name. Causing traffic and noise which, in turn, makes it hard for those who are adding real value to be identified.

It's leading us all into a vicious circle where all clients paint all sales professionals with the same brush!

What in sales has changed? Well, here's what we think, and why it has changed.

What in sales has changed?

- **There is too much noise** – buyers don't know who the real deal is and who isn't, so their starting point is: "Trust no-one!"
- **Transactional selling has lost its value** – companies have two choices: commoditise your business or move up the value chain
- **Social selling has become vital** – people care how you fit into the ecosystem and what your brand stands for

Why has it changed?

- **Consumers have more choice, and power** – the information age has made it very easy to find competitors, reviews and comparisons service and products
- **Transparency and openness** – social media has led to normal people wanting to deal with normal people, the veneer has been lifted and the desire for authenticity and substance has been amplified
- **You can only be present when your customer wants to buy** – technology has made most services and products available on a just-in-time basis instead of a just-in-case basis, therefore, you can no longer 'sell to anyone'

Reflecting on these points, Sydney Sloan, CMO of leading global sales engagement platform, Salesloft had this to add.

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“Sellers have to meet buyers on their terms, wherever they are. And today, it’s all digital. Sellers need to think about engaging customers how and when they want, leveraging digital touchpoints like LinkedIn, Email, chat, and phone. And it has to be relevant and personalized. Generic messaging-for-all doesn’t work anymore.

Successful salespeople today are highly consultative and collaborative. They understand the unique needs of individuals in the buying committee and know how to bring them together to deliver the best solution. Relevance, succinctness, and delivering insights in every interaction is what will win the business and the customer for life. Personalizing just 20% of your email results in 2x higher response rates.

It’s better to respond quickly than perfectly. Waiting a day to respond to a prospect increases the average time to opportunity by 9 days.”



If you are trying to be a Jordan Belfort, you need to stop watching movies and start adapting...



How can we adapt?

- **Consumers have more choice** – but so do salespeople – the information age has also provided sales businesses with better information with which to get to know their customers
- **Design your customer journey** – A-Z cold calling is dead, target your customers intentionally, build your approach and don’t sell on the first call
- **Build your online reputation** – use social media to your advantage, build your presence and show an interest. If you want to work with a company show you know them, read their content, make constructive comments and engage with them
- **Add genuine value** – if you target a sector, know the sector, understand the macros; engage in the community, create awareness – be in that ecosystem!
- **Use technology to multiply your brand awareness** – once you’ve built credibility, demonstrated authenticity... become available. So, when your customer is ready to buy, you are right there ready to deliver

Here's what Darren Westall, Founder of the brand building tool, Paiger, has the following insights on front.

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“LinkedIn has recently changed its algorithm to use “dwell time”, which it uses to indicate whether your post is worthy of showing to everyone you’re connected to, or your followers. With this change, it means sharing engaging, valuable content is more important than ever before – gaming the algorithm to show your sales pitch isn’t possible - it’s like the early days of SEO when Google stopped using the META tags of a website and moved to a much more dynamic approach.

The only way to get value from LinkedIn is to give value yourself. It’s not enough to connect with people and then send a message introducing yourself and your service/product - that is the same as cold calling. Ineffective, unscalable and brand-damaging in the longer-term.

There is a popular website tracking service that has had this problem, in the circles of marketers that I am in the brand has been tarnished because of their sales approaches, in the short term it helped them to get users but in the long term it has stagnated growth and has a hugely negative impact amongst their customer base.

LinkedIn can be such a powerful sales tool when used correctly though. 93% of all of Paigers users can be attributed in some way to our LinkedIn activity, and for our clients, they’re seeing 10% of their website traffic coming from LinkedIn (via Paiger - <https://www.paiger.co/case-studies>). This traffic is highly targeted as it’s coming from the connections of their salespeople. The people they connected to, the people they want to prospect.

When you couple delivering valuable content to your target market & driving that traffic to a website that is set up to convert; you will see your sales funnel be filled with good quality MQLs but here is the kicker. It’ll only work if your salespeople are active on the platform, deliver value and buy-in to the longer-term ROI. If you’re still judging LinkedIn’s ROI based on a month, you’re better off hitting those phones.”

The Do’s

1

Build awareness. Connect with your target audience – become industry experts in your field by sharing and creating relevant content

2

Create credibility. Show a genuine interest in your ecosystem, engage in what your customer does and the sector they serve – knowledge, renown, belief, ideas

3

Put yourself out there. Don’t be afraid to be bold, share your values and find alignment

The Dont’s

1

SELL, SELL, SELL! Don’t call incessantly from a private number and try to force a sell on the call there and then (even if you close one deal, you’ll lose 10x more in the people you annoy)

2

Send ‘war and peace’. Don’t write an essay on your intro the second someone accepts your invite in LinkedIn. We’re all overwhelmed with info, don’t drown your customer

3

Refuse to change. Avoid using the exceptions when you do close on the first call, to convince yourself that nothing has changed and keep acting like a Jordan Belfort wannabe

Lisa Addison is a business growth and sales expert with marketing and brand origins at Coca-Cola and McDonalds and most recently Chief Growth Officer of Digital Growth Consulting, she offers her views on this matter.

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“Sales is about respect and testing yourself.

Have respect for the process and delivering a quality service. Do the right thing and respect your customer.

The more salespeople show dignity, surety and empathy in their roles, the faster they will succeed. Knowledge matters, but honesty, assertiveness and ethics when negotiating is priceless. It brings authenticity and rapport with the client; and ultimately, victory for both sides.”

A few rules!

1. Size matters...

People working in small, unknown companies (all salespeople must work in one!) who can originate deals from nothing are gold-dust; they're true hunters. It's a real skill; selling in global corporates is showing up with a pen.

Start-up and scale-up folks uncover a stone and find a deal. They have to be smart; they can't rely on a black book. I ask salespeople "what if you lost the black book? How do you start from scratch?". You better have the skill at building from nothing. That's real entrepreneurial ability.

2. Age matters, too

Been the first person selling in a small firm? Young, no legacy companies need chutzpah, energy, verve, agility of mind and bravado. If you can sell here, you are a winner. I highly recommend it. There's no training ground and you learn on your feet. Importantly, you learn humility... there's no hand holding.

3. Functional expertise

I often ask and get asked by CEOs how to hire the best sales teams. Most come to me with a problem: "My sales team isn't working. Is it about process? What KPIs should I use?"

So, back to empathy and respect: the CEO needs to exhibit these traits too.

I ask if they know how to sell, most blush! Do they know what good looks like? What a hunter is? I usually receive a glazed look...

Most technology CEOs do not understand sales or salespeople. They must hire a sales expert; this is often not a head-hunter.

4. Don't overdo it on LinkedIn

I have bags of empathy and will usually give salesperson a chance. I feel for them; despite thinking they're probably going to sell to me, I'll listen.

But, don't shame yourself. To my esteemed peer's point, please don't oversell on LinkedIn.

It's truly cheapening, and it is brand damaging.

From the horrific automated messages upon connection, to the follow up emails the next day, to COVID-related excuses; it's too much. Complete strangers shouldn't ask if someone's family is doing well while selling! It's a shattering cringe.

There is never an excuse to sell on LinkedIn. Instead, do the hard-graft and hard yards of proper sales planning, prospecting, engaging, developing rapport and earning your commission. No short-cuts. Yes, it's highly-tempting, but don't do it.

Moreover, LinkedIn is a personal platform, not a business tool, right? If I were buying something, I'd have already reached out to market for what I want.



Like the idea of social selling but not giving up cold calling altogether? Mark Gaisford, Co-Founder of RedSprout Media believes social selling is actually there to complement cold calling.

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“Social selling is a technique where you allow people to get to know you before they decide to buy from you. Naturally, we’re more inclined to buy from people we trust and like. By having a strong presence on social media, opening up and showing your personality, you’ll be letting people get to know you and they’ll like you. Your prospects will be much more receptive. They’ll already know who you are when you call them up, making that cold conversation much more comfortable and effective.”

Social selling is a longer game and takes commitment. It will secure you the big clients, but it’ll take time. For it to work, you must be consistent on social media and show authenticity – don’t use social media to push sales messages. You must consider your target prospects, what content they want to consume and how you can get your brand across in a subtle way.

Social media has changed, in particular LinkedIn. LinkedIn used to be all about business. Now, it’s still a professional platform, but it’s more human. You’ll get the occasional user who’s convinced this isn’t the case; leaving comments like ‘this isn’t Facebook’ on a personal post. But it’s these people who will get left behind.

LinkedIn offers a world of opportunity to generate inbound leads and make those cold calls easier. It’s like walking into a networking event, full of your target clients. They’re there, they’re willing to listen to you. You just have to say the right things. Like any ‘real life’ networking or conversation, it takes two to tango. Use LinkedIn to share information about you and your life, and contribute to other people’s post where they’re doing the same.

We must always adapt our approach to stay ahead to win new business. ‘Wining and dining’ was the relationship builder of times past; now it’s engaging online, offering value and contributing to others in return. And the best bit? No massive bar bills. It’s all free. It just takes commitment.”

So, there you have it, if you weren't convinced yet, hopefully you are convinced now.

The days of a sociopathic egomaniac telling you must close on every call is over.

This isn't bad news, this is great news, its paints a very bright future on how sales will be done. how we no longer need to treat our customer like the enemy and instead be like a friend they can trust, no longer do we need to shove our "solutions" down people's throats but simply be there when they need us.

Most of all, no longer do we need to be KPI mad robots hiding behind a fake phone accent, we can finally just be human, or perhaps be more human.

In the end ABC is still the golden rule in sales, but today it stands for something else...

"Always Be Communicating"



Notes on the Authors

About Affi Khan



Affi Khan is an experienced entrepreneur and leader in the staffing market in the UK. A start up specialist with extensive experience in launching, building, scaling and exiting sales focused, recruitment businesses in rapidly changing niche markets.

Affi credits a large proportion of his success in building recruitment businesses on a pioneering sales training program which he created in 2013 and which won the FSB award for "Best training Program in London" in 2014. Using a 'Just in Time' model utilising a decentralised and collaborative platform, he leveraged his experience with Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) to create a program which to date has seen over 200 recruiters trained successfully through it.

Affi Khan

CEO of CPL UK – Tech & Health

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About Jack Fox



Jack is Co-Founder of CPL Specialist Talent, a talent partner who use cutting edge recruitment technology to ensure the most thorough sales pipeline management of clients in the technology sector across the UK. Using the most effective practises and technology to communicate with our clients and candidates in a multi-channel fashion to reach them how and where they like, at the times that suit them best. A true partnership powered service with human touch allowing us to connect people in the most time-efficient way.

Jack is a law graduate with experience in the healthcare and technology recruitment sectors and is currently in the process of building a 360 team of recruitment consultants working with the best people and the best companies in the UK tech market. As well as loving systems and processes, Jack is a lover of taking long walks around the house and office on the phone and has a tendency to try to optimise whatever he can get his hands on, this has led to him to having a very satisfied customer and candidate base and an extremely tidy desk.

Jack Fox

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About CPL



CPL Specialist Talent is a part of CPL UK; a group of specialist talent businesses which service the science, technology, engineering, mathematics and health sectors across the UK.

Together we form the UK footprint for CPL Resources Plc which is one of the largest staffing companies in Europe. As a group we've been powering businesses by providing specialist tech talent for over 30 years and has been listed on the London Stock Exchange since 1999.

We built CPL Specialist Talent to create a true talent partner who could look beyond placements and work with our customers purpose, to align and adapt our 6 different solutions to meet all needs. In a hyper changing world, our offering evolves with you.

Notes on the Contributors

About Lisa Addison – Chief Revenue Officer, Digital Growth Consulting



Lisa is a catalytic business grower.

She has escalated SME, start-ups and scale-ups for 20 years – helping to grow and exit 3 businesses being in-house.

Now a passionate, straight-talking, revenue expert, she advocates a firm, directional and strategic approach to sales growth – hunters and confident risk-takers are most welcome.

She has consulted to 100 scale-ups over the decades – from early stage marketing strategy, analytics, data science and SaaS businesses, through DeepTech, AI and blockchain-based firms – in FinTech, RegTech, HealthTech, InsurTech, MarTech, SportTech, and beyond.

About Mark Gaisford – Co-Founder of RedSprout Media



Mark Gaisford is the Co-Founder of RedSprout Media, an inbound marketing agency.

Mark has built a company practicing what he preaches, solely based on inbound marketing leads he has built a large client base of specialist recruitment companies, he has also generated a network of over 50,000 contacts on LinkedIn – as the company has been recognised as one of the best for social media.

RedSprout focuses on helping companies reduce their reliance on cold-calls and increase their leads through quality content marketing.

About Paiger



Paiger is a tool used by salespeople, recruiters and marketers to build their personal and company brand on LinkedIn. You can find out more at www.paiger.co

About SalesLoft



SalesLoft is the provider of the #1 Sales Engagement platform, helping organisations like MuleSoft, Cisco, and Zoom, generate more revenue and deliver better experiences to their customers. With offices in Atlanta, London, New York, Indianapolis, San Francisco, and Guadalajara, Mexico, SalesLoft is frequently recognised for its award winning culture and customer experience. The platform enables revenue teams to execute, coach and deliver insight throughout the entire deal cycle, empowering them to deliver great buying experiences to customers. For more information on SalesLoft and how to deliver a better sales experience, visit www.salesloft.com.

