

# 5 Key Sales Trends to Consider Within your 2018 Sales and Marketing Strategy and Plan

**This article outlines some of the key trends to consider when embarking on developing your 2018 Sales (and Marketing) Strategy and Plan**

## 1. The convergence of sales and marketing

The traditional separation of sales and marketing is no longer an option for companies to consider. The lines between these two functions have been merging for many years now. These lines have become even more blurred by the explosion of on-line and mobile communication channels and the increasing demands of modern age buyers who expect an easy, fast and personalised approach. The role of marketing has rapidly evolved in recent years. Digital marketing techniques are creating more customer connections and are filling the middle of the sales funnel – a space that was traditionally serviced by sales people. For great success, sales and marketing functions must merge under one department and develop joint plans that focus on putting the customer at the heart of the business. Merging these two functions will remove legacy rivalry, create a cross-pollination of skills, increase focus on the customer and significantly improve productivity and results.

## 2. Personalisation of approach

The recent change in consumer buying habits is rapidly changing expectations of B2B customers. Organisations that are delivering highly personalised consumer services such as Uber, Spotify, Netflix and Amazon are making B2B customers expect a fast, easy and personalised approach to buying. A cold call or a generalised blanket email is no longer acceptable and therefore low value and ineffective sales techniques. In today's environment there is a rich source of customer data pouring in from social media, emails and the many client interactions that can be exploited. Navigating this colossal amount of data in order to identify customer preferences and buying patterns requires the full support of marketing and analytical expertise. Marketing are key to helping sales personalise their message and approach. Organisations that are not investing in developing personalised digital and face to face experiences are missing a massive opportunity to win more loyal customers.

## 3. Embracing the power of social networks

Social media has now become a core part of modern day culture that organisations can no longer ignore. Teenagers are the top users of social media platforms and will go on to fully expect communications to be delivered and received in the digital environment. In today's environment you can't afford to toy or dabble with your social media activity. Getting it right pays real dividends but demands a huge investment in time, which is a huge expense to any organisation. People can waste hours of time engaging with social media for very little return. Therefore adopting a strategic approach to your social media activity, investing in upskilling sales people in digital marketing techniques and exploiting technology to harvest personal networks and drive productivity are all worthy strategies to consider.

## 4. Technology that enables sales force productivity

The explosion of digital communication and the volume of connected devices in the world has created new ways for businesses to serve their customers. Artificial Intelligence can now handle the sales process, big data drives decision making, messaging Apps are used for personalised communication and video will continue to permeate into the sales environment. Tablets, iPhones and iPads will all continue to have their place. Cloud based CRM technology has significantly improved sales and marketing productivity and has created an environment where the accumulation of customer data is becoming automatic and delivered in real time. Leading CRM systems have blurred the lines between sales and marketing and are providing solutions that allow businesses to fully integrate customer data onto a single platform. Smart use of technology will allow sales force interactions to become increasingly focused on delivering value and insight to the customer. The challenge for many organisations will be gaining a balance of sales force automation and personalised selling. Remember technology solutions are only as good as the data behind it – you need an effective data backbone as dirty data will prevent you from gaining valuable insights and making smart decisions.

## 5. The shift towards adaptive selling

Adaptive selling is the opposite of formula selling and is based on an approach that the act of selling is personalised and adaptive to the type of customer and the sales situation. It's an approach where sales people adjust their style in response to understanding what is going to work in the best interest of the customer. It a favourable approach as customers are becoming fatigued by known formula selling techniques, they are frustrated by the relentless interruptions and unsolicited emails and annoyed by random desperate phone calls and polite requests for fifteen minute chats. In todays environment sales people need to develop the skills and attitude that will help them alter and adapt their sales behaviour during each customer interaction. It requires a sales person to use their judgement and humility and not be slave to a prescribed sales formula. Sales people using an adaptive approach endeavour to fully understand their buyer's situation and state of mind and they remain focused on developing meaningful relationships with customers that add value and don't cause irritation or frustration.