

Does Social Media Help Salespeople Sell?

Dallas, Texas, May 9, 2012. Facebook[®]. LinkedIn[®]. Social media technologies have radically re-shaped how we interact. But do they help salespeople sell?

During the Paleolithic snail mail era, “reaching out” meant writing letters, sending faxes or making phone calls. But, now many people consider those formerly sovereign communication tools “antiquated inefficiencies” that are not likely to BBS (be back soon). We reach out to others today at the speed of thought through a cacophony of buzzing cyphers, coded symbols and quirky abbreviations. Social scientists claim social media is now the principal means teens use to communicate with one another. Some researchers report, BTW (by the way), that social media has now even dethroned pornography as the reigning king of web-based activity. OMG (Oh, my God!)

Social media is also being rapidly deployed by sales-driven organizations seeking faster access to new customers with less dependence on inefficient F2F (face-to-face) prospecting and selling. But, does it help their salespeople sell?

Not according to results of two surveys presented at the 2012 annual convention of the Southwestern Psychological Association in Oklahoma, City. Some salespeople consider it a CWOT (complete waste of time). The survey, reported by behavioral scientists Trelitha R. Bryant and George W. Dudley at Behavioral Sciences Research Press in Dallas, Texas, was presented April 13, 2012. Bryant and Dudley asked 4,768 salespeople (67% men, 33% women, average age 40) in more than 1,000 U.S. companies and across industries, which form of client communication is most effective for generating new sales. The salespeople were surveyed during a standard assessment protocol for sales professionals which included the Sales Preference Questionnaire (SPQ*GOLD[®]), a psychological test used worldwide to detect patterns of emotional discomfort associated with prospecting for new business.

Almost 70% (+/-1%) said established forms of communication (face-to-face and telephone contact) were most helpful for generating new sales. Only 10% (+/-14%) claimed email was most effective and less than 10% said other forms of communication such as texting are most effective. Results were not related to age.

“Further analyses uncovered another relationship,” principle investigator, Bryant, said. “Salespeople saying email and texting is most effective could also be struggling with sales call reluctance[®], an emotional impediment to production consisting of apprehension, conflict, hesitation or avoidance specifically associated with sales prospecting. They had elevated patterns of prospecting distress on eleven of twelve distinct forms of sales call reluctance measured by SPQ*GOLD[®].” “That may help explain their preference for more indirect prospecting methods,” Dudley added. “Paradoxically, in an earlier study, we discovered that approximately 5-7% of the people currently working in sales prefer not to talk to anyone. For them, social media may be more escape than opportunity.”

To confirm their results, the research team completed a follow-up study of 1,512 additional salespeople (64% male; 36% female, average age 40). The outcome was essentially the same.

“The second study confirmed what we learned in the first,” Bryant said, “including the link with sales call reluctance. Computer-mediated social media may help find a date, keep tabs on old friends or support a political campaign. But, most salespeople don’t think it’s as helpful as conventional person-to-person contact for generating new sales. The results of these two surveys do not categorically find that social media cannot be an effective sales tool. They could simply reflect the most recent example of sales organizations uncritically rushing to adopt a new technology before adequately studying probable effectiveness, influence on other policies and procedures and perhaps most importantly, the readiness of their salespeople to use it comfortably and effectively.”

About Behavioral Sciences Research Press

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