

How the Sales Process Has Drastically Evolved to Fit the Future

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This article was written by Molly Miles Rizer, a member of the Entrepreneur NEXT powered by Assemble content team. Entrepreneur NEXT is our Expert solutions division leading the future of work and skills-based economy. If you're struggling to find, vet, and hire the right Experts for your business, Entrepreneur NEXT is a platform to help you hire the experts you need, exactly when you need them. From business to marketing, sales, design, finance, and technology, we have the top 3 percent of Experts ready to work for you.

I landed my first sales job in 2001. At that time, I spent the workday in my car, calling on both existing clients and prospects. I was taught to seek out new clients and I wasn't particular about what businesses I approached. My "sales kit" included piles of marketing collateral espousing the benefits of my product over those of my competitors. I managed to get in front of a lot of people, but they weren't necessarily the decision makers. At that time, quantity of calls was my goal and I wasn't often considering targeted calls to ensure the prospect needed my solution. I imagine my hit rate was in the neighborhood of 25 percent. I was young, energetic, driven—and spinning my wheels.

Technology hasn't just changed the sales process for the sales rep, it has changed the process for the buyer. And to be

successful now, sales reps need to let go of the outdated sales tactics and embrace a new process—led by the buyer. Buyers now have access to a wealth of information via the internet and they're researching solutions rather than relying on sitting through sales pitches.

The number one problem shared among entrepreneurs today is finding, vetting, hiring, and retaining expertise.

Begin by reframing your view of the sales process. Smart business development professionals are using inbound marketing to attract new clients with rich, targeted content and data. Identifying your ideal customer and delivering engaging content are key. Well-timed information is compelling for buyers in need of solutions and you want to be the one who provides it.

Roughly two-thirds of marketers report content marketing is effective for their business. Where do you begin?

Take a look at your website.

Do you have case studies on your website? Start small and write a piece about a successful client experience. Include words from your client and specific examples of problems your team has solved. Do this well and prospective clients can identify similar opportunities to use your services within their organizations.

Be smart about enhancements and placing content on your website. If you're not well-versed in website design, this might be a good time to bring in some support. Look at this as an opportunity to create your best impression. Whether your site only needs a little polish, or you have to start over, this is your time to craft your ideal appearance.

Your blog probably needs work, too.

Do you even have a blog? When was the last time you updated it? Are you blogging about relevant topics?

There are many benefits to blogging. Perhaps the most crucial benefit is the opportunity to not only attract new clients but to further engage (read, “repeat buyers”) existing clients. Your blog keeps your company in front of an existing audience, giving you the opportunity to tout new products and services, success stories and business enhancements.

Invest some time in developing a blog schedule and determine your topics ahead of time. Leave room for some lighter content to give readers a peek into your organization’s culture. Elevate a partner business with a post about how your teams collaborate. Create a space where your teammates can write about what’s special about what they do for the organization—it might be a welcome creative outlet for them.

Make yourself follow a routine of publishing posts and it will get easier as you do it more often.

Retool your social media channels.

Are you posting relevant content on each channel or are you in the habit of using the same content no matter the platform? For example, what works on Instagram needs massaging to work on LinkedIn. Take the time to think about your audiences and make content decisions that make sense. It may make sense to choose only one channel for a post, but in doing so, you’re embracing quality over quantity and refining your important message.

Provide resources online.

Again, we’re moving away from traditional sales tactics. Give

your audience resources with little to no commitment. You're not giving away all your expertise for free—you are giving your audience an idea of what they can expect when they work with your team.

Establish yourself as an expert in your field with white papers your visitors can download by simply signing up for your newsletter, and make sure you follow up with a scheduled newsletter.

Collaborate with an expert in a parallel industry and invite your online network to a webinar where you discuss current trends in your markets. Bonus: You get access to the other expert's network in addition to your own.

Video is another fantastic tool for attracting and keeping customers. You don't need to be an expert to create videos, but you will need to formulate a list of relevant topics and scripts.

When in doubt, reach out.

You may decide to hire an expert to get started. There are many agencies focusing solely on inbound marketing and working with them can get you set up and keep you moving forward if you employ them to maintain your strategy.

You can also tap your existing network and best clients for insight. What do they look for when researching solutions online? What social media channels do they use regularly? Do they use inbound marketing and has it been successful?

Heraclitus said, "change is the only constant in life." As you grow in your marketing or sales career, you have to be nimble to succeed. Take the time to research inbound marketing trends and be open to adjusting your role in the journey

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