



WHITE PAPER

Social Selling

An Overview for Sales Executives

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Sales in the Era of Social Media

The need for social selling stems from a fundamental shift in the way people buy goods and services in an online world. Simply put, today's purchasers are better informed and far better connected, thanks to social media. Consider the buying process as it exists today:

1. Awareness

Buyers stay aware of their needs through online connections with industry groups or communities of practice. For example, they follow thought leaders and experts on Twitter who keep them up-to-date with industry news and trends. On LinkedIn, they participate in open, substantive discussions with people who work in the same positions at other companies. Additional content flows in from other social networks, blogs and forums, informing their workplace discussions and framing their understanding of business issues.

2. Consideration

When they begin to look for a solution to their problems, buyers don't contact a vendor. Instead, they reach out to their colleagues and peers on social media for

recommendations, or research companies with a quick Google search that opens up a digital universe of reviews, testimonials and complaints. An IBM sales study found that 75% of their B2B buyers were likely to use social media to influence their purchasing decisions.

3. Transaction

By the time buyers engage with a live salesperson, most of their buying process is already complete. More often than not, buyers actually experience an informational advantage over sellers. At this point, they've come to their own conclusions and they can define the scope of their conversations. Salespeople want to have strategic discussions, but they end up talking about features and price points.

Social selling is the use of social media to increase revenue and sales team productivity.



This change in the buying process requires a strategic response from sales organizations. Success now depends on reaching buyers at the right times, while knowing more about them and their needs than they know about you and your product. That's where social selling delivers. Sales teams that practice social selling are hitting their quotas, achieving shorter sales cycles, and retaining more customers — all because they're better informed and more engaged with buyers at the critical moments of the decision-making process.

Take a holistic approach

It's not enough for your reps to set up profiles on LinkedIn. Effective social sellers monitor and participate on multiple social networks, taking advantage of the unique strengths of each of them. By taking a holistic approach to social selling, your sales team can gain industry insights, build reputations as trusted advisors, and connect with prospects and customers when it matters most.

Integrate social media into your team's workflow

Social sellers don't have to throw away their phones or stop sending emails. Actually, they become far more productive on these channels when they start using social media to monitor their prospects and gain warm introductions. In other words, social selling isn't a new sales engine, it's a fuel additive to supercharge revenue generation.

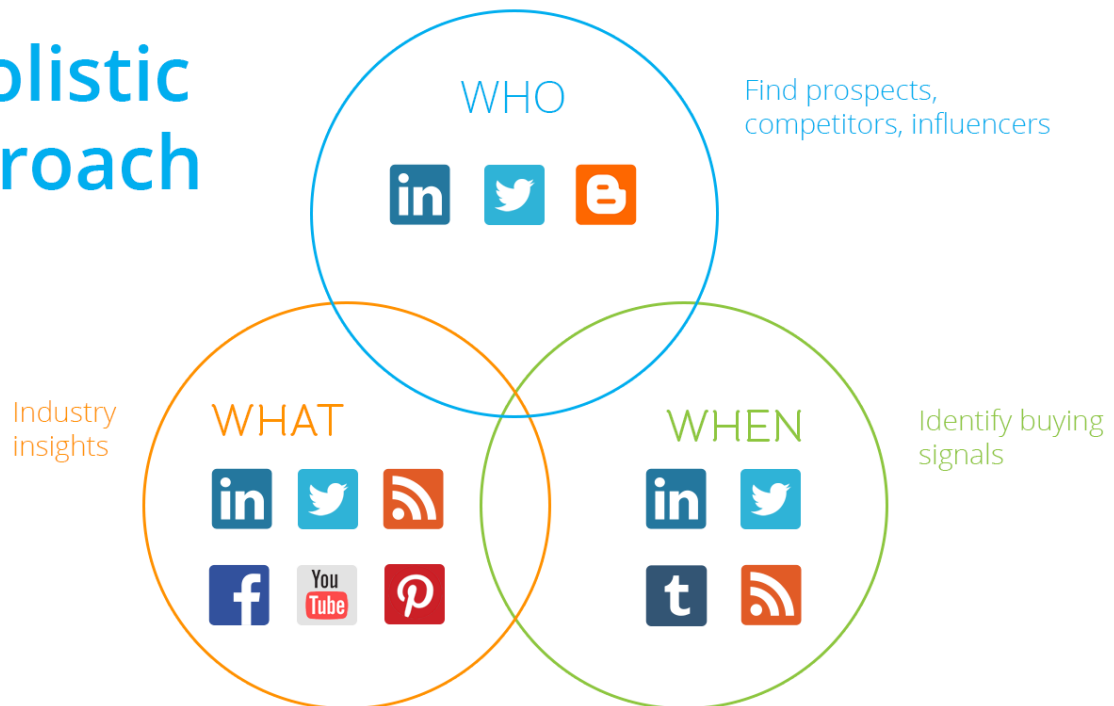
Global sales processes using social media show a 10% increase in revenue.

McKinsey & Dachis Group

This white paper will explain how your organization can use social selling to grow revenue through 3 key outcomes:

- More and Better Leads
- A Shorter Sales Cycle
- Greater Customer Lifetime Value

A Holistic Approach



1. More and Better Leads

Much of the buying process occurs before customers reach out to salespeople, but that doesn't mean it's happening behind closed doors. In fact, quality leads are in plain sight on social media. They're talking about their business needs, asking questions about issues in your industry, revealing intelligence about their own companies, and reaching out to their peers for advice.

Recognize Buying Signals

Buying signals are expressions of purchase intent or indications that a company is putting itself in a position to buy. Potential customers are generating these signals in real-time on Twitter, LinkedIn Groups, and other social networks, as well as blogs and forums. Therefore, it's important that your sellers take a holistic approach to social listening and not limit themselves to one social network.

Early stage buying signals:

- Questions about a business problem
- Frustration with a competitor's solution
- Announcement of a new senior management hire
- Geographic expansion
- An addition to the board of directors that indicates a new strategic direction

Late stage buying signals:

- A request for pricing information
- Engagement with a competitor's salesperson

Monitor your competitors:

- Their corporate social media handles
- Their customer support handles
- Their lead devs
- Their sales engineers
- Their reps
- Their account managers

Get Noticed as an Industry Expert

Today's sophisticated buyers want to speak with people who can provide value in a consultative role, not one-dimensional sellers who can only read them a brochure. If your team wants call-backs from customers while they're still developing awareness, your salespeople need to be knowledgeable, recognized, and trustworthy.

Monitor social media to gain domain knowledge

- Listen to LinkedIn Groups and web forums to understand changing customer needs.
- Follow subject matter experts on social media and blogs to keep track of industry trends.

Create an online persona as a trusted advisor

- Maintain a presence on multiple social networks, not just LinkedIn.
- Create customer-centric social media profiles that are focused on what you can do for customers.
- Be available in real-time to handle questions from prospects and customers.

Share valuable content to establish credibility

- Leverage curated content from Marketing to post to social networks and communities.
- Stay on-brand with consistent messaging.
- Share industry specific news and insights.

“Before LinkedIn and other social networks, in the sales world, ABC stood for Always Be Closing. Now, ABC means Always Be Connecting, because your connections lead to your next lead and your next close.”

Jill Rowley, Social Selling Evangelist at Oracle

2. A Shorter Sales Cycle

Social selling methods will help your salespeople move deals through the pipeline faster, freeing them up to move on to new prospects and lowering your acquisition costs.

90% of CEOs don't respond to cold emails or cold calls.

Insideview

Reach Decision Makers Faster

Your sales reps are spending a huge amount of their time trying to connect with decision makers. Right now, most of their efforts to begin a dialogue with prospects are probably ignored, especially if they're trying to go straight to the top. Meanwhile, potential customers are on social media asking questions about industry topics and expressing frustration about your competitors. When your salespeople respond to these open invitations, they'll make personal contact much more quickly and start developing leads into opportunities.

Form social connections with decision makers and buying teams

- Follow prospects via multiple networks to discover common interests and other personal information that can turn cold calls into warm calls.
- Comment on prospects' social media posts and share relevant content to initiate relationships.
- Use LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook to leverage shared contacts for introductions and move higher up the buying organization.
- Connect with gatekeepers and influencers before they can delay or kill a deal.

Move Sales Through Your Pipeline

An influx of quality leads from social media will only translate into more revenue if your organization can move them through the sales pipeline. Social selling methods will allow your salespeople to spend less time tracking down people who aren't in a buying situation and more time advancing deals with those who are. With better intelligence about the status of your pipeline, you'll be able to forecast performance more accurately and allocate resources strategically.

Increase the capacity of your reps

- Generate more leads and opps in less time by prospecting on social media.
- Eliminate wasteful cold calls and maximize research productivity.
- Stay in touch with more opportunities and stay better informed about all of them.

Manage your pipeline with better information

- Integrate social media monitoring into your CRM workflow to keep lead records up to date with the latest intelligence.
- Quickly qualify leads by connecting with decision makers sooner.

The average B2B buying group includes 5.4 people.

CEB

3. Greater Customer Lifetime Value

At its core, social selling is about moving away from a purely transactional relationship with customers and toward a consultative partnership. When your sales organization adds social selling techniques to its sales process, your reps will be able to spend more time on activities that really create value for buyers. By building stronger relationships with customers, you won't just make quota this quarter, but create a foundation for sustained revenue growth year after year.

- ✓ More upselling opportunities
- ✓ More cross-selling opportunities
- ✓ Better renewal rates

Educate Customers

Social sellers are able to find customers near the beginning of their buying cycle, when they can be challenged to think strategically. By taking control of the customer conversation early on, your salespeople can expand the scope of discussions. Then, over the course of the purchase process, they can continuously monitor their prospects, educating them with relevant content at critical times.

- Leverage curated content from Marketing to provide relevant material to individual prospects.
- Share relevant industry news and insights to keep prospects informed on key industry trends.

Make Bigger Deals

If your salespeople use social selling techniques to position themselves as trusted advisors before negotiations even begin, customers will look to them for help and be far more receptive to complementary product offerings. Intelligence from social media monitoring will also allow your sellers to understand the pain points and politics within buying companies, so they can expand their sphere of influence and grow deals horizontally.

- Monitor social networks to identify upsell opportunities with current customers.
- Connect with cross-function influencers to expand deals into new departments and locations.

Retain Your Customers

Social media allows salespeople and account managers to provide value to customers even after closing deals, during periods that are traditionally dark. By monitoring client companies on social networks, your organization will:

- Discover opportunities to re-engage and discuss business outcomes.
- Recognize attrition signals such as complaints or requests for recommendations.
- Find out when competitors are making connections with your customers.

About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting [enterprise.Hootsuite.com](https://enterprise.hootsuite.com)

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