The Definitive Guide to Social Selling

A Hootsuite White Paper

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Social selling—the use of social media to increase revenue and sales team productivity—is an inevitable consequence of social buying. At this point, sales managers don't have to make a decision to adopt social media, because their customers have already made it for them.

Over the past decade, your customers have become socially empowered, highly informed decision makers. Consumers and B2B purchasers alike are leveraging social media to find deals, research products, and make recommendations. Their new market-making power has upended traditional marketing and sales practices, especially among companies paying close attention.

The good news for sales organizations is that social selling isn't a clean break from traditional selling; it's an evolutionary step forward. Social sellers do not have to abandon email, phone calls or face-to-face meetings. Instead, their time on these traditional channels becomes far more productive when supported by

deliberate use of social media. Social selling eliminates some of the most wasteful parts of the traditional sales process (like cold-calling) and enhances the activities that good salespeople already do to create wins and drive revenue.

Perhaps the greatest misconception about social selling is that it entails making sales pitches through social media. In reality, a social seller uses networks like LinkedIn and Twitter to find potential customers, relate to their needs, and engage with them. When appropriate, they can move the process forward through email, a real-time medium, or in person.

1. AWARENESS	2. CONSIDERATION	3. TRANSACTION

Social Buying Process	Buyers use social media to actively search and evaluate products and vendors.	Buyers contact salesperson to request a proposal.
Social Selling Response	Salesperson engages early in the buying process, builds a relationship as a trusted advisor, then closes the deal.	

The Pillars of Social Selling

Listen and Learn
Salespeople discover potential leads by monitoring social networks (perhaps in concert with professional sales intelligence services). They map out relationships within prospective companies to determine which decision-makers they should target, leveraging shared contacts for referrals and introductions.

Research and Relate
Today's buyers openly express their aspirations and their needs through social media. For attentive salespeople, this information is manna from heaven. It allows them to discover shared interests or relationships that can turn cold calls into warm introductions. In addition to empathy, social media fosters insight. Because online social profiles make the customer's business needs and the seller's subject knowledge more transparent, the two parties can build a relationship through valuable exchanges of information, not just idle chit-chat.

Social Selling: The use of social media by sales organizations for listening, customer engagement, and internal collaboration—is an inevitable consequence of social buying.

Engage and Impress
Social media allows a sales agent to actively communicate with more accounts and stay better informed about all of them. He or she can keep tabs on customers' social profiles and become aware of trigger events without bothering them with interruptive "follow-up" calls that add little value to either side. When an opportunity for engagement arises, the seller can reach out to the customer through social media or another channel.

Collaborate and Close
B2B sales are organization-to-organization, not just bilateral interactions between sales reps and individual customers. When partnered with solid business practices, social tools strengthen the entire web of relationships involved in sales, making the selling process as collaborative as the modern buying process. Sales representatives can collaborate to research prospects, build referrals, and discover cross-selling opportunities.

Social Buying

Wikipedia, Google, and countless other online resources have democratized access to information, empowering people to diagnose their own problems and find solutions. In addition, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have made it possible for decision-makers to reach out to peers and experts for advice and receive it almost instantly. The web-enabled, socialized buyer is here to stay.

The New Buying Process

Information asymmetry can give modern buyers an enormous advantage over their counterparts in sales. Professor Neil Rackham, a pioneering researcher of the sales profession, argues that purchasing has "gone through a major revolution" in the past two decades to emerge as a "vibrant strategic force" in business. [1] Recent developments, including social media, have only accelerated the revolution. The biggest question for Rackham is how and when people on the sales side will react.

"The average company today can access 20 times as much information about you and your competitors as they could access five years ago," says Rackham. "So you're no longer dealing with a customer where ignorance is a factor. Sophistication is the nature of customers today, and you need a sophisticated salesperson to be able to handle that."[2]

Buyers aren't just more informed, but busier. A 2012 survey by International Data Corporation found that B2B technology buyers receive an average of six phone calls and 14 emails per day from vendors. Since they're inundated with data and sales pitches, it's not surprising that the IDC's respondents return a paltry 10.5% of phone calls and 9% of emails from new vendors.[3] Now that informed buyers can thoroughly research their own options, a call from a new sales representative can be more of a nuisance than a service.

Salespeople who get return calls face another challenge: navigating larger buying teams of stakeholders at prospective companies. The number of people involved in a large technology purchase increased from five in 2010 to seven in 2012.[4] As businesspeople become

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more adept at researching products and services through search engines and social media platforms, more of them participate in complex buying decisions. As Kathleen Schaub of IDC states in CRM Magazine, businesspeople "are bringing technological expertise and very sophisticated consumer habits" to work.[5]

B2B buyers are much like socially empowered consumers—except they're armed with the resources, organization, and profit motive of a corporation. They not only use the same digital tools as consumers to learn about vendors, but can work in teams to methodically acquire, organize, and analyze relevant data.

By facilitating collaboration and information-sharing within purchasing committees and across entire enterprises, social media helps put buyers in control.

Today's business decision-makers begin their purchases by researching products and services online, and by the time they seek out sales professionals, they're well on their way to making a decision. CEB estimates that nearly 60% of the buying process in a complex sale is already complete before prospects are willing to engage with a live salesperson.[6] Forrester pegs the figure even higher, at 70%.[7]

Regardless of the metric, it's clear that buyers have changed their expectations of a salesperson's role in their purchasing decisions. According to one Chief Sales Officer in the CEB study, "Our customers are coming to the table armed to the teeth with a deep understanding of their problem and a well-scoped RFP for a solution. It's turning many of our sales conversations into fulfillment conversations."[8]

One of the reasons that salespeople are on the back foot in their first meetings with B2B customers is that buyers no longer move down the sales and marketing funnel in an orderly, predictable fashion. They take non-linear paths toward making a purchase, reading and sharing a variety of online and offline content which informs their decision-making process. Kim Celestre, senior analyst for B2B social marketing at Forrester, tells AOL Government that IT decision makers "jump in and out of the process of studying and choosing technology solutions. They access multiple digital touch points along their purchasing journey."[9]

The Salesperson's New Role

Ironically, it's the sheer volume of online data that gives sellers an opportunity to create value for buyers. Buyers may be incredibly well-informed, but they're desperate to shorten their purchasing cycles. The more data they have to process, and the more stakeholders they must consult, the longer it takes to make a buying decision.[10]

Although enterprise social networks have had a noticeable impact on interdepartmental collaboration and information-sharing, most companies haven't used them speed up decision-making.[11] Therefore, information-drenched buyers continue to dip their toes in and out of numerous vendors' sales funnels, testing the waters, while sellers wonder when they'll be ready to take the plunge.

If salespeople could deliver insights to buyers at the right times, they could bring purchasing times down and make everybody happy. But if the statistics show that customers aren't interested in picking up the phone until after they've scoped solutions, how can salespeople reach them early and then keep their attention?

The answer is social selling.

- Sellers can use social media to relate to customers and identify opportunities for engagement at the right time: while they're still conceptualizing their needs.

- Social media is asynchronous and non-interruptive, which makes it perfect for reaching buyers who are still kicking tires.

- Social networks help salespeople establish authenticity and credibility online, so customers consult with them instead of deleting their voicemails.

- Continuous participation within relevant social groups allows salespeople to stay visible and valuable throughout their customers' winding, non-linear buying journeys.

In a LinkedIn-commissioned study, Forrester found that social networks are a critical source of influence on decision-makers in every phase of the IT purchase process. In each of the five phases of decision-making, social networks influence nearly half of all IT decision-makers involved in that phase.[12]

Forrester discovered that decision-makers participate on social networks for business in large part because they can learn from a broad network trusted peers and find information quickly. On LinkedIn, for example, groups of decision-makers organize around particular industries and professions to discuss the business issues that matter to them. These conversations are highly influential on their purchasing choices.

Percentage of IT Buyers Influenced by Social Sources, by Decision-Making Stage

Awareness	54%
Scope	45%
Plan	46%
Select	47%
Implement	44%
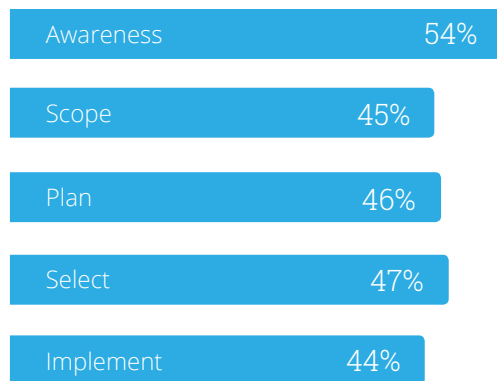
Source: Forrester

The opportunity for sellers is not in hijacking these peer groups for sales pitches, but in being insightful and helpful to buyers at the right time and place. Forrester's respondents cited "relevant context to connect with vendors" as one of the top reasons they use social networks for business, and 73% of them have engaged with a vendor on a social network.

Providing relevant, well-targeted content is the best thing a sales representative can do when reaching out to a prospect. During the pre-purchase phases of their decision-making, buyers value consumption of vendor content more than they value sales calls. They feel the most motivation to return a reach out when "the rep has provided me with some type of value in return for my interaction with them" such as a webcast or white paper.[13]

Enterprise Social Technology for Social Selling

Increasingly, sales organizations are adopting social business technologies to enhance their external social activities through better internal collaboration. Many of these social business technologies, including

Hootsuite, are cloud-based Software as a Service (SaaS) applications that have been designed to work not only with social networks like LinkedIn and Twitter, but also with each other. Due to their interoperability and versatility, enterprise social tools can be deployed in a variety of configurations to suit different businesses.

- **Social Media Management Systems (SMMS)** allow salespeople to consolidate social selling activities across multiple social networks and applications into a single convenient platform. SRPs also enable sales professionals to collaborate in social listening and engagement at the team or departmental levels. In addition, they allow organizations to measure the effectiveness and ROI of social selling programs with sophisticated analytics.

- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)** applications can be integrated with an organization's SRP. This enables sales professionals to gather information about a contact's background, interests, and business needs from social media profiles, then bring it to new or existing CRM records. Blending social media into CRM provides sales professionals with more rounded, timely views of customer needs throughout the sales cycle.

- **Marketing Automation** applications allow marketing and sales departments to collaboratively generate and qualify leads from social media. When a marketing automation system is effectively integrated with an SRP, sales and marketing professionals can easily add social media activity to lead records to increase lead scores and qualify them faster.

- **Content Discovery** applications help sales professionals stay up to date with the latest industry developments and find relevant, engaging content to share with their personal social networks. Social sharing helps salespeople demonstrate their subject matter expertise and build meaningful relationships with customers and prospects.

- **Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs)** facilitate information sharing within the sales organization and with other business functions, including marketing and customer service. These internal channels help sales teams collaborate, share best practices, and locate subject matter expertise that they can leverage in customer relationships.

Again, training is fundamental to success. According to Gartner, a "provide and pray" approach to social tools has about a 90% failure rate.[14] With the right combination of people, platform and procedures, however, a sales organization turns its sales reps into social dynamos.

The opportunity for sellers is in being insightful and helpful to buyers at the right time and place.

Empowering the Sales Team

Education is fundamental to success when rolling out social technologies in a sales department. According to Gartner, a "provide and pray" approach to social tools has about a 90% failure rate. [ENDNOTE] Organizations must empower sales representatives with effective training in tools-based skills as well as education in social selling best practices. Sellers must also have a practical understanding of the company's social media policies, especially in regulated industries.

The primary goal of social media education in the sales department should be to operationalize social selling practices. Sales leaders must help their teams move beyond ad hoc use of LinkedIn toward deliberate, integrated use of multiple social networks and tools throughout the sales process. When sales professionals start to leverage social media on a daily basis as part of a regular routine, departments can better measure and optimize these activities to move the needle on lead generation, sales cycle length, and deal size.

To deliver results at the departmental level, a social selling education program must first enable the individual. Today's busy sales professionals are under pressure to make quota and keep up with rapid developments in nearly every industry. By providing them with self-paced, self-assessed education, organizations can empower sellers to develop advanced social selling capabilities without hampering ongoing activities. Many large, distributed sales organizations are now delivering on-demand training through scalable online platforms.

Collaboration with Marketing

Implementation of collaborative social business practices is crucial for both sales and marketing, which need to work more closely than ever to give buyers the right information at the right time.

Content Marketing

If sales managers want their reps to be effective social sellers, they must work with their colleagues in the marketing function on content strategy. Content marketing is now employed by 91% of B2B marketers.

Fortunately, a trend toward in-house production of B2B marketing content indicates that sellers have a chance to collaborate closely with the people who make the content they rely on for engagement. In 2012, the number of B2B marketers creating all of their content in-house increased from 38% to 56%, and just 1% of B2B companies now outsource all of their content creation.[15]

Content segmentation

Since social engagement relies so heavily on providing relevant, custom content, it's important for marketing and sales to conduct an audit of their content library. An audit is a chance for both departments to get on the same page regarding what content works, what needs to be replaced, and what's missing.

Buyer personas. The Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs have found that 71% of the most successful B2B content marketers tailor content to the profile of decision-makers, compared to 41% of those ranked least effective.[16]

Phases of the buying journey. Companies have an opportunity to get ahead of competitors by tailoring content to stages of the buying cycle—only 42% of B2B organizations do so, up from 39% a year ago.[17]

Although marketers must support sales with quality content, potential buyers want to see that sales professionals are knowledgeable in their own right, not just outlets for marketing campaigns. Sellers should not only use their social media profiles to amplify official company messaging. They should also share industry news, third-party reports and any other content that is relevant to the communities they interact with, along with original commentary that establishes their credibility.

How Hootsuite Helps Your Sales Team

Hootsuite enables sales departments to drive revenue from social media and increase productivity throughout the sales process. Sales professionals use Hootsuite to monitor social channels for buying signals, generate qualified leads, share content to build relationships, and close deals faster with real-time insights about prospects and clients.

✔ **More and better leads**

✔ **A shorter sales cycle**

✔ **Greater customer lifetime value**

Hootsuite University
Give your staff the social media education they need to excel as individuals and as a team.

Social Listening
Listen to the real-time conversation and discover opportunities for engagement with existing accounts and new prospects alike. Simultaneously monitor multiple social networks for brand mentions and other keywords, including competitors' names.

Social Sharing
Publish to LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social networks to establish your online persona and make yourself a magnet for buyers. Save time by scheduling your social sharing across multiple networks, leaving more time for account research and real-time contact.

Teamwork
Make social listening into a collaborative process with shared streams, message assignments, and other team functionality. Coordinate with Marketing in Conversations, our back-end communication tool, to ensure that every member of the sales team has the best content for social sharing.

LinkedIn Groups
Set up dedicated streams for every one of your LinkedIn Groups in the Hootsuite dashboard, so you never miss an opportunity to engage. Publish to your LinkedIn profile or a specific group (or all of them at once) from the dashboard or the Hootlet, our browser plugin.

App Directory
Use Hubspot and Needtagger to streamline your social prospecting and coordinate with Marketing. Give your accounts better post-sale support thanks to Hootsuite's seamless integration with Zendesk, Nimble, and other Social CRM apps.

Ecosystem
Hootsuite's ecosystem of partnerships and integrations allows you to discover, qualify, and engage with customers on multiple social networks from a single, customized dashboard. Just as important, Hootsuite's open platform makes it easy to integrate social media into your existing sales tools. Save time and leverage social selling to realize greater value from CRM, Marketing Automation, and the other applications your sales department is already using.

Go Mobile
Listen and engage at any time, in any place. Hootsuite's mobile apps bring your dashboard with you, so you can keep in touch with your accounts even while you're on the road.

> ☑ To find out more, visit enterprise.hootsuite.com

Endnotes

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About Hootsuite Enterprise

Social Media Management

Social Marketing

Social Customer Service

Social Selling

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

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