

Become buyer obsessed for B2B sales success

Who does this describe? – ‘Uncertain, stressed and anxious?’. That’s an easy one, you would say – A salesperson on his first call. Don’t the buyers have it all? They are so well informed and so precisely aware of their needs that they do not engage with the salesperson until the last mile of their purchase journey. 67 percent of the buyer’s journey is now done digitally, says the famously quoted Sirius-Decision statistic.

But wait. Here is a surprise. The truth, in fact, is quite the opposite, suggest Nicholas Toman, Brent Adamson and Cristina Gomez, in a just published Harvard Business Review article *The New Sales Imperative* (HBR March – April 2017). Presenting a counter-intuitive perspective, they cite CEB research to show that buyers, especially those in B2B segment, are anything but self-assured. “Deeply uncertain... stressed ...increasingly overwhelmed... often more paralyzed than empowered” is how the buyers feel, the article says.

What explains this dramatic finding? For one thing, buying complex solutions required in a B2B context was never easy. To this challenge, you add the staggering cache of information to process, the multiplicity of stakeholders to manage and the ever-increasing number of options to choose from. What you have is a near nightmare that slows down the purchase process or stalls it altogether.

CEB Research findings

Where does this leave the sales function? Consider some interesting findings from CEB research that the authors quote:

- The avalanche of information pushes buyers into ‘unproductive, open-ended learning loops’. Sizing up requirements and evaluating options consumes more time and energies of the buyers than ever before
- Number of people involved in B2B purchases is going up as stakeholders are drawn from a wide swathe of functions, roles and even geographies

THE MERCURI VIEW

Mercuri International’s Sales Excellence Survey 2017 found that sales teams of companies that excelled in sales notched up significantly higher scores in having a comprehensive knowledge of their Customer’s business, processes and markets.

The [survey](#) also found that Top performing companies are far ahead at elimination of silos enabling sales to initiate and adopt a cross functional approach with other teams, to address Customer requirements holistically. This was true for top performers across sectors



- The bewildering number of options available today demand higher outlays of evaluation time. This is the tyranny of choice in an internet driven world of buying and selling
- Finally, there is the post purchase angst on whether the buyer has made the right choice. Was there a more attractive option that we ignored? Such second guessing occurs in more than 40 percent of completed B2B purchases, say the authors

The picture that emerges is one of customer's struggling with their buying process

'Responsive' is passe: 'Prescriptive' is in

How can sellers help then? The authors suggest a *'prescriptive'*, rather than a *'responsive'* approach to selling which improves ease of purchasing by as much as 86%, according to them. They define the prescriptive approach like this: *"Prescriptive suppliers give a clear recommendation for action backed by specific rationale; they present a concise offering and a stable view of their capabilities; and they explain complex aspects of the purchase process clearly"*. This helps anticipate and eliminate obstacles early on, conserving buyer time and energy

What it involves

This will involve the following actions

- Meticulously map and understand the buyer's purchase journey
- Identify beforehand the barriers or challenges that might emerge at various stages of the purchase journey
- Design solutions or prescriptions to meet these challenges, equip the sales team with tools to help the buyer overcome such barriers and
- Track the purchase journey so as to intervene wherever necessary for reducing indecision and compelling action

Two critical enablers

For a supplier to be able to implement this approach, will call for two critical 'enablers'. First, sales should reorient their focus from getting Customers to buy to understanding how Customers make their purchase decisions. Second, a tight alignment of sales and marketing to support the Customer's purchase journey, end to end

In the world of B2B sales, it is the obsessed who succeed... the buyer-obsessed, that is.

The full-length Harvard Business Review article on *The New Sales Imperative* is [here](#)

Key Words

Mercuri International
Sales Excellence Survey 2017
Sales Performance Improvement

Annotations
Prescriptive Selling

In Essence
B2B Sales

In Essence annotates published articles of value to the Sales Community. It is an effort to bring insights within reach of Sales Leaders in ways that enable quick assimilation and action. Mercuri International acknowledges the authors and the publications for the insights.



www.mercuri.net