How will your business transform to deliver the digital experiences your customers crave?

Find out how EY and Microsoft can help accelerate your digital strategy and make it a reality.

Your digital world. Realized.
Digital selling: reinventing sales to stay relevant to changing business-to-business buyers

Your customers have walked right past you. It’s time to catch up.

There’s a new reality today in the B2B world: Business buyers are becoming more elusive and behaving like consumers by using self-service digital channels to learn about and purchase products. The sales organization, stuck in the analog world of calls, meetings and conferences, is becoming detached from the digital world buyers prefer. Today’s harder for B2B companies to get customers’ attention, build relationships with them, and create and sustain brand loyalty. That translates into less certain revenue streams and a much higher cost of sale. Sales organizations risk getting left behind as buyers become more self-sufficient in finding information online; bypass the traditional sales process by purchasing directly via digital self-service; and turn to salespeople for help with only their most complex purchasing decisions.

To restore the sales organization’s value and relevance to buyers, sales organizations must reinvent how they sell and embrace the concept of “digital selling.” In other words, sales professionals need to become just as digital as their customers, supported by digital selling Centers of Excellence (COE) that bring together the key skills, technologies, and processes necessary to develop and strengthen relationships with buyers. This wins the customer’s trust, increases revenue and reduces sales costs.

Digital selling helps increase revenue by creating a bigger pipeline with more leads, converting more leads to sales and boosting the average deal size. It helps reduce costs by enabling sales to spend less time finding the right contacts, less time on non-productive activities and less money to onboard high-performing sales teams.

What does digital selling look like?

Digital selling encompasses six core capabilities (Figure 1), each of which includes robust new digital tools—such as Adobe Marketing Cloud, LinkedIn Sales Navigator and Microsoft Dynamics and Power BI—that can boost salespeople’s effectiveness and productivity.

Digital performance management

Helps sales leaders track activities and performance to financial outcomes.

Social network

Support sales to identify leads and the right decision-makers.

Digital sales confidence

Integrate digital capabilities into sales motions.

Understand customer’s agenda and position solutions.

Cross-channel coverage management

Deliver consistent, seamless experiences to maximize revenue opportunities and cost efficiency across channels.

High-value marketing content

Engage with content aligned to the customer’s agenda while reinforcing company brand and key marketing messages.

Figure 1: The six core capabilities of digital selling

Relationship intelligence automation (RIA)

The sheer amount of data available can make it difficult for sales to harness the power of their relationships to establish and strengthen trust with buyers. RIA can help salespeople connect insights from existing internal and external sources of data (Figure 2) to build an intelligent, holistic view of each customer that can form the foundation of a strong relationship and deliver a one-on-one experience at scale. Machine learning can process and analyze data to provide insights that help sales reps understand what’s important to specific customers, fuel meaningful conversations and build trust. Updated customer and sales information is automatically fed into the relationship intelligence engine on an ongoing basis to refine insights and develop new approaches, keeping salespeople in step with current customers and uncovering potentially promising new ones.

High-value marketing content

Consider the traditional buyer decision-making process: awareness, information gathering, evaluation and selection (Figure 3). Historically, marketing owned the first phase, generating awareness, and sales owned the rest. Today, with tools like Adobe Marketing Cloud, marketing is getting more involved in the information-gathering phase, but sales has effectively lost its place in the middle two phases, which customers have taken over for themselves by finding information online. To regain their influence, customers’ information gathering and evaluation, sales must work tightly with marketing to help guide customers through those two phases in the purchase journey. Sales and marketing must work cohesively to not only develop high-value marketing content that’s relevant to sales, but also measure that content’s impact on sales results and use those results to refine content to heighten its importance to customers. With such integration, a company can seamlessly transmit messaging from the big stage in Adobe Marketing Cloud (i.e., overall company branding, campaign messages, and account solutions) to the small stage (messages and content that’s tightly tailored and highly relevant to an individual customer’s needs) using Microsoft Dynamics and Outlook.

Cross-channel coverage management

While B2B companies have made progress toward selling and operating in multiple direct and indirect channels, they still have a long way to go. According to one study, three-quarters of B2B companies generated no more than 20% of their sales via ecommerce. That’s likely to change in the near future, as a majority of respondents in that study expected their ecommerce sales to increase significantly in the next 12 months.

Figure 3: Regaining sales’ influence in buyer education and evaluation

Digital performance management

Four types of metrics are critical for sales organizations to gauge and continually improve the effectiveness of their digital selling efforts. Marketing metrics (available from Adobe) help enable a company to plan, invest in, and execute marketing activities in support of sales activities. Social media metrics (generated via a combination of LinkedIn, Microsoft Dynamics, and the Adobe Marketing Cloud) help a company understand how engaging buyers with marketing content via social networks translates into increased pipeline and sales. Relationship metrics (available in Microsoft Dynamics) help enable a company to manage the pipeline and measure the development and strength of relationships with buyers and influencers. Finally, sales metrics help enable a company to analyze sales results and performance against goals and show what’s working and what isn’t.

Companies that leverage tools like Adobe’s e-commerce and campaign systems, LinkedIn Sales Navigator’s messaging and content sharing capabilities, and the ability for Microsoft Dynamics to merge all their input channels together, can create a seamless omnichannel experience that gains access to broader revenue streams and can use the data that digital channels generate to create a much more detailed and useful view of their customers.

Digital sales confidence

Traditional ways of relationship development must be augmented by new ones like prospecting focused on “pull” versus “push”; warm introductions via contacts’ contacts; and hours set aside for social selling. This will leverage hundreds of millions of searchable professionals on LinkedIn and via LinkedIn-Sales Navigator TeamLink, the company’s “collective network” for introductions. Relationships with a deep understanding of a customer’s agenda will grow from things like curated micro-content and high-value marketing content comments on customers’ content, and the execution of other “digital gracious acts” people now value. Developing trust quickly from there, and consistently measuring trust over time, will be critical to sustaining long-term relationships. With customers increasingly educating themselves online and purchasing directly via digital self-service channels, salespeople must become consultative sellers: digitally savvy guides who make themselves indispensable by deeply understanding customers’ needs and providing solutions that meet them. Microsoft Dynamics can play a key role in that transition, enabling sellers to gain a complete, up-to-date view of every customer and take ongoing steps to nurture relationships over time.
Addressing digital disruption head-on

As buyers continue to turn to digital channels to learn about and purchase solutions, traditional sales tools and approaches grow ever closer to being obsolete. In fact, many already are. Selling is rapidly evolving to encompass a blend of traditional and digital channels, as well as a mix of human and automated interactions. Without a concerted effort to infuse digital into sales operations, B2B companies risk drifting further away from buyers and ceding customers and revenue to more digitally savvy enterprises. By shifting to a digital selling model, supported by a dedicated digital selling Center of Excellence (CoE), B2B companies can develop the tools, technologies and processes they need to foster stronger relationships with and relevance to customers in an evolving digital world.

The six core capabilities of digital selling represent areas of focus that uncover business challenges needing transformation. But digital selling is more than just understanding which wheels are squeaky or buying a solution; it’s an ongoing journey that asks companies to understand the true business needs of their particular organization and develop a sales strategy starting from the digital buyer’s perspective before backing into technology. Some of the platforms and tools that solve these issues are outlined above, but a cohesive, tailored solution is based on a holistic technology strategy and road map with the aid of colleagues, external subject matter experts and the right vendors. Creating a digital selling sales organization requires fully embracing a digital transformation happening with customers, employees and across the industry. It demands companies define the ideal customer, learn how to find that customer, know what they want and make and keep them happy and loyal.

1. “State of Sales 2016,” LinkedIn Sales Solutions.

A Center of Excellence is vital to digital selling’s effectiveness

Digital selling encompasses myriad skills, tools and processes that, in many companies, likely don’t already exist. To help enable these capabilities and deliver a better customer experience, the traditional organizational boundaries of marketing and sales must be rethought. To truly excel at digital selling, companies need a dedicated Center of Excellence (CoE), an entity that provides leadership, leading practices, skills, processes, technologies and other kinds of needed support to a specific focus area. A digital selling CoE melds the necessary capabilities that serve as the foundation of all selling efforts and helps companies embrace a broad suite of digital tools that close more deals and boost revenue. According to the LinkedIn “State of Sales 2016” survey of US sales and business development professionals, top salespeople are 24% more likely to attribute their success to sales technology (including email tracking tools, productivity apps and sales intelligence software), viewing it as “critical” to their ability to close deals. A CoE can bring discipline to technology evaluation by staying abreast of what’s out there and continually testing technologies in small pilots. It can help ensure technology is built from the salesperson’s point of view, not an engineer’s, so it facilitates the sales process and is easy to use.

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