Proven Strategies From the World's Top Sales Professionals

A MESSAGE TO THE PROGRESSIVE SALES PROFESSIONAL

How the Best are Breaking New Ground

People are naturally resistant to change, and while that's not always a bad thing, many people are resistant to the major changes and opportunities that social media is creating for sales and cross-functional departments. Social media expert Jim Keenan reports that **72.6% of people using social media as part of the sales process outperform their peers and exceed quota 23% more often.** Although interest in social sales is significant and continues to trend upwards, adoption of strategies and tools are lagging for three main reasons:

1. **Lack of education** – People who understand how to get a positive return on investment by using social media for sales are in the minority.
2. **Lack of tools** – There are few easy-to-use tools for intelligent sales prospecting, social listening and buyer engagement.
3. **Lack of support** – Social sales adoption should start from the top, but many C-suite executives are not social themselves.

So what are the best-in-class social sales organizations doing differently?

We asked dozens of innovative sales, marketing and operations leaders to share how they embraced LinkedIn as a social sales tool, changed their sales culture and achieved results. They also shared best practices and pitfalls to avoid, as well as advice for success in today's hyper-connected sales environment.

Rather than starting from scratch, you and your team can learn from these industry leaders succeeding with LinkedIn and mimic their success. While every organization adopts the approach that best suits its needs, the leading ones embed the following practices:

- **Lead with a focus on relationships**
- **Demonstrate thought leadership**
- **Build success around data-driven efficiency**

Read on to understand how effective social sales tactics translate into a competitive advantage; best practices employed by leading companies; and ways that your organization can transform its sales approach now to drive better results.

Alex Hisaka
Head of Content Marketing,
LinkedIn Sales Solutions

Sales Executives: Lead With a Focus on Relationships

Sales Managers: Demonstrate Your Thought Leadership

Cross-Functional Executives: Build Success Around Data-Driven Efficiency

Lead With a Focus on Relationships

Sales Executives

LEAD WITH A FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Sales executives are challenged daily with managing increasing complexity in their role while building a high-performance culture.

Organizational growth strategies can add more pressure. For example, consumption-based revenue models make churn and customer satisfaction more important to monitor, and everyone has to do more with less to protect and grow profits.

Still, organizations tend to structure the forecasting process, reporting mechanisms and compensation around top-line growth. That doesn't necessarily align with how sales professionals must work to attract and nurture today's more educated, self-driven buyer. This dichotomy creates tension among sales and marketing teams, and pipeline development and close rates can suffer – an urgent threat that sales executives must face head-on to be successful.

The sales executives interviewed for this report address these challenges by using LinkedIn to:

- Build credibility and interest with deployment of consistent, high-quality messaging across their sales teams' networks.
- Identify what is working well and where sales team members need to change behavior by using the Social Selling Index (SSI) as a performance metric.
- Encourage collaboration through leading by example when they provide warm introductions within their networks to sales team members.

Are you like these leaders, facing the urgent challenge of today's sales environment? The following Q&As will arm you with big-picture benchmarks, tips and anecdotes to help assess and improve your position – whether you're on the right course or just getting started.

THE POWER OF SSI

Sales rep interactions have the biggest impact during the education phase

45%

Social Selling Index (SSI) leaders generate **45% more opportunities per quarter** and are 51% more likely to hit quotas.

–LinkedIn

16%

Sales professionals who use social selling help their organizations achieve a 16% gain in year-over-year revenue.

–LinkedIn

SSI is measured on four social selling pillars:

1. Profile
2. Posts
3. Views
4. Followers

TIM RIESTERER

Chief Strategy & Marketing Officer, Corporate Visions

LI: Why should salespeople be vigilant about creating great conversations?

TR: Research shows B2B decision-makers count their interactions with salespeople as the major determinant of whom they choose – more than product quality, brand reputation and pricing combined. And those reps who can create a buying vision win the business three times more often than those who come in late and try to win a competitive bake-off. As a result, reps who show a knack for presenting edgy, counterintuitive industry insights in their networks can make themselves a go-to source when their contacts are ready to buy.

LI: How are you using LinkedIn to have conversations about your value proposition?

TR: It's a great vehicle for sharing our fresh, original and exclusive research in the area of customer conversations. We are providing tested and proven examples that support our distinct perspective that your marketing and sales messages need to be based in the decision-making sciences – not best practices. There's too much opinion and unexamined folklore out there when it comes to messaging. Working with Stanford professors Zakary Tormala, Ph.D., and Maggie Neale, Ph.D., we regularly share new insights into how you can communicate value in a way that aligns with how buyers actually frame value and make decisions.

LI: What are the basic elements of a great conversation?

It comes down to the salesperson's ability to articulate value across the buying cycle. This can be an abstract concept, so to make it simpler, we've identified three "value conversations" and related skills every salesperson must master:

First, create value: Disrupt your prospect's status quo with a powerful "why change" message and differentiate from competitive alternatives with a distinct "why you" message.

Second, elevate value: Connect your solution to the business needs of executive buyers and build a business case that passes muster with financial decision-makers.

Third, capture value: Expand the size of the pie to protect your margins and avoid unnecessary discounting during negotiations.

LI: How does using LinkedIn help with alignment of sales and marketing in conversations and messaging?

LinkedIn helps us reach a bit of marketing nirvana, with the ability to create and deliver consistent, high-quality messages across all of our reps and touching everyone in their networks. Salespeople are the gatekeepers for making sure our distinctive marketing messages and insights reach prospects and customers. In the past this was a hit-or-miss proposition, but with the power and simplicity of sharing content on LinkedIn, all of our reps can now promote our keen insights, along with their personal commentary, to their contacts. Ultimately, it gives marketing the desired exposure for the story.

LINDSEY BOGGS

VP Enterprise Sales & Social Selling, etailinsights

LI: Can you describe an early "aha" moment with social selling that convinced you to embrace it?

LB: In my first sales job, I was asked to generate prospect meetings in Dallas, and instead of going to our CRM tool, I went to LinkedIn. It felt natural to see what connections I had first in that area, rather than reach out to cold prospects. Within 48 hours I had 10 prospect meetings lined up, and my surrounding team had 0-1. That was my exact "aha" moment when I knew I was on to something, and prospecting on LinkedIn became my new priority.

LI: What was your first challenge when you started social selling?

LB: I had the least amount of calls on the activity report in a very "cold calling-heavy" environment. The flip side was that I was exceeding my quota quarter after quarter, so my managers soon developed a different and foreign mindset of embracing quality versus quantity. I taught the sales organization my methodologies, and they're practiced there to this day.

LI: How do you use LinkedIn to create urgency and motivate your team to optimize social sales tools?

LB: I consistently remind my team that people are getting hundreds of sales emails per day and very few InMails. I ask them, "Would you rather be the 1 in 300, or 1 in 5?" There is a much better chance of getting responses with InMails. It's psychologically hard to say no to a person who has a profile that represents [them], rather than just a foreign email address. I also challenge my team to nurture prospects throughout the sales process with Sales Navigator. There is a definite correlation with a high Social Selling Index (SSI) score to performance, and it's an internal way I measure success as a sales leader and create a competitive, yet fun sales environment around tracking SSI scores.

LI: How has social selling helped you build credibility?

LB: My entire brand has been built through the LinkedIn platform. LinkedIn has allowed me to showcase my company's offerings, projects, recommendations, and a holistic view of who I am. It's also allowed me to publish articles, which before LinkedIn, I would have never done. By publishing articles alone, I have gained immense credibility in what I do and attracted many followers. Pipeline is flourishing every day simply by my activity and using LinkedIn as a platform to prospect and connect with professionals. I pioneered social selling early, and dividends have paid off in both my professional career and personal branding.

PAUL ALBRIGHT

CEO & Co-Founder, Captora

LI: What is Captora's formula for pipeline development and revenue growth?

PA: It starts with a detailed understanding of the target buyer and go-to-market strategy – market maturity, competitive landscape, sales cycle and average deal size – these lead to the right mix of inbound and outbound marketing investments. The sharper the focus, the better the results. Maximize inbound marketing contribution to pipeline because it's most efficient for scaling the top of the funnel. Once new buyers engage with marketing programs, speed them through the funnel with scoring and nurturing programs. Continually expand your reach, content, and improve your conversion rates. The end result should be growth greater than 1.5X. This is true at Captora while revenue is growing over 200%.

LI: How do your sales and marketing teams use LinkedIn to identify where buyers are in the sales cycle?

PA: We use LinkedIn to engage with specific buyers – marketing leaders in healthy companies, where inbound marketing is strategic to scaling their growth. Our LinkedIn programs are primarily for identifying and engaging new buyers in the top of our funnel. LinkedIn provides a great channel for targeted marketing programs, and we leverage Captora for maximizing conversion of those buyers that click through to a dedicated, highly optimized landing page. Sales uses LinkedIn to profile target buyers and to find out with whom we are already connected for warm introductions. Once engaged, we score and speed those new buyers through the funnel.

LI: What are some "lessons learned" for using LinkedIn that you and your sales team have experienced?

PA: LinkedIn is a key channel for identifying and engaging new buyers. The cost per click is higher, but the quality is extremely good. It's a great way to engage with executive-level buyers in large companies. The key is to make sure the landing page the buyer goes to is highly optimized. Title, subtitle, CTA, and other content should be customized to every persona. The clicks are expensive and high quality, so that means your landing pages must be amazing too.

LI: What kind of feedback do you provide the sales teams regarding social selling?

PA: Feedback comes in the form of metrics – conversion rate, time at each stage of the funnel and sales' quota attainment rate. I think the overall sales attainment rate of quota should be 70%. Sales feedback should be continuous – daily activity, pipeline development results, opportunity-to-bookings conversion rate, sales cycle for each deal, and average sales cycle across sales' deals. Social selling offers more access to buyers and more feedback about the problem sales is addressing. Therefore, the metrics should show impressive results versus past, old school selling.

BARB GIAMANCO

Social Selling Strategist

LI: What has been your most impactful discovery with social selling?

BG: Less is more. Salespeople and marketers can feel pressured to spread themselves too thin across multiple social channels. They need to define their social selling strategy, which will make clear the ideal characteristics of the target buyer. With that information, determine the top one to three channels that will give you the greatest return on effort. This is especially important if you are just getting started. To be successful, you need to fish the watering hole where your fish are likely to be.

LI: Why is collaboration so important to social selling?

BG: With buyer expectations at an all-time high, salespeople need to be social media savvy, but they darn well better have top-notch business, consultative and problem-solving skills, too. Research from Harvard Business Review, MHI Global, CSO Insights and others, point to buyers clearly saying that they want to work with salespeople who can help them solve business problems and who also collaborate with them … to craft solutions. More importantly, CEB (Corporate Executive Board) has said that there are five to seven people involved in any buying decision, which I think might be low. Your ability to rally support with multiple people in multiple departments requires collaboration.

LI: How do B2B buyers change their social behavior at different points in the cycle?

BG: There is no linear, one-size-fits-all buyer's journey, but most consider the modern buyer's journey to have at least basic phases. The buyer needs different types of information from salespeople to answer different questions and address unique challenges at each stage.

At Awareness, the buyer knows something needs to change, and you'll see them start to express symptoms of a problem. They'll start working to better define the problem. They might evaluate what competitors are doing, ask influencers in their industry, go directly to peers in their network, or pose questions in LinkedIn Groups.

At Consideration, buyers and their other buying-team members conduct early-stage research to better understand available options, approaches or methods to solve the problem. They are using websites, white papers, presentations, video, group forums, reviews, perhaps Twitter – all for the purpose of better educating themselves before talking to a salesperson.

With data in hand in the Decision stage, buyers finalize their strategy for fixing the problem, and start listing vendors and products that could align with their strategy. That then becomes a short list, leading to engaging sales and, ultimately, a decision to buy.

DAVE MATTSON

CEO & President, Sandler Training

LI: What are three vital skills every sales professional must have today?

DM: First, follow a process. Many salespeople go by intuition, but 80% can't write out their process from start to finish. Experienced pilots perform a checklist and follow the same process for every flight. Salespeople should replicate best practices and continually follow a proven process to improve every day. Second, develop a cookbook: a list of everyday activities and behaviors to be successful. Your cookbook interprets your goals into your daily behaviors. Third, be flexible in your communication so that you understand your own behavioral styles and those of your customer.

LI: Describe some ways face-to-face time and digital discussions can complement one another to strengthen relationships.

DM: Digital discussions accelerate deal velocity. Buyers now do a lot of their due diligence behind the scenes. When you schedule a face-to-face meeting, you want to do some due diligence of your own up front, so you can talk in depth about topics that are specific to this buyer. We use digital discussions to provide third-party information that validates a specific pain and shows prospects what we've done in the past to fix it. Buyers want digitally delivered information that helps them better understand the issues and the possible solutions.

LI: What are the most important lessons you teach about building referrals?

DM: If salespeople checked to see where their qualified prospects actually come from, they'd probably see that referrals show up at the top of the list. The big lesson we teach is that there's no direct correlation to doing great work and receiving referrals. You have to ask for referrals, and you have to have a plan for doing so. Some people will give them without asking, but most need to be prompted. So ask – then circle back to update the referral source on what happened! You'll get even more referrals.

LI: Why is now a great time to be a sales professional?

DM: Today we have three things we need to work on: technique, attitude and behaviors. If you have the right attitude, the right mindset – meaning you learn how not to become paralyzed with fear, doubt and worry – if you have the right behavior patterns, every day – and if you have the right technique – then you've got the winning combination. Historically, salespeople just pushed, based on personality. Now, as we mature as a marketplace, we understand salespeople are made, not born. Today we are responsible for our own success.

ALEXANDER LOW

Head of Client Development, JLL

LI: You call yourself a social selling evangelist. Why?

AL: I am someone who believes in the concept of social selling and wants to make people change their minds about what they think or perceive social selling to be. My voice is not the sole gospel truth, and there are other evangelists out there whom I follow and learn from. The world of business is going through a seismic shift in how we engage with our clients; therefore, there will be leaders and laggards throughout this evolution. I want to be a leader through learning. If there are those that choose to follow, fantastic.

LI: How does social selling help you help your clients make the right decisions at the right time during their buying journey?

AL: Social selling is all about enabling your client/prospect to make an easier purchasing decision. I refer to the CEB Challenger Sales process and their insight into the changing buyer's journey – 57% of the buying decision is made before a client will engage with you.

Social selling helps get your client/prospect's attention; once you have their attention, you need to gain their interest; this will lead them to make a decision about you and your ability to help them in their business. Done well, social selling will help you guide your clients/prospects to a decision to take the next step in their process. What it will not do is close the sale for you.

LI: How important has providing insight – not just services – been to your success in commercial real estate?

AL: In the grand scheme we are still in the early-adoption stage of social selling. What we are seeing, though, is increased engagement through LinkedIn as a channel. Last year alone we created 112 new business opportunities in which Sales Navigator was instrumental. This is a pipeline in excess of $5.5 million across multiple service lines. Twelve deals have been closed, which has generated in excess of $627,000 in revenue, and we have over 700 prospects identified.

LI: What advice would you give sales leaders in the real estate industry who are just starting social selling?

AL: Having a high Social Selling Index score and great social engagement with your clients/prospects does not mean you will suddenly start winning lots of business. What it will do is move your brand up the value chain in the decision-making process of your clients/prospects. You still need to have a robust sales process, use of CRM and good salespeople.

Demonstrate Your Thought Leadership

Sales Managers

DEMONSTRATE YOUR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Building trust has been and always will be a critical component of selling. When you're dealing with a senior-level prospect, it's even more important to tailor your approach to the concerns that come with their job description. Here are three ways you can use LinkedIn to help earn their trust.

Sales Managers are on the front lines of an exciting, dynamic transformation in B2B sales. Digital communication has strengthened one-on-one relationships by enabling more frequent and more meaningful communication, and predictive intelligence and analytical insights have elevated prospect targeting to a true science. But risks also lurk in the digital marketplace, and pressure to "make the number" looms large at many organizations.

Sales managers are caught in the middle and so must urgently push for adoption of social selling systems and practices to accelerate organizational transformation. The payoff is two-fold: higher performance, but also better data, which feed continuous improvement and thus even higher performance.

As a content distribution platform, LinkedIn carves out a business-focused marketplace amid social media noise that salespeople can use to build a reputation as an expert. And as a sales solution, LinkedIn can't be beat for targeting in numerous ways to research and reach out to the more than 410 million members.

The following Q&As tell the stories of managers who are using LinkedIn and other strategic systems and tools to succeed. Sales managers are probably in the hottest of "hot seats" for sales performance these days, but with the right systems and tools, they can use the opportunity to cement their own story of success.

B2B BUYERS AND ENGAGEMENT

1 to 10
Potential range of the number of colleagues involved in a B2B buying decision, according to SiriusDecisions

3 to 5
Most common number of content pieces a buyer reviews before engaging with a salesperson, according to Demand Gen Report's 2016 Content Preferences Survey Report

53%
Buyers who said they spent more time using social media to research vendors and solutions than they did in 2014, according to Demand Gen Report's 2015 B2B Buyers Survey

LORI RICHARDSON

CEO, Score More Sales

LI: What have been the biggest changes you've seen in how selling is done during your career?

LR: I began selling in the era of the acronym BANT (does the buyer have Budget, Authority, Needs, and what is their Timeline?). Now we focus on learning what change our buyer is looking for, what their aspirations and challenges are, why now, and what happens if they keep the status quo. Knowing there is now a decision team rather than just one decision-maker, and that money can be found when the solution has a great return on that investment, we work consultatively to be of service for them.

From that standpoint, consultative "solving" to help buyers with their problems and to create a better future state has not changed – the tools, the people, and sometimes the acronyms have.

LI: Is there a global standard emerging for how to do social selling or is there regional variation?

LR: In professional selling, there is never one single answer for everyone. It just isn't that easy, otherwise sales would be a whole different career, and robots will be taking our jobs soon. What I do know about regional selling, though, is that I don't see any difference between the West Coast and the East Coast having lived on both coasts.

LI: What's the most common pain point for sales managers?

LR: I have seen many well-intentioned sales managers who either are missing basic skills of sales management and leadership fundamentals or they just overbook/overcommit. In the case of skills, many don't realize their TOP priority with their reps is to offer solid accountability and enough coaching to help their reps learn and improve. Managers often don't have a game plan that they use every day.

LI: What advice can you give on how to build momentum and urgency for social selling?

LR: Clearly the best way to prove social selling concepts is to focus attention on a small team or a couple of individuals who have the interest and basic understanding to show others how well meeting your buyers on social channels can work. Stop trying to change the haters. Focus on the handful who want to grow revenues, exceed their numbers, and are willing to do new things to accomplish that. Share the success stories. Others will follow.

MATT LOOP

Head of Enterprise, N.A., LinkedIn Sales Solutions

LI: Where does the urgency for sales managers to advocate for social selling come from?

ML: I wouldn't be successful – nor would my team – without incorporating social selling into our overall sales philosophy. It improves our approach to every aspect of the sales process: researching to gain deeper insight into our prospects, leveraging relationships for warm introductions, real-time alerts informing us of important changes within our territory, engaging and influencing our target audience with content in a thoughtful and intelligent way, and more. Reps leveraging social selling outperform their peers by 78%, so I think the impetus is on sales leaders to provide their teams with the best tools and techniques to succeed in today's challenging sales environment.

You've said your experience working abroad was both challenging and rewarding, and it ultimately contributed to you becoming a successful sales manager. Was jumping into the "new territory" of social selling a similar experience?

Not challenging, but certainly rewarding! I'm one of the first million members on LinkedIn, so leveraging my network and social insights has always been part of my DNA as a sales professional. The exciting part has been bringing others along on the journey. When I opened our business in Australia in 2013, over 20% of the clients my team signed in the first year came through warm introductions I made to connections in my personal network.

LI: How important is data quality to what you do?

ML: Absolutely critical. Time is the most important resource we have in sales, and access to high quality and reliable data ensures we spend time on the needle-moving activities. An example is our approach to territory allocation. In my previous life, we would give reps a random assortment of accounts with little to no science behind the assignment of each book of business. Today we know with a high degree of certainty that every book is balanced, that the accounts we've allocated are worth pursuing, and that our reps are set up for success.

LI: What are your top tips for encouraging adoption of social selling?

ML: There are a number of easy steps that sales professionals can take to get started on their social-selling journey. First, invest time to complete your profile with a professional picture and a comprehensive account of your experience and expertise. This should be written for your customers and not for recruiters. Second, nurture your network and connect with people you personally know through your professional experience – customers, partners and colleagues. Finally, get active! Post or share content, engage in conversation within your network, or research your key accounts to pick up new information you can use to win your next client.

AMY MCILWAIN

Global Industry Principal, Financial Services, Hootsuite

LI: Are companies in highly regulated industries at risk of losing market share if they don't have a strong social selling capability?

AM: Highly regulated industries have been slow to adapt to social media beyond pre-approved marketing messages, but failing to be more aggressive means missing out on valuable competitive benefits. For example, the sales process in financial services is typically high-touch and referral-based with a strong foundation of trust. Social media provides financial services sales teams a scalable channel to connect with prospects and clients, build trust, initiate conversations and generate referrals. With training and technology, financial services firms are beginning to embrace social selling while remaining compliant with industry regulations.

LI: What does the financial services buyer's journey look like and how does social selling help progress them?

AM: Social media touches every phase of the sales funnel from awareness to advocacy. When it comes to financial services, the buyer's journey typically begins with research; however, savvy social sales professionals are using social media to embed themselves within consumers' daily lives to identify money-in-motion events, such as the birth of a child, job changes and retirement – before the research phase even begins. These life events provide an opportunity to educate consumers, position yourself as an expert and stay top-of-mind.

LI: On a typical day, how are you using social selling?

AM: Typically I start my mornings on LinkedIn, spending 15 to 30 minutes skimming updates, liking and sharing content, commenting on job changes and reading articles. My goal here is to keep up with industry news, stay top-of-mind with particular people, identify new opportunities, and position myself as a thought leader by sharing interesting, relevant content. I also accept any pending connection invites and may reply with a pre-scripted response, pose a question or request a phone call.

Throughout the day I look people up on LinkedIn and Twitter. What connections do we have in common? Who are they following? What sort of content are they sharing?

LI: What are your favorite tips for using social selling to build a personal brand?

AM: When it comes to building your personal brand, I like to think of social media as a radio station, and you are the content DJ. You may play some of your own songs, and send them to your branded content, but you are also filtering through the barrage of content online and playing the very best songs, or sharing the best articles, with your audience.

JOHN CROWLEY

VP of Sales Operations, Cardinal Health

LI: How would you describe the state of competition in the health care industry today?

JC: The greatest threats in health care are not competitive. They are consumer driven. Patients today are digitally driven, socially connected and mobile. In order to stay relevant, health care companies must evolve to connect with patients and caregivers where they want to meet – online, socially and in real time. Companies that figure out how to do this, or facilitate it for other health care companies, will win in the technology age.

LI: How do your sales professionals use social media today vs. five years ago?

JC: The vast majority of "health care sales reps" engage with social media for personal use. The few that attempt to use it professionally do so improperly. The modern health care sales professional must evolve to use social media as a tool for networking, self-improvement and thought leadership. Note I didn't say selling. Social is a tool for engaging and curating – never selling in health care.

The apprehension around social is driven by the relative lack of adoption by physicians – the main call point for many in health care sales. What health care sales reps haven't figured out is the power has shifted away from the physician and toward the health system and payer. These institutions and their buying committees are online, social and researching your products.

LI: Cardinal is expanding through acquisitions. What challenges do you face as a sales-ops leader as Cardinal adds new product categories?

JC: If you've seen one health care company, then you've seen one health care company. There are no two alike! As a sales ops leader working for a [global] company with 35,000 employees, the most difficult task post-acquisition is training on cross-functional selling. Each company has its own customer segmentation, patient population, payer restriction and other nuances.

Training sales reps to know how to spot an opportunity for a different segment of the business is like trying to spot a needle in a haystack. Without cross-functional selling incentives, you miss a huge opportunity for collaboration across disparate divisions.

LI: You're in a highly regulated industry. Has this slowed your ability to nurture buyer/prospect relations using social media platforms, such as LinkedIn?

JC: While many health care companies shy away from social media, Cardinal Health has embraced it as demonstrated by our CEO, George Barrett, through his influencer posts. We advise our sales professionals to use common sense and abide by the "WSJ Rule" – If you wouldn't want your post on the homepage of the WSJ online, don't hit "update."

LinkedIn is a pivotal tool for our sales professionals. It empowers them to engage in social listening and connect with potential leads through a medium not yet exploited by most health care sales reps. I believe LinkedIn is such an important tool that I will not interview potential sales reps if they do not have a complete LinkedIn profile.

THERESA KUSHNER

VP of Enterprise Information Management, VMware

LI: Why are you so passionate about data as a sales enabler?

TK: Without good, quality data, salespeople can spend a lot of time calling on people who will never buy or companies that have no use for the products and services they sell. I have also seen good data used in the right ways add real dollars to the bottom line. Take, for example, a situation that exists in most rapidly growing companies. Within the company's data, you'll have a fair number of customers who bought a few years back and haven't bought since, but no one is using that data. But if you can get that data, it's great information for sales teams to have [in order to reactivate those customers].

LI: What do sales and marketing professionals fear when it comes to data and why?

TK: In general, sales and marketing professionals are really good at relationships, creative thinking and making things happen through talking. Data people, by contrast, live inside themselves and are really good at thinking through problems, analyzing situations, and testing and producing results from their individual efforts.

In the last few decades, data and marketing people have had to learn the ways of each other. Marketing people fear that there will be a lot of "math" involved with learning about data. And data people fear that they will have to go all "touchy feely" to engage in marketing. It's a classic case of yin and yang. It takes both to make a whole.

LI: How does a platform such as LinkedIn help non-technical sales professionals use business intelligence?

TK: LinkedIn and Google Analytics help non-technical sales and marketing professionals get an idea of how data can be useful – in a low key, non-threatening, no-scientific-formula method. LinkedIn gives you views and counts of people who may have the titles that you need to call on. Google helps you quickly analyze web page traffic or analyze how often a word is used in a search.

LI: Your company is growing and becoming more complex. How are you scaling to keep pace?

TK: Growth, market transitions and volatile markets, in general, create the opportunity for data divas like me to thrive. In these complex environments, data can be used to first of all describe situations in non-emotional terms, and it can be queried to provide answers to questions. In the case of Big Data, you can actually torture the data to confess the question. In other words – looking at Big Data might make you ask "why are all my customers abandoning my shopping cart after selecting this product?" Navigating tumultuous times requires data to be used not only in tactical ways with sales and marketing teams, but in strategic ways as well.

Build Success Around Data-Driven Efficiency

Cross-Functional Executives

BUILD SUCCESS AROUND DATA-DRIVEN EFFICIENCY

Achieving efficiency across functions might seem simple when you look at technology capabilities in isolation. But sales and marketing professionals know that change management and process planning are the bigger imperatives when driving social selling adoption and engagement.

Achieving efficiency across functions might seem simple when you look at technology capabilities in isolation. But sales and marketing professionals know that change management and process planning are the bigger imperatives when driving social selling adoption and engagement.

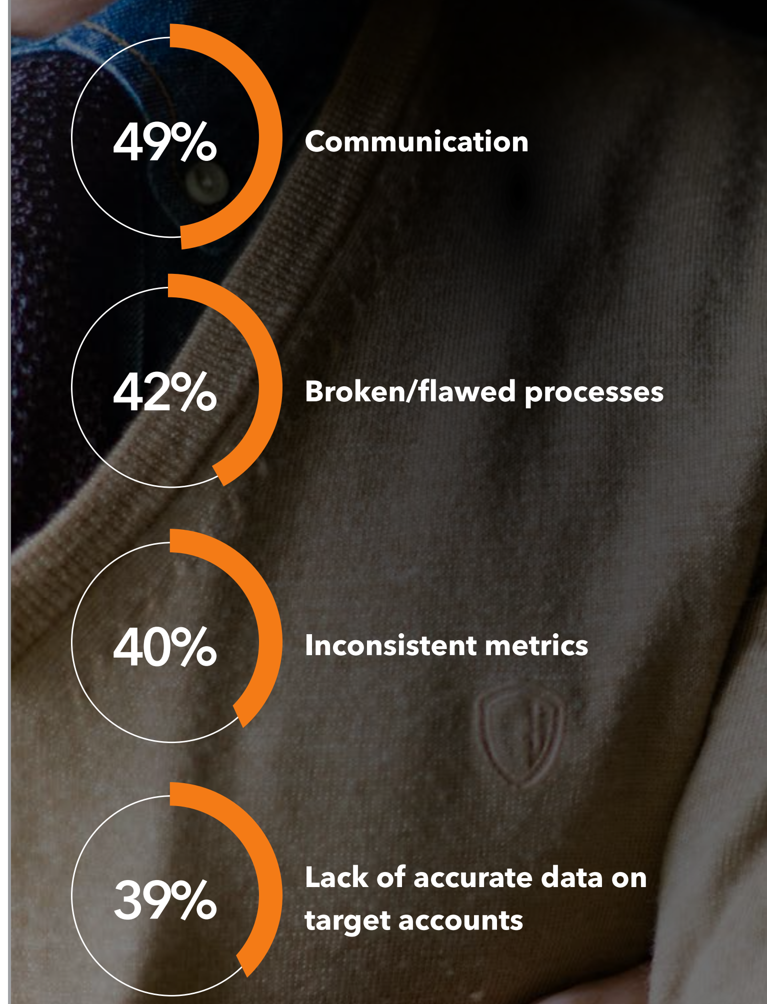
Fortunately, today's sales and marketing executives can have access to real-time operational metrics and buyer behaviors, enabling cross-functional leaders to raise the conversation above opinion and emotion, and focus it on shared realities.

Alignment is crucial for sustaining success. According to the Content Marketing Institute, **less than one-third (30%) of content marketers believe their content is effective**. This means there's huge potential to refine messaging to capture buyer attention and encourage movement through the buyer's journey.

LinkedIn can be a valuable source of this data. Consider account-based marketing. With LinkedIn you can view data by account to identify influencers in the buying process that might not be on a rep's radar. When new prospects are found, the person's profile, connections, posts and groups provide key information about priorities and pain points. Tools, such as TeamLink in LinkedIn Sales Navigator, inherently encourage collaboration as team members can see how they can rely on one another for warm introductions.

Of course, every organization – and indeed every person – has a unique story, so experiences in alignment will vary. But clear and common themes emerge from the following Q&As, and these can provide guidance along any path.

HURDLES TO SALES & MARKETING ALIGNMENT



Source:
"Crack The Code Of Sales And Marketing Alignment," Demand Gen Report and InsideView survey report, Feb. 2016

HEIDI BULLOCK

Vice President of Demand Gen, Marketo

LI: What's the most important lesson you've learned about social selling?

HB: It is a powerful way for your business to reach the right customers versus more broad-based marketing and sales strategies. No marketing or sales team has infinite resources or money, so it's ideal to focus your energy and resources on companies and people that will actually purchase your product/service and will remain customers.

The key thing we have learned at Marketo is that social selling cannot be a random act of marketing. It has to be integrated into the sales process. If you are just getting started, it can be helpful to set up a formal training for your sales team. Also, as with any activity you invest in, it is critical to measure and see what works and what does not.

How has data-driven digitalization of marketing changed how marketing and sales work together?

Most people reading this understand that today's buyers are more in control than ever before and leading their journeys. They do research online and gather input from colleagues or friends. That fundamental shift means marketing plays a bigger role across the entire buyer's journey– it needs to be present at every stages of the buyer's journey. Because of this expanded role, marketing is responsible for delivering potential buyers to sales at the right time; otherwise, there is too much noise for sales to be effective.

LI: What social selling challenges does LinkedIn solve for in the demand gen function?

HB: To start, LinkedIn's network has about 410M+ members and is the largest "planet" in the social selling universe. It is an incredibly rich professional database that covers key industries, so it's the ideal place for making credible connections. The data is structured in way that it is easy to obtain an account view, which is critical for social selling. You can see who is connected to whom, and what areas they are focused on. The classic demand generation challenge is bringing in the right potential buyers who are most likely to purchase your product/service and remain customers. Linkedin helps support account-based marketing techniques and social selling - which help you target the right buyer, versus broad inbound-only approaches.

LI: What are your favorite tips for getting started with social selling?

HB: My favorite tips are around being relevant and authentic.

Research who you are reaching out to. Understand what the individual is interested in, what their pain points are and what they find meaningful.

Be respectful of time. Everyone today is busy, so you need to respect their time and add value. It is critical to listen and be helpful. No one has time for long-winded conversations that do not result in a benefit for the buyer.

Follow the journey. Understand where someone is in the buyer's journey, and make sure you are providing something that is meaningful to them where they are on their journey.

DARIO PRIOLO

CMO & Demand Gen Practice Leader, Sales Performance International

LI: You have written about "micro-marketing." What is it and why is it important?

DP: Buyers have become increasingly numb to generic, irrelevant "push" marketing. Marketing messages must be tailored to a buyer's situation, and content must offer obvious benefit. When the buyer is bleeding, be on his or her doorstep with a bandage.

Most marketing teams can get only so granular. Salespeople must learn new skills to identify buyers with needs, then deliver personalized messaging that positions them as a credible resource to help. These "micro-marketing" skills leverage and augment "air-cover" marketing activity.

LI: What are some ways that sales and marketing professionals can pick up on demand triggers through social media?

DP: Before harvesting demand triggers on social media, you must understand what those triggers are and how you help a buyer in those situations. Start by interviewing customers to learn about the situations that led them to need what you sell. For example, regulatory changes in industries often drive a need to buy compliance solutions. Then, seek buyers in similar situations and thoughtfully position the value you offer. LinkedIn announcements and Google alerts are good places to identify triggers.

LI: Why does an inbound-only marketing approach no longer work?

DP: An inbound-only approach might have worked back in 2010, but now that everybody has piled on the inbound bandwagon, it no longer is a differentiator. Buyers are overwhelmed with low-quality, irrelevant content offers, and Google SEO is a nightmare.

Marketers and sellers have to create more relevance and reach buyers with the right content at the right time with a personalized message. You must understand how buyers prefer to consume information and align your promotional activities with these preferences.

LI: What's the top challenge you're working on right now?

DP: I usually work with CEOs in companies with growth issues. My top challenge is helping their marketers to better understand buyers and align sales and marketing with the buyer's journey.

Most marketers have very little direct customer contact, but are responsible for messaging, content and activities to drive demand. My process is delicate because it makes marketers realize that buyer behavior is very different from what they assumed and compels them to change their strategy. Egos sometimes get bruised.

DALE DURRETT

VP Sales East, 6sense, CBS Interactive

LI: Aligning sales and marketing is a huge hurdle. How can technology help?

DD: Technology allows sales and marketing to speak the same language and align on goals and the strategies needed to achieve those goals. The result is a collaborative environment with less friction between sales and marketing because they work in concert – with each other, rather than against one another. That's when you'll see titles such as Chief Customer Officer, a role that oversees the total relationship with the customer.

LI: How has the availability of predictive analytics changed how you personally sell?

DD: Being able to get insight into whether a company is a profile fit or not is a good starting point to being a productive salesperson, but predictive allows one to understand even more – whether that account is in-market, where they are in their buying cycle and which product category they are looking to buy from. Timing is everything in sales, and knowing when an account is in-market, plus their buying stage, provides a huge competitive advantage.

LI: How is your company using LinkedIn for sales enablement?

DD: We use LinkedIn Sales Navigator every day to identify accounts and relevant contacts.

LI: What's the biggest obstacle you encounter in prospects regarding making sales and marketing more data driven?

DD: It is not simple – meaningful results take time. There are a number of decision-makers on the buying continuum for marketing technology. This results in varied needs and requirements, and things can get complex fast. Keeping it simple with a crawl/walk/run approach is best. Making sure you know what success looks like once implementation is complete is critical.

JIM D'ARCANGELO

Senior Vice President of Marketing, Booker

LI: In the world of tech M&As, are acquirers asking for sales and marketing data at a more granular level? What do they want to see?

JD: First they want to see an organization built for scale, a planned approach across channels and segments – and an integrated approach that is data-, analytics-, and metrics-driven. Once that is understood, certainly overall pipeline by channel by lead stage, velocity and conversion between stages and to close, nurture conversions, lead-quality trending, and CPLs and CPAs by channel. We translate and convert that information into churn and LTV yield by channel, ARPU initiatives, results, and trends, and CAC management pushes. Finally, they want to see how we are optimizing desired channels and segments, and managing down the inverse.

LI: You also have experience working with small- and mid-size businesses. It seems social selling/social media would be crucial to this group. True? How are they doing?

JD: We've had tremendous success in approaching SMBs in ways that would have been crazy a few years ago – but SMB owners have gotten increasingly sophisticated in how they research and make purchase decisions. Software reviews, ROI assessments, community-sharing of best approaches to problem/opportunity-solving – they're all now part of the SMB's process. This has opened the door to more channels and content-driven demand gen through all buyer consideration stages, which makes possible inexpensive, really efficient marketing to SMBs. That makes their purchase path smoother.

LI: You've been in marketing a long time. What's the biggest change you've seen?

JD: The happiest change for me is what we've seen the last 10 years, but especially the last three. Marketing automation and tech-stack capabilities driving incredible analytics and modeling capabilities make me beam – we're running and managing intelligently. Finance and marketing are now tight allies. Sales and marketing now align to analyze forecasts by channel, yield-by-day by rep versus forecast, and tune to hit contract goals. Marketing now can drive a company as hybrid techies/scientists with a soul – no longer the home of tag lines and pretty pictures.

JORDI GILI

Managing Director, Execus

LI: Where do sales organizations need the most help with social selling: design or execution?

JG: Both stages are relevant. Design and planning is primordial, but what we've often found is that companies tend to get excited in the design and planning stages, and when implementation and execution comes, their energy drains quickly with the first rocks on the road, such as resistance to cultural and behavioral change. I would say: design-to-execute. That is, plan to maintain energy until your team gets tangible results and embraces social.

LI: Does social selling require sales professionals to think more globally?

JG: Social selling requires a global understanding of your client, not necessarily a global view in the geographical sense of the word. Our sales pros need to understand that sales is less and less about pushing a product or about your internal sales objectives/needs, and more and more about engaging with your clients on the buying journey, providing professional advice where and when they need it.

LI: What are some of the most effective social selling performance metrics you've seen used?

JG: We've seen companies that used to track selling-activity indicators (number of visits per week, time on the phone, messages sent, demos scheduled) throw away those metrics and solely use the Social Selling Index (SSI) to track activity. Companies such as Microsoft have seen a direct correlation between an increase of SSI [score] and an increase of generated opportunities. As a first step, we would advise incorporating the SSI on your KPI dashboard and tracking the number against results.

LI: Why is systems integration important to social selling?

JG: Organizations run on a complexity of internal and client-facing sales processes, which are supported by a typically also complex IT infrastructure. Adding a social layer to the sales process requires a well-thought redesign of selling processes and, therefore, a need for new or redesigned systems that support the new processes at scale. The need for integration may arise then. Our advice would be: Start small, seek results, build a business case, and then redesign and deploy processes and systems that scale.

BETH BACHRACH

Customer Success Manager, LinkedIn Sales Solutions

LI: Tell us about a social selling "aha" moment that made you an evangelist.

BB: The "aha" moment was when Duncan Carvey of LinkedIn Nonprofit Solutions, saw via TeamLink that I was connected to the Regional Director of Corporate Partnerships for the Northern California Red Cross. The LinkedIn Sales Solutions Nonprofit team had recently formed, and Duncan was trying to build up introductions to some of his accounts. I happily crafted an intro email (cc'ing Duncan) to my friend, and a meeting was secured the same day. A month later they purchased five Sales Navigator seats. All of this really shows the power of LinkedIn, Sales Navigator and how warm introductions make a difference.

LI: Do you have some favorite coaching tips for managers for helping teams optimize Sales Navigator?

BB: I've learned the way to ensure your team is embracing "something" is to inspect what you expect. When having one-on-one meetings, forecast reviews or discussions with your sales reps, it's important to reiterate that "something." In this case, it's using Sales Navigator and "inspecting" that they are using it and holding them accountable.

I recommend that they have a great profile, as you are the one setting the example to your team; stay on top of the top accounts that your team is prospecting this quarter by saving the top two to three accounts of each of your reps; look at the usage data and correlate it to your team's performance.

We see that sales reps who are top social sellers outperform their peers and are 51% more likely to hit quota. So if you see a rep who may not be hitting their number, compare their prospecting activity in Sales Navigator to their performance. Are they finding new leads and saving them? How many new VP+ connections are they making on a weekly basis?

Another tip is to hold competitions to energize your team. You know your team well and what motivates them. Switch it up each month or quarter. After a few months, you should see their SSI increase and hopefully their performance.

LI: What's the No. 1 fear that sales professionals have about social selling, and how do you respond to it?

I often hear, My prospect probably isn't on LinkedIn, so why should I use it? My response is there are more than 410 million professionals on LinkedIn. Even if one prospect isn't there, his or her peers are on there. You can use Sales Navigator to put together an org chart and find other pathways in to reach that prospect. Keep in mind, there are now more than seven people involved in the decision-making process, so why only target that one person?

LI: How has your training and coaching philosophy evolved since you began teaching social selling?

BB: I incorporate more stories into my discussions to show the true value and benefit of Sales Navigator. Real-life examples speak volumes.

CAROLE MANCINI

Head of Enterprise New Business, LinkedIn Sales Solutions EMEA

LI: What's the most impactful change you've seen in selling during your career?

CM: Probably the increase in knowledge of the buyer. Buyers today are looking for so much more from sales. They want consultants who are willing to invest in helping shape and optimize solutions, mitigate risks and ultimately drive to the best outcomes.

LI: Is there a global standard emerging for how to do social selling?

CM: There will always be some regional and cultural variations in how customers want to engage with salespeople, but the key tenets of social selling are remarkably consistent around the world.

Sales professionals everywhere need to effectively find and engage with potential customers, and navigate the frequent and substantial organizational changes of customer accounts they need to manage. They also need to differentiate themselves from their competition based on their knowledge of their clients' needs. And finally, relationships are more important than ever – everywhere.

LI: What is the most common pain point sales managers have that LinkedIn addresses?

CM: It's the simple fact that the most finite resource sales professionals have is time, and there are so many increasing demands on that time. Sales managers simply need their sales teams to be more efficient.

The other key issue for sales managers is what do they need to do differently to more effectively run their business. Key here is to focus on the key elements of social selling: Are salespeople building connections and relationships to key customers? Are they sharing relevant content and engaging in conversations? Are they utilizing InMails and engaging with insights to make relevant approaches to prospects and customers?

LI: What advice can you give on building momentum and urgency for social selling?

CM: Start. There are incredibly simple things that can be done right now that will have impact and that cost nothing. For example, have your sales team update their LinkedIn profiles. Stop using your profile as a resume, and start talking to your prospects and customers.

Engage executives and senior managers. They can provide support to social selling programs and can leverage their networks and relationships.

Plan. Think about what you want to accomplish. Different aspects of social selling will enable you to achieve different goals, so it's important to know what you want to accomplish so you can plan your strategy.

Measure. Many leading indicators can help you achieve objectives. It might be sourced pipeline, marketing lead conversion rates, or number of connections to key decision-makers. Pick metrics that are relevant to you and have sales management focus in on them.

LI: How do you attract talented people?

CM: To attract and keep the right talent in this social media world, the millennial generation expects to have these types of tools. They expect to work for a company that invests in them, and it in turn makes them far more successful and able to add more value to their clients.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of your role or industry, encouraging social selling adoption and engagement is no longer a "nice to have" because the traditional way of selling simply is not coming back and indeed is risky among digitally enabled buyers. With the right tools, training and senior-level support, you can quickly move from early adopters to the early majority phase.

First, lead with a focus on relationships. Using LinkedIn, you have a clear opportunity to bring a sense of proximity and connection to your company's professional ecosystem and at a low cost with low time commitment.

Second, demonstrate your thought leadership. With more than 1.5 million unique publishers actively sharing content, you can gain business insights with your network and efficiently position yourself as an industry thought leader.

And lastly, build success around data-driven efficiency. Tools, such as the Social Selling Index, can help you and your team to quantify and prove the impact of your sales results.

Your organization is unique – no doubt – but as the testimony of these experts shows, the practices that lead to social selling success are essentially the same. The key is to get strategic with social selling, and by following the advice from these industry leaders, you and your team can do just that.

For more information on a range of sales solutions from LinkedIn, click here.