



The Inside Story On Inside Sales

B2B trends are reshaping sales teams, putting more emphasis on inside reps

By Jim Peduto

Inside sales. Inside sales. Inside sales. While the trend toward inside sales has been growing for several years, over the course of the past six months, our clients have been asking about this topic more than any other. This article discusses the growth of inside sales and the appropriate role for these reps.

Let's start by defining what inside sales is and what it is not. Inside salespeople are professional sellers who have similar selling profiles to their field sales counterparts. The primary difference between the two is that inside sales are office-based rather than field-based. Inside sales is a separate and discrete function from customer service. Inside sales is not lead generation. It is not appointment setting. It is a sales position.

The growth of business-to-business (B2B) inside sales is unmistakable and irreversible. Multiple studies confirm

the growing importance of inside sales. One study found that inside sales forces are growing 50 percent faster than the traditional field sales.

This growth is the confluence of a "perfect storm" of trends that are fundamentally reshaping B2B sales.

1 The Amazon Effect, which is the impact that online marketplaces have on B2B sales. In just a few clicks, modern buyers can access product information, technical specifications, demonstrations, testimonials, training and pricing — information that was traditionally provided by a salesperson. Clients now expect their salesperson to thoroughly understand their

business and deliver expertise centered on business outcomes ... not products.

2 Salespeople are working more closely with fewer and larger accounts. The remaining "B" and "C" accounts, along with customers who are price sensitive, are better served by inside sales professionals.

3 It is increasingly difficult to justify field sales support for many distribution customers. Jan/san is no exception. The number of accounts that can be more effectively serviced with an inside sales model will continue to grow.

4 Technologies such as online webinars and videoconferencing make it possible for inside salespeople to create customer intimacy without field interaction.

The combination of shifting buyer behavior, rising sales costs and advancing technology are likely to continue to challenge

long-held assumptions about the roles of inside sales and propel its growth.

Research indicates that inside salespeople are most effective at managing existing ac-

counts and teaming up with outside salespeople. The Sales Man-

agement Association's research concluded that "Business-to-business organizations are growing inside sales ... because they find inside sales more cost effective and productive than other sales resources. Yet inside sales' chief value isn't in replacing traditional sales roles, but in complementing them."

Investment in inside sales represents a significant opportunity. There will be issues of selection, training, compensation and coordination with the field sales team that need to be addressed. However, the success of inside sales models in other B2B markets demonstrates the vital role that it should, and will, play for distributors and manufacturers. www.cleanlink.com/sm

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