



The Voice Of The Modern Buyer

Customers don't want product pushers.
They need sales reps to be trusted advisors

By Jim Peduto

Distributors and manufacturers share a common frustration. Their market has changed, and their sales forces are losing ground. Selling is harder than it's ever been.

Sales forces are struggling because the modern buyer has changed, and sales teams have not changed with the times.

Study after study confirms traditional markets are in a state of disruption and, with it, the role of a salesperson is in flux, too. Customers are segregating sales forces into one of two groups: Sellers that sell on product and price, or trusted business advisors.



Research sheds light on how customers view salespeople. One study examined the reasons sellers are successful with modern customers. Customers ranked 10 criteria that drove their selection of a supplier. It turns out the top three reasons for supplier selection are based on the salesperson:

1. Educates me with unique insights and business perspectives.
2. Collaborates with me.

3. Persuades me that we would achieve the intended objectives.

The voice of the modern buyer is crystal clear. It demands trusted business advisors who can improve business outcomes. To be successful, salespeople must be able to differentiate themselves in two ways:

1. Ask a lot of great questions.
2. Have an in-depth and challenging business conversation that the customer hasn't had with anyone else.

Then, because of this conversation, the customer learns something they didn't know, changes their thinking in some way, and comes to the conclusion that the salesperson "gets it," i.e. understands their business better than anybody else.

Unfortunately, based on our research only seven out of 100 salespeople presently have the consultative selling skills needed to succeed with modern buyers. However, the good news is we can measure the attributes that make a salesperson "consultative." Consultative sellers, the ones that can successfully sell to modern buyers, have a unique combination of the will to sell, positive sales DNA and tactical selling competencies.

The sales organizations that are outperforming their peers, gaining market share and posting impressive revenue growth, have benchmarked their sales teams, identified the performance gaps, and then built training to close the gaps. Examples of the types of tools that they use are available at <https://knowledgeworx.com/knowledgebase>.

We know customers are increasingly choosing value-differentiated consultative sellers and marginalizing product jockeys. The challenge for distributor leadership is to assess, adapt and re-skill their sales teams so they are aligned with the needs of the modern buyer.

Selling to modern business customers becomes easier once you hear their voices. 

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