

# SELLING SKILLS AND THE MYOPIC MARKETING OUTLOOK

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Abstract: Management literature is full of praise about the big role of marketing and the inevitability of the marketing concept. While the broad development of marketing concept is understood and appreciated, the question is whether Selling is necessary or not! Customer orientation is good for the business in understanding the consumer behavior and the impact of Business environment on the psyche of the buyer. But in the end, business results are counted in terms of units sold or market shares gained! This is not possible for any organization by just making available competitive and well designed products. An organization has the primary responsibility of creating a Product pull. Unless there is a good presence of selling skills among the marketing personnel and the marketing organization as a whole to push for sales, the end result may not be as expected. While the marketing efforts are lauded for creating customer pull, a sales push to compliment the marketing effort is very much called for. This research paper aims to show that selling skills are as important for an organization as the marketing grand stand of strategy, segmentation and promotion. At the end of the day the results of marketing has to show on the ground reality of increased sales volume and market share. This is possible by complimentary efforts by sales team and their skill in doing so!

**Keywords:***Inevitability of the marketing concept, consume behavior, customer orientation, product pull and sales push, complimentary efforts of sales over marketing.*

## INTRODUCTION

The marketing concept has developed and evolved over a period of time. While several scholars have attempted to differentiate the marketing concept form selling, hard core selling has never lost its luster. Perhaps in the dazzle of marketing the principles of good sales and selling skills were temporarily drawn to the background which we can call as a myopic outlook of marketing. This should not be mistaken with the concept of marketing myopia, which concerns more with the aspects of selling without a customer orientation. While the concept of Marketing is good to identify the customer needs, fulfilling them needs selling skills to point out to the prospect how well one's product meets their requirements in comparison with competing products.

While marketing is efficient in identifying customer needs, fulfilling them in ways to attract the customer to one's product and services is a vital component of company's marketing efforts. This is what the salesmanship does. Selling and Marketing cannot be separated; they are like the two sides of a coin for if you remove or erase one side the other side loses its value and is out of context! This paper attempts to remove such myopic attitudes of marketing personnel to look at selling function as if it is cancer for the company!

The ultimate purpose of any Marketing function is to reach products and services to customer in ways that will be appreciated and which will retain the customer. This needs a marketing intelligence and selling skills to execute them perfectly. When marketing and selling functions are performed well the products reach the customer and the sales volumes and profits improve. Consequently the market shares and profitability of the company improves. At the end of the day this is what the company wants – better profits and increase in sales to continue as a growing concern.

### **OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

This research topic was selected because of the growing concern about the mutual roles of sales and marketing in a company. There is a tendency among authors and literature to underplay the role of Sales and to glorify Marketing as the 'IN' thing for success. This trend needs to be bucked. As any practicing Marketing or Sales Manager ill concur, both role are needed and are in fact complimentary. With this in mind the following objectives have been identified for the limited purpose of this research paper:

1. A critical review of current Sales and Marketing concepts.
2. Identify factors that have contributed to the development of a myopic attitude towards sales.
3. Identify roles suitable for marketing and Sales functions
4. Strategies to compliment the roles
5. How can one measure success of operations?
6. Findings and concluding remarks.

Since the paper is conceptual it would be difficult to make a questionnaire to cover the aspects mentioned above. However the author found plenty of research which has been done in related fields and availability of published literature, and so it was found appropriate to go for a thorough desk research to arrive at the appropriate conclusions from the study. This has been achieved to a great extent as can be seen from the analysis and conclusions.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The sales profession is changing fast enough that it is difficult to identify every essential sales skill. Let us examine critically the sales skills you think salespeople should possess today. When I started researching through data available, it quickly became apparent that there were hundreds of different selling techniques. It is pointed out that the sales world is pretty cluttered with advice. I believe that every good salesperson, well really any person in general, always has room to grow in their role and improve their skills. It's why companies invest in the education of sales team, encourage them to take time out of their days to read industry publications, let them test their ideas, all in confidence.

There is a clear line between top performers and second place or mediocre sales people. And unfortunately, there are more duds than there are superstars in sales. So, what differentiates them - Selling kills. Some sales reps have the specific selling skills required to sell more efficiently and effectively while others are doing things all wrong. Today, the selling skills you should focus on refining are the ones that buyers indicate are the most critical factors that affect their buying experiences. Putting the below skills to use can help you gain an edge over your competition and hit your targets consistently because they're in tune with the way buyers shop in the future. What you need to focus on is educating prospects with new ideas and perspectives and offering valuable content and information that they haven't come across through their online research. This will differentiate you as a valuable source of knowledge, and you'll win over prospects. Otherwise, why should prospects take the time out of their day to talk to you?

Sales people are often lone wolves who like to be in control. They don't work well with others—and that's why so many of them fail. Collaborating with prospects is one of the most critical selling skills to have in 2017. That's because sales people are no longer in control—buyers are. They want to be a part of the solution. Communication is an essential business skill in virtually all industries, so it's not surprising that it's one of the most important selling skills, too. As a sales rep, you need to be able to communicate your ideas in a clear, believable, and persuasive manner. You need to be able to paint a picture that helps buyers visualize how they'll benefit from your offering and how they'll yield a return on investment.

The sales process isn't about salesmanship anymore, the rule of the game has changed. Learn how to become an active listener, to truly understand customer needs and pain points, to ask more engaging questions in order to dig deeper, and to follow up in ways that demonstrate that you were listening. You need to improve your empathy skills in order to better connect with your prospects. The fact is buyers purchase from sales people *they like*. Even if you truly have the best solution and the best price, you could still lose

the deal by turning off the customer with your attitude, personality, actions, and words. The importance of empathy in sales cannot be understated. It allows you to create trust in the sales process, build stronger relationships with buyers, and view the world from the buyer's eyes, so you can really understand his problems and come up with ideal solutions. These skills are in sync with today's customers and will allow you to create a better buyer experience, which in turn, will help you close more deals and increase sales.

The buyer is in charge, field sales force is moving inverted, technology is transforming the profession. To survive in this environment, salespeople need a new set of skills. By analyzing these trends and watching what makes some of the world's best salespeople successful in the new sales environment following core set of skills has been identified by top notch companies in the world. The best salespeople characterized by the following qualities. The most important of today's sales skills is simply understanding the buyer. It's the foundation of effective selling. It is about identifying the experience that the buyer wants to have as they consider making a purchase in your market. You buyer has a set of expectations about that experience and your job as a salesperson is to exceed those expectations. Sell in a buyer-responsive manner, use psychology to engage the buyer and establish trust with the buyer.



**Exhibit 1: Visual images help selling**

Buyers like to do business with people they trust. Good salespeople view their ability to establish trust with the buyer as a core sales skill. Helping the buyer goes a long way in this regard, as does understanding what the buyer wants. You have to communicate succinctly and it is a two way process in which Listening is an art. The days of the silver-tongued, overly verbose salesperson are coming to an end. Buyers value how information is presented more than the information itself. Today, the preferred form of presentation is

conciseness. A good rule here is to never try to communicate more than three important points in a single conversation with a buyer. Act on what the customer is saying: A lot of leaders and pundits like to talk about good sales people are good listeners and that the best salespeople take action based on what they hear from their customer. It's not good enough to just listen. In sales the relationship between a customer and the sales person should be like the patient and the doctor in a hospital. You need to internalize what the buyer just said and then do something about it. Demonstrate your expertise: Salespeople actually need to be subject matter experts in two areas. First, they need to understand the buyer. This involves knowing about the pressing issues that the buyer is facing and what the buyer wants as they work their way to a purchase. Second, salespeople need to know a lot about their own product or service. Communication is one of today's most important sales skills given how much sales now uses email to communicate with buyers. Finally, start and conclude your written communications with a call to action that asks the buyer to take a next step.

Field sales, is definitely moving inside and the face-to-face meeting is quickly becoming the 60 minute teleconference. As a result, salespeople need to be effective at managing sales calls using the phone. This requires different skills such as the ability to read the tone of someone's voice or measure the cadence of the conversation to determine whether the prospect is satisfied or not. Some very smart people think that marketing is eating sales. Though this may not be true, sales has a lot to learn from marketing and sales people who possess advanced marketing skills will fare well. Some sales organizations are also using a campaign format to structure how they conduct traditional sales activities like prospecting. These activities used to be unorganized and non-standardized. Now, sales management is borrowing from marketing and enforcing campaign-like structure on many sales activities.

The Customer has less attention to give to you than ever before and so it is no longer good enough to agree on next steps. You actually need to help the buyer achieve those next steps. Many sales organizations are using technology to become more efficient and shorten the length of the average sales cycle. Salespeople are actually busier than ever as evidenced by a recent CSO Insights report that shows that salespeople only spend 37% of their time actually selling. The salesperson that can use technology to become more productive and can have a significant advantage over their peers – they are able to spend more time selling. The best salespeople focus on the daily tasks or activities that they know will set them up to achieve their quota. This sales skill is usually learned over time, but it's invaluable. They invest time in a number of opportunities knowing that some will close and some will not. They track the performance of each opportunity, as well as the aggregate performance of their entire pipeline on a weekly, if not daily, basis. They are

also able to conduct a “bottoms up” analysis of their pipeline at any time to determine where they sit relative to their quota target.

Above all else, you can't be an effective salesperson if you don't understand who you are selling to and what the market landscape looks like. Examine how the competition is selling and pitching, and do something different. You want to stand out and be unique, while still speaking to what your prospects need (and want). According to Ken Krogue, President & Founder of InsideSales.com, "It's really about the leads." From our standpoint, this means refining your lead generation so that you are capturing high-quality leads who truly need what you're selling. But increasing the quality of your leads can be tricky. It starts with knowing who you're targeting (i.e. identifying your buyer). In order to have effective lead generation, you need to have a specific target audience and prove that your solution can solve the needs for this group. While talking all about strengthening the bond between marketing and sales, a great way to help ensure the success of your sales team, is to make sure you're fostering a sales-driven culture.



**Exhibit 2: Marketing through images! (Save the Children Campaign)**

The sales team has to use their CRM platform, but also integrate it with the marketing automation software, so there is full transparency between marketing and sales. Sales team is able to see exactly how a prospect has interacted with our content - what blog posts they've read, what pages they've visited, what emails they've opened - giving them talking points, but also more insight into what the prospect is interested in purchasing and how ready they are to buy. Additionally, CRMs can be highly beneficial when there is a change on the prospect's side during the sales process. Focus on the Data Analysis is critical for success of sales and marketing efforts. Pay close attention to your matrices,

find out what's working and what isn't. Data analysis can take a lot of time, so it is suggest that if you're not accustomed to measuring your sales efforts, start with bi-annual reports and make them as in-depth and detailed as possible. By looking at different trends you can make smarter decisions that will ultimately get you more results in the long-run.

Building trust can be difficult when you're trying to sell someone a product or service. And a great way to do that is through education. Education is through content in your blog. Use your blog, your premium content offers, your webinars, etc., to help educate your prospect on what your organization offers. If you help to educate them, enabling them to make their own decisions (which you have helped guide towards your solution), they will begin to trust you. And once you have trust, you're much more likely to be able to win the relationship. On the sales side, use your marketing team to your advantage. Talk to them about what your prospects are saying - Share these insights with your marketing team so they can continue to feed you higher and higher quality leads. You also want to share your reports with the marketing team. Full transparency will help you both be more effective. Marketing is in charge of delivering leads. So if you can show them what types of leads are closing, or how long it's taking you to close a sale because the leads aren't ready to talk to someone, then they are able to change their marketing campaigns to account for that. Use them as an ally, not as an enemy as so many companies do, you'll see the results.

#### MARKETING AND SALES COORDINATION

Some marketers pass all leads directly to their sales team and others only pass over the ones that meet criteria they determine as "sales qualified." For the latter group, if sales is passing back a lot of leads, this indicates the criteria for transitioning a lead needs to be tweaked. It's important to keep these meetings consistent and regular. These feedback sessions with sales and marketing should occur at least monthly and all commentary should be kept actionable. Lead nurturing is a topic that comes up often because it requires such carefully coordinated efforts between both teams. By implementing these steps, marketing and sales teams can see more bottom-line results from their efforts.

Product designers learned years ago that they'd save time and money if they consulted with their colleagues in manufacturing rather than just throwing new designs over the wall. The two functions realized it wasn't enough to just coexist—not when they could work together to create value for the company and for customers. One may think that marketing and sales teams, whose work is also deeply interconnected, would have discovered something similar. As a rule, though, they're separate functions within an organization, and, when they do work together, they don't always get along. When sales are disappointing, Marketing blames the sales force for its poor execution of an otherwise

brilliant rollout plan. The sales team, in turn, claims that Marketing sets prices too high and uses too much of the budget, which instead should go toward hiring more salespeople or paying the sales reps higher commissions. More broadly, sales departments tend to believe that marketers are out of touch with what's really going on with customers. Marketing believes the sales force is myopic—too focused on individual customer experiences, insufficiently aware of the larger market, and blind to the future. In short, each group often undervalues the other's contributions.

This lack of alignment ends up hurting corporate performance. There is no question that, when Sales and Marketing work well together, companies see substantial improvement on important performance metrics: Sales cycles are shorter, market-entry costs go down, and the cost of sales is lower. That's what happened when IBM integrated its sales and marketing groups to create a new function called Channel Enablement.

A recent research study pointed out that:

- The marketing function takes different forms in different companies at different product life-cycle stages—all of which can deeply affect the relationship between Sales and Marketing.
- The strains between Sales and Marketing fall into two main categories: economic and cultural.
- It's not difficult for companies to assess the quality of the working relationship between Sales and Marketing. (This article includes a diagnostic tool for doing so.)
- Companies can take practical steps to move the two functions into a more productive relationship, once they've established where the groups are starting from.

Before we look closely at the relationship between the two groups, we need to recognize that the nature of the marketing function varies significantly from company to company. As companies become larger and more successful, they realize that effective marketing calls for people skilled in segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Once companies hire marketers with those skills, Marketing becomes an independent player. It also starts to compete with Sales for funding. While the sales mission has not changed, the marketing mission has. Disagreements arise. Each function takes on tasks it believes the other should be doing but isn't. All too often, organizations find that they have a marketing function inside Sales, and a sales function inside Marketing. At this stage, the salespeople wish that the marketers would worry about future opportunities (long-term strategy) and leave the current opportunities (individual and group sales) to them.

The economic friction is generated by the need to divide the total budget granted by senior management to support Sales and Marketing. Promotion costs, too, are a source of friction. The marketing group needs to spend money to generate customers' awareness of, interest in, preference for, and desire for a product. But the sales force often views the large sums spent on promotion—particularly on television advertising—as a waste of money. The VP of sales tends to think that this money would be better spent increasing the size and quality of the sales force.

The cultural conflict between Sales and Marketing is, if anything, even more entrenched than the economic conflict. This is true in part because the two functions attract different types of people who spend their time in very different ways. However, that performance focus doesn't always look like action to their colleagues in Sales because it all happens behind a desk rather than out in the field. Salespeople, in contrast, spend their time talking to existing and potential customers. They're skilled relationship builders; they're not only savvy about customers' willingness to buy but also attuned to which product features will fly and which will die. They want to keep moving. They're used to rejection, and it doesn't depress them. They live for closing a sale. It's hardly surprising that these two groups of people find it difficult to work well together.



**Exhibit 3: Marketing & sales Alignment**  
( Ref: By Harshad - Own work, CC BY- SA 4.0)

Given the potential economic and cultural conflicts, one would expect some strains to develop between the two groups. And, indeed, some level of dysfunction usually does exist, even in cases where the heads of Sales and Marketing are friendly. Once an organization understands the nature of the relationship between its marketing and sales groups, senior managers may wish to create a stronger alignment between the two. If the business unit or company is small, members of Sales and Marketing may enjoy good, informal relationships that needn't be disturbed. This is especially true if Marketing's

role is primarily to support the sales force. If the market is becoming commoditized, for example, a traditional sales force may become costly. Or if the market is moving toward customization, the sales force will need to upgrade its skills. The heads of Sales and Marketing may want to build a more aligned relationship and jointly add new skills. To move from a defined relationship to an aligned one:

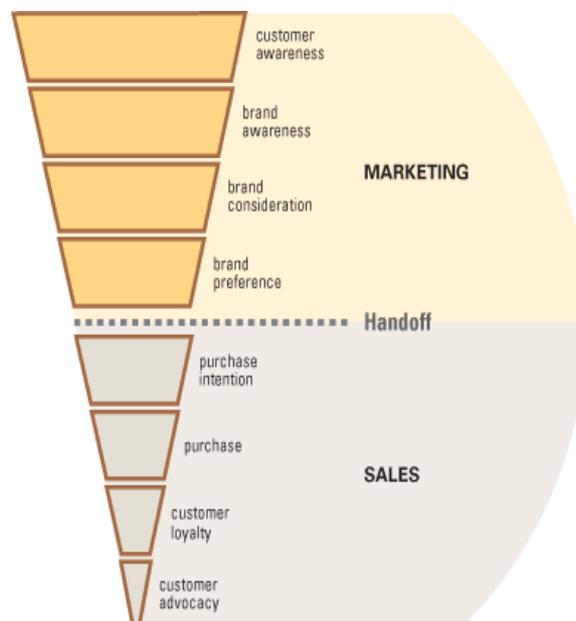
As your functions become better aligned, it's important to create opportunities for marketers and salespeople to work together. They should get involved with developing alternate solutions for customers, early in the sales process. Jointly, marketers and salespeople should generate a playbook for expanding business with the top ten accounts in each market segment. They should also plan events and conferences together. The main rationale for integrating Sales and Marketing is that the two functions have a common goal: the generation of profitable and increasing revenue. It is logical to put both functions under one C-level executive. Companies such as Campbell's Soup, Coca-Cola, and FedEx have a chief revenue officer (CRO) who is responsible for planning for and delivering the revenue needed to meet corporate objectives.

#### DEFINING THE MARKETING AND SALES FUNNEL

Sales and Marketing are responsible for a sequence of activities and events (sometimes called a funnel) that leads customers toward purchases and, hopefully, ongoing relationships. Such funnels can be described from the customer's perspective or from the seller's perspective. (A typical funnel based on the customer's decision sequence is shown in the exhibit "The Buying Funnel.") Marketing is usually responsible for the first few steps—building customers' brand awareness and brand preference, creating a marketing plan, and generating leads for sales. Then Sales executes the marketing plan and follows up on leads. This division of labor has merit. It is simple, and it prevents Marketing from getting too involved in individual sales opportunities at the expense of more strategic activities. Funnels of this kind—integrated into the CRM system and into sales forecasting and account-review processes—form an increasingly important backbone for sales management. Of course, Marketing's involvement in the sales funnel should be matched by Sales' involvement in the upstream, strategic decisions the marketing group is making. Salespeople should work with the marketing and R&D staffs as they decide how to segment the market, which products to offer to which segments, and how to position those products.

There's a conventional view that Marketing should take responsibility for the first four steps of the typical buying funnel—customer awareness, brand awareness, brand consideration, and brand preference. (The funnel reflects the ways that Marketing and Sales influence customers' purchasing decisions.) Marketing builds brand preference,

creates a marketing plan, and generates leads for sales before handing off execution and follow-up tasks to Sales. This division of labor keeps Marketing focused on strategic activities and prevents the group from intruding in individual sales opportunities. The sales group is responsible for the last four steps of the funnel—purchase intention, purchase, customer loyalty, and customer advocacy. Sales usually develops its own funnel for the selling tasks that happen during the first two steps. (These include prospecting, defining needs, preparing and presenting proposals, negotiating contracts, and implementing the sale.) Apart from some lead generation in the prospecting stage, Marketing all too often plays no role in these tasks.



**Exhibit 4: The Marketing / Buying Funnel**

The integrated organization will not succeed unless Sales and Marketing share responsibility for revenue objectives. Salespeople historically work on commission, and marketers don't. To successfully integrate the two functions, management will need to review the overall compensation policy. Obviously, the difference between judging current and future outcomes makes it more complicated for companies to develop common metrics for Sales and Marketing. As the working relationship between Sales and Marketing becomes more interactive and interdependent, the integrated organization will continue to wrestle with this difficult, but surely not insurmountable conflict.

But every company can and should improve the relationship between Sales and Marketing. Carefully planned enhancements will bring salespeople's intimate knowledge

of your customers into the company's core. These improvements will also help you serve customers better now and will help you build better products for the future. They will help your company marry softer, relationship-building skills with harder, analytic skills. They will force your organization to closely consider how it rewards people and whether those reward systems apply fairly across functions. Best of all, these improvements will boost both your top-line and bottom-line growth.

The "new marketing myopia" occurs when marketers fail to see the broader societal context of business decision making, sometimes with disastrous results for their organization and society. It stems from three related phenomena: (1) a single-minded focus on the customer without considering other stakeholders, (2) a narrow definition of the customer needs, and (3) a failure to recognize the changed social environment of business which considers multiple stakeholders. Customers in the "new marketing myopia" remain a central consideration, as in the traditional "marketing myopia".

## **ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

The literature is full of information. But to identify and filter them is the difficult task. One such example is the availability of enough information regarding what contributes and demonstrates selling skills. But how it is appreciated and applied by Sales is the crux of the problem. The sales orientation and training programs must concentrate on developing the APPROPRIATE selling skills development. For example one of the key research findings from previous studies has been that 'Listening' is 5% and 'Talking' is rest. This needs to be reversed.

From the day Theodore Levitt published his paper on Marketing Myopia in Harvard Business Review in 1960 to this day, Marketing is suffering from this myopic outlook. Business Environment has changed, customer expectations have changed; management accountability to stake holders and public has increased. Blindly following a customer orientation and mending your ways to his tunes will not help organizations; they have to consider the impact of stake holders and make room for improved profitability and viability of the company which can be achieved through improved sales performance alone, without compromising marketing. For this reason management should move away from a 'jaundiced view' of sales role in the company.

As suggested it is futile to enter into controversy as to whether marketing or sales role is more important because we have seen from a comprehensive literature review that both roles have to be complimentary. The marketing funnel is helpful in identifying mutually contributive and fulfilling roles. The measure of success is as always has been the bottom line. Better Profits and increased market share can be assured with the mutually

collaborative roles of sales and marketing. Future (Marketing) is built on the shoulder (Sales) of the recent past and present.

Without marketing, you would not have prospects or leads to follow up with, but yet without a good sales technique and strategy, your closing rate may depress you. Both are necessities to the success of a business. You cannot do without either process. If you work to strategically combine both efforts you will experience a successful amount of business growth. The sales process consists of interpersonal interaction. Studies have shown that it takes multiple contacts using both sales and marketing to move the prospect from one level to the next. That is why it is important that you develop a process that combines both sales and marketing.



**Exhibit 5: Alignment for optimum results**

In conclusion the question is like whether the right eye or the left eye is more important. Both are needed for a correct and complete vision so also the need for Sales and Marketing. Historically this has never been disputed, but only distorted due to power centers being created for mutual exclusion!

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Marketing's myopic focus on customers and failure to give attention to a broad range of stakeholders can have serious adverse consequences for marketers, their firms, and society. In contrast, a vision of marketing management as involving multiple stakeholders in value creation is needed. To realize this vision improved marketing practices are required. While the theoretical and conceptual differences between marketing and sales are getting resolved other issues needing attention are:

1. Integrating stakeholder vision and expectations from the company

2. The paucity of research on stakeholders in marketing needs focus in future research.
3. Further research on communication practices that are salient and effective for different stakeholders to developing methodologies and metrics for the measurement of stakeholder orientation and corporate social performance more broadly.

Organizations need to comprehend better their deeply embedded position in society and shift from a narrow focus on customers to a stakeholder orientation if businesses are to prosper and grow in the challenging environment of the 21st century

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