

Group 1 - Discussion transcript

Sales Trends in the Digital Economy

1. What are the key digital trends impacting sales? How are shifting demographics and other trends creating new challenges for sales?

Group 1: What other groups were saying, we tried to focus on things that are a little bit different... Obviously we talked about digitization, we're seeing this movement from face-to-face to virtual texts and emails and our comments were around not really teaching students how to write in sales, or communicate properly, and in virtually we know that there's this whole issue around how do you, in a virtual world, establish rapport, build trust, particularly when you're selling solutions and not products anymore. There's a huge issue there. The other coin of digitization that we talked about was the fact that it's not just about the fact that knowledge is starting to become, there's this symmetry of knowledge between the buyer and the seller, which we hear about and talk about and research, but the fact that there's much more information capture happening right now to support that content development. And all the CRM systems and all the other big data systems out there. There's a lot of privacy issues and if you think about it sales people are the brand managers worst nightmare, because they're out there and it's like the wild west in terms of social media, and emailing, and spamming, there's very little work done to train salespeople on how to do that in an effective manner while taking into consideration privacy issues and other forms of data collection which used to be the purview of the marketing department.

Group 1: You were a knowledge broker ten years ago, now that can't be your value add because they've got that information, so where are you at, how are you adding value, and our view there was you're no longer the value, you're no longer a knowledge broker, you're the knowledge curator and you're helping them analyze not just your information but helping them understand their own data collectively synthesizing it together and helping them understand unmet needs. We just feel like we're asking a lot from our salespeople. If that be a customer industry expert and the ability to have to curate all this information. We looked at globalization and the fact that now salespeople, you don't know who your competition is anymore. It used to be that you knew who they were, they could be coming from anywhere (now). Obviously a big issue there is that things that were moving products to solutions are much more customised. Customised solutions are becoming more important and a real high delivery focus. So sales people used to be, you make your sale, but now they're so integrated in the delivery process because we move to solutions particularly with the supply chain issues that we're having now and timing of when things are going to take place. The whole point of the solution selling is now, we call them team leaders, quarterbacks, whatever it is, you're now responsible for pulling in the resources from your organization pulling in the resources from the buying centre with no authority to do any of that. But you're responsible for it. So, we are asking to be leaders without maybe having the skill set or leader behaviours that are required in the political savviness and the networking capabilities to

draw on those resources inside the organization effectively. Essentially be able to advocate for their customer inside the organisation when they're trying to draw on resources.

Sales Education and Research in Canadian Universities

2. What are the knowledge gaps and the implications for teaching and learning, especially in a Canadian context? What are the key opportunities and challenges of sales education in Canadian universities?

Group 1: In terms of additional specific skills we see from those trends in sales education, we talked about how written skills need to be up at a higher level but also virtual skills. We do see these people as they've grown-up with the younger salespeople in this Digital Society. But this doesn't mean they have sales specific digital skills. Do they know how to build rapport? Do they know how to establish trust in a virtual platform? I'm not sure any of us do. Are they comfortable with the sales specific technical tools we use? They will probably pick them up quicker but are they coming in with an understanding of what they're going to be and what they'll be using? We see this skillset changing to much more sophisticated, analytical skills, you'll be seen as much more of a consultative role now because you're selling solutions. So, do they really understand the value of what they're delivering, and can they clarify that either as an ROI or as a positioning statement and be super clear almost like the way a consultant is doing it. As well, recognizing that the value you deliver is differently perceived by different members of the buying centre. So, you know depending on who you're talking with, you're delivering different types of value within the buying organisation. In terms of tackling selling challenges in Canada, I'm not sure if Canadians are super good at understanding that they need to sell to the world. Yes, we sell a lot so maybe it's just more of a we have this ego issue and you don't think we do that well. But, I don't think it's the first choice of a new Canadian startup to think that they are going to be an exporter. Where I think in Europe it is very different, it's nothing to sell to different countries within the E.U. Canadians are much more domestic focused and I don't think we recognize that we're going to have to be more effective there.

Group 1: Better needs assessment, we don't think this is a skill level that in terms of asking the right questions or at the level they need to be when solution selling as opposed to product selling. I think it was interesting in the conversation as well when there's the exchange of skills and this importance of mentoring going forwards. We have this older generation who has industry and product knowledge, and we have the younger generation who are more the digital experts. So, there's this cross of sharing information. Some of the basics, now that we're into more solutions selling, do our students and new salespeople know how to write an effective response or an effective RFP? The other thing we talked about was the fact that the market is so volatile now all of a sudden companies skyrocket to success or collapse in failure. So, it's probably more important now to have deeper connections inside your own client organisations and are our salespeople developing those networks, those tentacles, so that if you lose your key contacts, your

relationship doesn't just fall apart. I think that has always been important, but now it's even more important because the market is so volatile because these companies are going through these bigger swings. We talked about Shopify, who knew they were going to explode into the massive success they have, and so on. And people change, you may not have left the company but you've changed jobs and all of sudden you've potentially lost your relationship. So, deeper connections with your clients is important.