How to fail at social selling

There are three ways in which you can be sure that social selling will be a waste of time, says NADINE THOMAS

CONNECTING WITH POTENTIAL clients and customers using social selling can bring great rewards to an effective sales team. Social selling techniques allow you to find out what your clients' needs and challenges are and then surround them with the information that will be helpful and useful for them. Along the way, you can educate them about your brand, products and services. This puts you on their radar and when they need your services they are more likely to pick up the phone to you than head for Google. If you pick up the phone to them, they tend to be more receptive to your call.

The question is, if you introduce social selling to your sales team, will it definitely work? The honest answer is, it depends – there are no guarantees as there are so many things to factor in. But there are three ways in which you can pretty much guarantee that social selling will be a waste of time:

1. Let your sales team work it out for themselves

Some companies have a specific team to deal with their social media. Others will let their sales staff do it alone. Whichever route they take, there's often no guidance and staff are left to work it out for themselves. Joining social networks does not mean that opportunities will just appear and pipelines will be filled. You can't just throw your sales staff into social selling and expect to succeed.

Sales leaders need to research and understand how social media can be used as a viable sales channel. You need a plan, a process for your team to follow and a way of measuring the success of their efforts that relates back to revenue. That way, you have a consistent approach and sales process across the team and team members can teach newer colleagues as they join. At some point you may well have to justify the social media activity and explain why 'likes', 'follows' and comments count.

2. Don't use the available tools properly

Social selling is a system using products, tools processes and frameworks. You need to know how to use them effectively and make sure there are processes for your team. You can't expect them to work everything out for themselves.

Let's compare this to learning to drive. Would you just hand your car keys to your child and simply say, "There you go, work it out"? Of course not. So why do sales team leaders do this when sales figures and revenue are at stake?

There are some great success stories out there for sales teams that have introduced social selling with some increasing their revenue by 20-50%.

Take the time to learn what you have with social selling. Know the tools available and how to use them. Attending the odd training session may spark interest and give you ideas. It may even start you off on the road to using social selling, but you have to understand the tools, have a plan in place and also a way of measuring the results that's linked to revenue, otherwise it's a waste of time.

3. Fail to link social selling to revenue

Doing social selling for the sake of it, or just because your competitors are, is pointless. There's no point in sharing content and tweeting if you don't have an end goal. Not only do you need to have a plan for your content, but you also need one for revenue. You need to know how your activity is going to drive targeted leads and then convert those leads into viable opportunities for your pipeline.

Social tools like LinkedIn and Twitter are powerful platforms for developing business relationships. Treat them as the business tools they are. Use them to build an audience of prospects, influencers and people you know you can generally help.

Once that's in place you need a framework that allows you to tie your social media initiatives back to revenue. If you can't see the impact of your activity on your revenue, then it's highly likely you will become demotivated. That's natural, why would you waste your time on something if you can't see that it's delivering results?

When it comes to social selling, the plain fact is that if it's not planned properly it will fail. Whether you are the sales director, manager or rep out there in the field, it's essential that there is a plan that ties your efforts back to revenue.

Find out about social media tools and techniques and how to use them properly. You may decide that you don't have the time to do some of the activities required and get someone else to do them. That's fine, but whichever route you take, learn what's available, because it's critical to success.

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Pitching to the C-Level

STEVE BAVISTER shares six secrets of selling to senior executives

1. Think conversation, not presentation
They've asked you to give a 20-minute presentation followed by 20 minutes of questions. So that's what you do – right? No, no, no. Research reveals that 88% of executive buyers want a conversation not a presentation. Start with some introductory remarks but aim to bring them into the pitch as soon as possible. Talk with them, not at them.

2. Get to the point and focus on the WIIFM
Most C-Level executives have a very short attention span. Think nanoseconds. So get straight to the point. The critical thing you need to do right from the start is demonstrate you can help them. They'll be focused on What's In It For Me. Recite a dreary list of features and you'll have them thinking 'So what? Who cares?' The reason they're talking to you is because they have a problem they can't solve on their own or an opportunity they're looking to take and need help. It's all about benefits. Can you improve their bottom line? Can you give them a competitive edge? Can you make them more successful?

3. Know your stuff/provide evidence
You need to be credible – and that means knowing your stuff. The moment the C-level believe you have no idea what you're talking about you're dead. So prepare and then prepare some more. Most importantly, avoid 'puffery' – statements such as 'We're the leading vendor in this sector'. They don't impress, but irritate. Substantiate any claims you make with evidence, metrics, case studies and proof points.

4. Speak with conviction
Most executives respect strength and despise what they perceive to be weakness – so speak with certainty and conviction. Avoid 'wimp talk' such 'I think this is right for you' or 'hopefully you'll find this useful'. Any signs of nervousness on your part will give the typical CEO cause for concern – and can lead to them saying 'no'.

5. Stand your ground
C-Level executives rarely take anything at face value. Their nature is to question and challenge. Expect them to interrupt you whenever they want – sometimes aggressively. Often it's just a test. When you stand your ground under fire you will enhance your credibility in their eyes.

6. Provide insight
As anyone who's been using the Challenger Model will already know, one of the most effective ways of engaging C-Level executives is to provide insight. If you can share with them valuable things they didn't know about their business or their sector, they'll be all ears.

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ASK ANNE

Teleselling made simple

In the first of a new series on telesales and marketing, ANNE BAGNALL considers whether it's best done in-house or outsourced

Q is for 'Question' – I have had quotes from different telemarketing agencies and it seems expensive, over double the cost of employing telesales people - surely it's best to set it up in house?
A is for 'Anne' – I am often asked by businesses about the best way to utilise telesales and telemarketing. First up, should they outsource the work to a call centre, or do it in-house. There are no right or wrong answers to this, just different elements to consider in order to make the right decision for the company. Pound for pound, it will always feel more expensive to outsource to an agency, but you also have to consider the 'real and hidden' costs of employing telemarketing agents at your own premises, as the cost of the agents' salaries is really just the beginning.

Q – What are the main considerations in setting up an in-house operation?
A – Before you employ telemarketing agents, the first requirement is a database/CRM system for them to work from. If you have someone experienced in IT, it's worth checking if they can build this with access (this can be done with a large number of users with the correct IT software). If that's not possible, there are Cloud solutions, such as Goldmine and Salesforce.com. You will need to dedicate time to recruiting the correct staff to do the calling. It helps if you have someone in your company who has previous experience of working in a telemarketing environment to know what kinds of people to look for and how to conduct an interview, which should include role-plays. Supervision is important too, so you will need to budget for a team leader or manager depending on the size of the team.

Q – Is there anything else?
A – The ongoing monitoring and training of your telemarketing agents is of utmost importance in making a success of an in-house operation. It's really crucial that a person with experience is managing the team. If that experience is not within the company, then recruitment of the right individual will be necessary.

Conclusion
In my experience, running a successful in-house operation comes down to two essential ingredients. The correct database system, which enables activity levels to remain high (200-250 dials per day), and the telemarketing expertise in house to recruit, manage and maintain the operation on an on-going basis. If you don't have either of these, then you may opt to outsource your work to an agency.

Anne Bagnall is Founder and Managing Director of Phonetic Ltd, a call centre specialising in B2B telemarketing. She also has a consultancy and training company called Phonetic Elite Ltd, which specialises in telesales coaching and training. She is happy to answer reader questions privately. Contact her at **anne@phoneticgroup.co.uk** or visit **www.phoneticgroup.co.uk**