



FUNNEL
CLARITY

*The Key
Similarities &
Differences:*

**Inside
Sales**

vs.

Field Sales

As many sellers know, the number of inside sales positions has grown exponentially, while the number of field sales positions in most organizations has been stagnant or decreasing. This trend is reflective of the second tectonic shift in the sales profession that has occurred in the last 20 years. InsideSales.com reports in recent research findings inside sales (sellers who primarily sell remotely) and outside sales (sellers who primarily sell face-to-face) positions are 47% and 52% of the sales roles respectively. And, companies today are continuing to edge toward a 50/50 split.

However, that doesn't mean that there is a clear dividing line between the two kinds of sales jobs, nor does it mean that the same skill sets apply to both approaches. Not only are field sales increasing their remote selling activities, but inside and field sales are working together more collaboratively and blurring some of these lines. Have you ever considered what the current differences look like?

The sales world is changing.





The role of **sales skills:**

When most people hear the term “sales skills” their eyes gloss over. However, when we consider the state of the sales profession, it is worth noting that the growth in sales positions is among the highest growth areas in all of business. Much of this growth has resulted from two major changes in organizational structure of the sales function: (a) dividing the job of sales into specialties (i.e. SDR/BDR, Sales Engineer/Product Specialist, Customer Experience Manager, etc.) (b) the explosion of sales-related technology applications. Recently, we have been seeing a trend back to attention on the soft skills required of a top performing sales organization.

Unfortunately, there are many sales training organizations that “teach” based on their own guesswork, or their own “success.” The information presented below is the product of actual field research. In this case, field research means collecting data on the interactions between real customers and real prospects over a wide array of companies and industries, then dissecting those data sets to determine the statistically significant best practice. With that in mind, let’s examine one area where that research has been revealing.



Where Inside Sales and Field Sales Skills Differ:

There is no doubt that the skills required for effective selling as a field rep and as an inside rep are similar in many respects. In either case, great selling requires fundamental skills associated with helping clients make great choices and good decisions; i.e. decisions that are beneficial to both parties. Let's spend a moment considering where the skills are different.

1. Acute Buyer-Focused Selling

Perhaps the most significant difference lies in the fact that the field sales person can find themselves relying heavily on the “personal relationship” side of selling new business. The net effect of having an opportunity to sell in front of a prospect is the ability to misuse precious time. Time is the primary asset of any sales person – inside sales or field sales – and, as the saying goes, “Time is money!”

Think about it. The face-to-face seller has more degrees of freedom on-site, in a prospect’s office than does an inside sales person who is on the phone. Today, buyers expect real value when they interact with a sales person. The difference is it’s easier to express frustration or impatience on a phone call than to do so in person, if the seller is not getting to something that touches on the client’s interest in a short period of time. Consequently, there aren’t many inside sales people that will succeed as “professional visitors.” Frankly, not many field sellers will ultimately succeed in this mode either, but they may fly under the radar a bit longer by exhibiting a crowded schedule of “meetings”. The inside seller has to begin creating value for the prospect far sooner and far more consistently than a field salesperson.



Acute Buyer Focused Selling Continued

A great example of this was shared by a CEO who was traveling in the field with team members. He bemoaned an encounter where he accompanied an experienced seller on a first-time visit to an important prospect. The seller spent 25 of the allotted 30 minutes talking about the prospect's family, interests, etc. and ended by saying thank you and walking out. The seller actually told his CEO that he thought the meeting "went great." Although this may seem shocking, it still happens in today's selling world. It is far more rare that this could happen with an inside seller since the resulting conversation would likely be quite short.

Knowing how to structure an effective sales call and executing that call with a buyer-centric purpose, clear agenda and within the allotted time are skills that have a big impact on the sales cycle. These are areas where our research says that inside sales reps are doing better than their field counterparts. This is not due to talent, rigor or intention, but is the natural outcome of buyers' greater level of impatience and the selling medium of the phone vs face-to-face.



2. Ability to Read the Buyer

The second major difference is the inside seller's inability to make eye-contact and visibly "read the buyer". It can happen that a prospect can easily ignore an inside seller. How many inside sellers suspect that the prospect is looking at email or reading a document while they are "selling"? Does this happen in a face-to-face meeting? There is no doubt that buyers can be distracted or allow their minds to wander. But, there is also no doubt that the degrees of freedom available to the face-to-face seller are far wider. At a high level, this means that the ability of an inside seller to generate rapport and to create value for the prospect are more immediate and represent a more demanding selling environment than what a field seller typically faces.

Make no mistake about it. Both kinds of sellers need to know how to recognize the buyer's journey, know how to persuade with questions and need the skill of attentive listening. But think about this simple test. Put both the field sales person and the inside seller working the booth at a trade show. What might you expect to hear when a prospect stops by the booth? If both are skilled, both will do well. Neither one should immediately dive into a "pitch." Our research reveals that the successful inside seller is less likely to do so.

Successful inside sellers rely exclusively on verbal cues from the buyer. Unlike someone in field sales, verbal cues are the only cues an inside sales person can rely on. These cues may be freely offered by the prospect or elicited by the seller. However, the sales person needs to be skilled enough to listen, interpret and react to these cues in the right way, at the right time, with the right information or response. Obviously, verbal cues are important to field sellers as well, but the inside sales professional must be more acutely attuned to these exchanges and be more prepared to drive rapport during every interaction.

3. Access to Technology Stack

A third major difference is in the degree to which the inside seller uses an array of technology. Sales for Life reported today's sellers have a tech stack of four, five sometimes even six different applications which has driven an enormous increase in overall efficiency. However, the cost of equipping a sales rep with this array of software tools is approaching \$5,000 per rep per year, up 22% in just 18 months! The license fees associated with these applications is not the only cost that sales leaders need to be concerned about. There has been a significant hidden cost associated with a loss of skill.

What these technologies have done is produce a huge increase in efficiency. A large portion and sometimes the entire sales cycle can be conducted by a sales person that never leaves their work station. Dialers, information sources, CRMs, marketing automation tools, screen-share conference services, etc. have become tremendous force-multipliers of a seller's time. But, as the efficiency of sales tasks has increased, there has been less and less time devoted to the skill of selling. It is as though the sales conversation was becoming a thing of the past. Nothing could be further from the truth. All research points to the buyer's desire to interact with a value-creating seller. Our research indicates that the top performing providers in most fields have been the first to recognize this shortfall and have begun returning to training sellers on the skills of sales strategy and conversation.

Obviously, these technology tools are available to the field team as well. But, it will come as no surprise to anyone in sales, that field sellers are far less likely to fully leverage the stack due to different activities, objectives and measures. Efficiency measures are typically different between field and inside sales; however, effectiveness measures are often similar. Regardless, honing their strategy and sales conversation skills in their respective roles are critical to long term success.

Conclusion

At Funnel Clarity, we train both inside and field sales professionals. By focusing on the precise needs of each team, the results can be extraordinary. That success is critically dependent on recognizing that they face different challenges and any training they receive must be designed accordingly.

A man in a white shirt and tie is standing and presenting to a group in a meeting room. He is smiling and gesturing with his hands. In the background, there is a whiteboard with charts and graphs. In the foreground, there is a wooden table with a laptop and a glass of water. The text "We'd love to bolster your inside and field sales teams." is overlaid on the image.

**We'd love to
bolster your
inside and
field sales
teams.**

Schedule a free
30-minute consultation.

I'm not ready! I want
more sales resources first.

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