



The Original Social Media

Telephone still relevant for B2B sales with Customer 2.0

Even though the telephone is considered a “non-social” communication channel, it is still a relevant vehicle for encouraging conversations with Customer 2.0 in the business-to-business (B2B) environment. Search engines and social media sites have changed the nature of business-to-business sales by providing customers with greater access to information. The new buyer, Customer 2.0, “has nearly unlimited access to information on companies, products and people.” A customer may be a different level of buyer in a company and may have his/her own mission and vision that is different from your own, making the conversation crucial.

The challenge for salespeople is that they must know their customers’ needs in order to bring value to the sales process. Companies need to know where your customer

has been and where he or she is trying to go, as well as any lessons learned along the way.

Before the advent of Facebook and Twitter, businesses had a key vehicle for conducting the all-important conversation with existing and prospective customers: the telephone. All tweeting aside, business is still conducted between people; therefore, you need to be able to talk to your customers, and your customers need to be able to talk to you. Status updates, tweets, search engine results, texts, or e-mails cannot replace the value of the human voice.

In fact, social media may resemble to some degree “push” marketing. Many businesses use sites like Facebook, Twit-



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ter, LinkedIn and YouTube as opportunities to send out one-sided messages without getting a reading for what existing or potential customers are saying. Yet they wonder why their efforts do not lead to any additional customers or sales. Used effectively, social media sites enable firms to engage customers by encouraging conversations, a two-way flow of information. However, it is difficult to establish a business relationship if the conversation feels one-sided. In the B2B world, you need talk to Customer 2.0 in his tone and language at the right time during the customer's buying cycle. Pumping information out there will not work. The telephone proves an effective two-way conversation channel for lead generation and qualification, as well as additional customer contact and better service.

One of the key reasons to set up an inside sales team is lead generation. The challenge for salespeople today is taking enough time to get to know their prospects. Pre-call planning does include knowing your product/service and how it benefits your market. Therefore you must research your prospects using the same tools they are: search engines and social media to find information and personal connections. Does this mean you spend an hour per prospect? Does this mean you swap your phone/sales skills for an "ace" research hat? No. Knowledge combined with telephone communication skills and good questions will give you insight into the customers you contact.

Today, lead generation is changing. The fact that Customer 2.0 now spends significant time doing research makes the selling process much more interesting. Salespeople need to be sharper than ever. Whether the process starts by demonstrating how your product/service fulfills a customer's need or the customer identifies the need – there are ways to seek out opinions and information from decision influencers. A good salesperson is able to identify what the prospect already knows (or thinks he knows), and where the prospect is with this information. A good salesperson doesn't dismiss decision influencers at all. Often decision influencers are the key in the whole process.

The telephone also helps businesses better serve customers. Having 24/7/365 telephone availability can be a significant advantage for a business, as a representative of your firm can provide information and answer questions, as well as address concerns and provide good service. How can a business provide good service if it does not have a telephone number for customers to call if they need to "speak with a human being?" Do you really want to rely on your firm's Web site to be the primary contact vehicle for your customers? For example, a customer working with an e-mail marketing firm ran into a service issue, but there was no phone number to call for help. What kind of impression does that leave with a customer?

Customers in the B2B space are also consumers. For businesses to effectively demonstrate how their products/services can solve a customer's/prospect's challenges requires a "360-degree view" of the customer's business. Such a perspective requires companies to listen to their customers. Customer conversations are not one-sided if a business wants to establish a relationship.

Selling to Customer 2.0 means businesses need to learn about more than just business needs. Companies who would like long-term customers need to know what a customer is saying, and be ready to deal with calls as part of the relationship-building process. It's difficult to get a feel for what the customer wants or needs if you are not willing to listen. With effective, two-way telephone conversations, you can uncover real problems that you are able to solve.



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