



MICROSOFT

5-STEPS TO MASTERING THE ART OF SOCIAL SELLING

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Introduction

Nobody would argue that marketing is an exact science. Okay some people might, but certainly not anybody who is successful because they'd know that marketing is a constantly evolving endeavour. What works now may not be as effective in the future - something that's even more true in the world of digital marketing. So why is it, then, that selling - the end goal of marketing - is often restricted by a rigid set of rules that hinder any sort of natural development? The notion that the best way to sell is to sit at a desk reciting the same phone script over and over all day long is becoming increasingly archaic, yet the resistance to any change in this drab routine remains strong.

Another reason that sales teams might be stuck in a rut is the fact that within many companies, the sales force and marketing department are at war with each other. Despite being on the same 'team' and ultimately trying to accomplish equal parts of a shared goal, sales and marketing teams often feud. Whether it's over splitting budget, price setting, or [taking on tasks one side believes the other should be doing](#), the friction throws both divisions off their game. When things don't go well, the relationship sometimes devolves into sales and marketing blaming each other for not doing a good enough job with their respective tasks.

At the end of the day, sales and marketing teams need to get on the same page. Selling, like marketing, would benefit from adapting along with consumers. Because whether you're in sales or marketing, it's not about what you want, it's about what, where and how your customers wants to be sold on a purchase. If marketing is creating materials and framing the company brand in one way but the sales team is pursuing leads in a completely different manner than marketing intended, what do you think is going to happen? Nothing good, that's for sure.

Using Social Media to Align and Integrate

One of the great things about social media once you get the hang of it is that it's an escape from the mundane. For small businesses, social selling is an easy choice as it's often the same people responsible for sales *and* marketing. But for those who are strictly part of a sales force, social media can be enjoyable, too. After all, social media platforms are essentially giant, perpetually running conferences; salespeople don't usually miss an opportunity to network at a conference, so why is this any different?

Another reason that social selling is a good option for companies is its ability to bridge the gap between sales and marketing departments. Since it's an area where marketing will be active, if sales teams are open to the idea of selling on social media, they'll also become more aligned with marketing's overall strategy (which can only be a good thing). Content marketing and social media engagement are an integral part of marketing strategies in 2014, so the more involved and aware sales teams are about these processes, the smoother the transition will ultimately be. And as you'll

see as you read the rest of this whitepaper, the path to mastering the art to social selling depends on the strength of the relationship between sales and marketing teams.

Here are the 5 steps to mastering the art of social selling:

1. Find and Identify Your Market

Develop personas because all your customers are different.

No two customers are identical, even ones who buy the same product. Every customer will have a different motivation for making a purchase. They'll also conduct their searches in varying manners and have differing price expectations. If you're selling to companies, each one will have a different decision-maker and a distinct process for finalizing a sale. As an example, let's create two brief personas for the types of people who would potentially read this whitepaper.

a) Bob the Business Owner - Bob is the owner and sole operator of a recruitment firm that he has just started in the last year. He is responsible for both sales and marketing and knows that he needs new leads. Bob is interested in social selling because of its relatively low cost and huge networking opportunity (something that's important in his industry).

b) Sam the Sales Manager - Sam is the sales manager for a business-to-business (B2B) financial software company. His company has done well in the past but is losing business to an upstart competitor. Sam is looking to get his market share back and is open to using new and creative strategies.

As you can see, Sam and Bob are interested in social selling, but likely on different scales, platforms and budgets. Bob probably doesn't have much of a sales background and is probably focusing most of his energy on actual client work (even if it's only one or two clients). Sam, on the other hand, is always fully focused on selling but knows that he needs a fresh method. Bob is probably looking for some general tips and tricks for getting started with social media while Sam may be seeking to develop and implement a full-fledged social selling plan.

Simply labelling Sam and Bob "people who need social selling help" is doing a disservice to the specific information that each persona would need to successfully implement a social sales plan. Theoretically, we could write an in-depth guide for each persona type, but for the purposes of this whitepaper, we're keeping it high-level so that both groups can glean helpful information.

Find out where your customers are active.

The key to fishing is following the fish. By the same token, in order to sell you need a customer, so your first social selling task is to discover where your potential customers are most active on social media. For many B2B products and services, LinkedIn is often the most active corner of the Internet because

it's viewed as the most "professional" social network. Contrary to popular belief, however, [90% of B2B companies are actively using Facebook](#).

It can't be stressed enough how important it is for you to be present where your customers are having conversations. Sometimes, the conversations are about you and if you aren't active, not only will you be unaware of what's being said, you'll also be unable to respond! In 2014, [the customer is in complete control of the conversation](#) because they don't need a company or its salespeople in order to gather information or even make a purchase.

Getting a handle on where your customers might be having social conversations is actually fairly easy. Every major social media network has an advanced search feature that allows you to enter specific details about the kinds of people you're looking for. From there, you can view profiles and discussions to determine whether you're on the right track. There are also a variety of both paid and free discovery tools for each social platform, such as [Followerwonk for Twitter](#).

KEY POINTS - How to Find and Identify Your Target Market

- Develop specific personas for each of your customer types
- Determine where your customers are most active on social media

2. Gather Information

A little listening goes a long way.

The reasons why listening is a positive, respected practice are plenty. Getting a feel for a new group of people instead of trying to be the centre of attention is often more successful. A rookie athlete silently learning from veteran peers is a right of passage. And even the traditional sales tactic of letting the customer do the majority of the talking rings true in this case.

Well, the same goes for social selling, *especially* in the beginning. Your customers are already having conversations so don't interrupt them. Even if they're talking about buying from your competitors, do you really think jumping in with, "HEY, BUY FROM US INSTEAD" is going to have the desired result? Most of the time, it's just going to turn people off. Why not wait and observe. Maybe that particular customer will have a problem with your competitor's product, at which point you can join the conversation more subtly and offer a solution instead of making a desperate last-ditch effort.

The most important thing that listening to your potential customers accomplishes is the business intelligence you can gather. Whether it's information on your competitors, the challenges and requirements of your customers or more details you can add to your personas, there's a goldmine of intelligence floating around on social media.

Make connections.

The beauty of social media is that as far as topics are concerned, anything goes. Why not try to connect with people who you know are your potential customers on some other common ground? It's not always going to work, but joining a conversation about a movie, a sport or a current event may very well lead to a sale down the road. And if not, it could lead to a cultivated relationship that ends up being a great source of referrals. Just like in life, the more people you know, the better. At the very least, social media provides an opportunity to move away from the hard sell, if that's what you're used to.

KEY POINTS - How to Gather Information

- Listen more than you speak, at least initially
- Build as many relationships as you can

3. Create the Content Your Audience Is Looking For

Where sales and marketing intersect.

If you're a bigger company, this is an area where it'd be a significant help if your sales and marketing teams could work together. Essentially, if these two departments are already aligned and integrated, this step will most likely already be complete! If your marketing team is on the ball, they'll have fully developed personas and thus, content targeted at advancing each of these types of people along the buying funnel. By the same token, if the sales force is following along with the marketing process, they'll have a full understanding of the various customer types and their challenges, requirements and questions.

A small business is probably going to have its hands full creating a full slate of targeted content for customers, but we can't stress enough how important it is to publish material. [Companies with a blog generate 67% more leads per month](#) so if you need help to get it done, it's going to be worth your while.

Two perspectives are better than one.

It goes without saying that if sales and marketing teams can truly work together in complete harmony, your company is going to achieve a very high level of success. Instead of the buying funnel being broken down into two areas of responsibility - sales does this and marketing does that - the

whole team can work together at every step. This process is ideal in every way, not the least of which is the two-way street of information that can help each group function at a higher level.

For example, the sales team can inform the marketing department that a certain issue is often cropping up just before purchase, which can then be addressed in the content that marketing produces. Alternatively, marketing can alert the socially active sales team to extremely hot leads that pop up in response to content and social media marketing. It's a win for both teams and, ultimately, your company.

KEY POINTS - How to Create the Content Your Audience Is Looking For

- Get your sales and marketing teams on the same page
- Align and integrate content marketing with social selling

4. Become An Authoritative Thought Leader

Be as helpful and insightful as you can.

The goal of social media, whether it's from a marketing or sales perspective, is to become a trusted authority. That means answering questions and providing information on as many topics related to your industry as possible. Put simply, if you're more helpful on noticeably more occasions than other experts, your stock will begin to rise. Sometimes, it's to your benefit to share content other than your own - in some cases even that of your competitors - if it's the best way to provide value to a potential customer. Remember, social selling is about being active where your customers are most comfortable, not about pitching products and services at all costs.

Once you become a trusted authority, you'll start successfully entering a number of your potential clients' spheres of influence, which is exactly where you want to be. You'll have access to other like-minded people within more networks and be well on your way to establishing yourself as a thought leader and a go-to source of information. Over time, this enhanced status and the increased social reach that comes with it will undoubtedly help you generate more leads and close more sales.

Keep creating great content.

After establishing yourself as an industry expert, the key to maintaining that image is continuing to create great content. Whether you're creating the content or depending on your marketing department to deliver the goods, it's important that you have a steady stream of interesting and relevant content. Not only will consistent publication keep you top-of-mind for interested potential customers, it'll also ensure that they always have fresh resources to depend on.

KEY POINTS - How to Become An Authoritative Thought Leader

- Always be helpful and provide value, no matter what
- Keep creating and publishing interesting content

5. Measure and Analyze

Track engagement to gauge success.

With social media, it's pretty easy to get a sense of how you're doing just by the number of responses and "engagements" you get (likes, retweets, followers, profile views). It won't happen overnight (especially if you were paying attention since, for the first little while, you're just supposed to *listen*) but eventually, if you're interesting and helpful, you'll start to get noticed. From there, you can track and measure how successful certain kinds of posts are, figure out what time of day generates the most engagement and all sorts of other little details that can help optimize your strategy.

You should also be analyzing which content is proving most useful to buyers who are close to a purchase. That way you - or the marketing team - can put more time and energy toward creating the most relevant and effective content for this very important stage in the buying funnel.

Measure results and assess quality of leads.

Another aspect of your social selling process you should measure is the quality of the leads you're getting. You can do this by keeping track of how many leads you generate from the social media pipeline and comparing it with how many of them ultimately become customers. However, you should also keep in mind that part of social selling is becoming an authority and making connections, which is a practice that can boost referrals. This means that you should be monitoring any positive outcome generated by your social presence, even if it's just extra press or a shout-out from a noted influencer.

KEY POINTS - How to Measure and Analyze

- Track and monitor to gauge success
- Analyze results to measure quality of leads

Now...Repeat the Whole Process!

When you reach the end and have finally mastered the art of social selling, guess what? It's time to start the cycle all over again! That's right, you can likely improve your performance at each one of the five steps. Even if it's just tweaking a persona by adding one small description or discovering a new social platform where your potential customers are hanging out, it can make a world of difference. You'll also make new observations the second time through which you can apply to your overall strategy, ultimately becoming a true master of social selling.

About WSI (We Simplify the Internet)

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

Ready to move ahead and discuss a project with a Social Selling Master Trainer? Get in touch with us now by visiting

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