

Contender or Pretender?

The Role of Inside Sales in Winning Business



A BUSINESS ISSUE
QUICK READ

What is your sales reality?

- Buyers too busy to talk?
- Costs for face-to-face calls adversely impacting budgets?
- Salespeople pressured to shorten sales cycles AND exceed revenue goals?

For many organizations, these challenges mean re-thinking their sales strategy to include or expand **inside sales**—and re-tooling the team to do it.

Meet the New Contenders: Inside Sales Professionals

In the past, inside sales was relegated to the same category as “telemarketing”—often viewed as nuisance calls that provided no value for the customer. Today’s inside sales approach differs from a scripted, one-call-close, telemarketing call. The inside sales call is planned but not scripted, and it often requires more than one conversation to gain the customer’s commitment to buy.

Even now, inside sales is often confused with expanded customer service responsibilities. Although some inside sales representatives also take inbound calls, perhaps for price quotes or product information, reacting to customer requests and providing traditional customer service is not part of their responsibility.

Today’s inside sales professionals include sales representatives, business develop-

ment representatives, account managers, sales managers, and supervisors who use “virtual selling skills” in working with their customers. And their role in the sales function is increasing in importance.

A Growing Trend

While outside sales (salespeople who meet face-to-face with customers) remains a solid revenue source, there is a trend toward deploying inside sales teams to complement the efforts of outside sales representatives.

Consider these growth statistics:

- Organizations will be increasingly turning to inside sales. As opposed to 0.5 percent growth for outside sales, inside sales will be growing 7.5 percent a year.¹
- Since 2007, the average size of inside sales groups has almost tripled. Research shows growth of 800,000 jobs (from 2009 to 2012) in inside sales while growth in traditional, face-to-face, sales positions stagnates.²

¹ • “What is Inside Sales? — Our Definition of Inside Sales,” Kenneth Krogue, co-founder of InsideSales.com, January 30th, 2010

• “Inside Sales Teams Continue To Grow Because It’s a Net Win”, Steven Watts, EzineArticles.com, October 2010

² • “Selling to the Digital B2B Buyer”, Robert Lesser, Acquiring Minds — A B2B Lead Generation Blog, July 22, 2010



Developing the 21st
century workforce™

And consider the large number of prospects and customers they touch:

- Many businesses count on inside sales teams to generate up to 50 percent of their sales revenues.³
- Although the numbers may vary, it's been estimated that inside salespeople average two hundred new outbound calls and e-mails per week.⁴

In reaching out to so many customers, an inside sales professional has the opportunity to differentiate an organization from the very first time a customer hears the salesperson's voice.

Yet, having gained the individual status they deserve, inside sales professionals face many of the same challenges as the traditional telemarketer:

- Decision makers who avoid sales calls
- Indifference to products or services
- Internal call metrics that limit the time allowed for each call

Get Off The “Dialing-For-Dollars” Treadmill

What's the key to inside selling success? Organizations may be willing to invest in technology, recruiting, and training, but many do not provide the tools and support to use the inside sales team effectively. Selling on the phone—and online—requires specialized skills.

Inside sales people can no longer spend their time making hit or miss calls, moving from short-term transaction to short-term transaction. Give them the talk time they need to build relationships that lead to repeat business and predictable, long-term revenue growth.

³ • Feigon, Josiane Chriqui, *Smart Selling on the Phone and Online*, AMACOM, 2009

• Feigon, Josiane Chriqui, *Inside Sales 2.0 Trend Talk — Mid-Year Report*, TeleSmart, 2009

⁴ • *Inside Sales Enablement: “Let Them Drink Coffee!”* Aberdeen Group, December 2009

• *American Association of Inside Sales Professionals*—Bob Perkins, CEO, February 24, 2011

⁵ • *Using Business Intelligence Tools to Help Manage Costs and Effectiveness of Business-to-Business Inside-Sales Programs*, Guy Gessner and Richard A. Scott, Jr., Canisius College, Modern Marketing Concepts, Inc.

• Information Systems Management, 26:199-208; Copyright Taylor and Francis Group, LLC

While it is generally accepted that relationship building is important to face-to-face selling success, our research indicates that personal interaction with customers is equally important in inside sales. In fact, regular dialogue with clients can significantly increase sales.⁵

These conversations go well beyond small talk. Today's customers want knowledgeable salespeople focused on them and their business success. With product and service commoditization so rampant, ultimately, customers make buying decisions based on the behavior of the salesperson.

The Great Divide

To help sort through the possibilities, AchieveGlobal developed a graphic representation of how a salesperson's behavior impacts the perspective of the customer—and the customer's comfort level in making buying decisions. We call it “The Great Divide.”

The diagram on the following page draws on the image of sales as rugged terrain, two peaks separated by a great divide. This illustrates two types of relationships that customers have with their salespeople: **Transactional** and **Consultative**. To cross The Great Divide and reach the higher peak, inside sales professionals must interact with customers in new ways, beginning with the very first interaction.

Transactional Selling Behaviors

Transactional Selling focuses on short-term interactions between a customer and an inside sales professional based on rapport, price, or features.

- A **Professional Visitor** succeeds on personality without forming long-term alliances that promote future sales. *While a customer may be willing to take the call from a Professional Visitor, closing on sales opportunities may be limited.*
- A **Price Seller** highlights costs, deals, and quotes. *Price Sellers reinforce a perception of their products or services as commodities.*
- A **Content Seller** emphasizes features, often without linking them to key issues for the customer or stating explicit benefits. *A Content Seller may bear the dial tone in place of a customer commitment.*



The Great Divide

Consultative Selling Behaviors

Exhibiting the behaviors of a consultative inside sales professional requires skills, product and industry expertise, and knowledge of customer circumstances. The inside sales professional will have greater impact on the buying process through one of four relationships with the customer:

- A **Need Satisfaction Seller** creates mutually beneficial relationships, uncovering a customer's critical needs and tailoring solutions to each customer's situation. *When customers view the salesperson as a Need Satisfaction Seller, sales possibilities emerge.*
- A **Resourceful Expert** applies in-depth product and industry expertise to configure solutions that meet customer needs. *A knowledgeable guide creates value for buyers at different organizational levels.*
- A **Loyal Champion** possesses deep insight into the customer's business and industry, and, as a result, the customer views the salesperson almost as an employee. *The Loyal Champion often gains access to strategic plans and other inside information.*
- A **Trusted Advisor** discovers and meets critical needs by providing not only products and services, but also advice and assistance. *Over time, the Trusted Advisor earns the right to influence all stages of the buying cycle.*

The Essentials

What sales behaviors are most appropriate for the inside sales professional? Crossing the divide to Consultative Selling Behaviors helps protect the salesperson from commodity pricing and otherwise aggressive competition. It makes the salesperson part of the value proposition, a differentiator in the purchase decision.

Today's contenders—the successful inside sales professionals—distinguish themselves as consultative sellers. Each outbound call is an opportunity to initiate a consultative relationship from the first point of contact.

More organizations are counting on an inside sales team to attract and gain commitments from new and existing customers. The inside sales professional is tasked with safeguarding current and future revenue. **Are they contenders or pretenders?** A consultative approach, supported by preparation and skill, formulates the essentials of becoming a sales contender—and winning new business.

Additional Resources

- Ken Drogue online article, January 30, 2010
<http://www.kenkrogue.com/inside-sales/what-is-inside-sales/>
- *Using Business Intelligence Tools to Help Manage Costs and Effectiveness of Business-to-Business Inside-Sales Programs.* Guy Gessner and Richard A. Scott, Jr., Canisius College, Modern Marketing Concepts, Inc.; Information Systems Management, 26:199-208; Copyright Taylor and Francis Group, LLC

About AchieveGlobal

In the 21st century, the level of human skills will determine organization success. AchieveGlobal provides exceptional development in interpersonal business skills, giving companies the workforce they need for business results. Located in over 40 countries, we offer multi-language, learning-based solutions—globally, regionally, and locally.

We understand the competition you face. Your success depends on people who have the skills to handle the challenges beyond the reach of technology. We're experts in developing these skills, and it's these skills that turn your strategies into business success in the 21st century.

These are things technology can't do. Think. Learn. Solve problems. Listen. Motivate. Explain. People with these skills have a bright future in the 21st century. AchieveGlobal prepares you for that world.



World Headquarters

8875 Hidden River Parkway, Suite 400
Tampa, Florida 33637 USA
Toll Free: 800.456.9390

www.achieveglobal.com