B2B

SOCIAL SELLING 101

HOW TO USE LINKEDIN EFFECTIVELY AS A B2B SALES REP

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent survey, 82% of B2B buyers said that the content of the winning vendor had a significant impact on their buying decision. So, still think that social media has nothing to do with you as a sales rep? (HBR).

And when we combine that statistic with the fact that over half of decision makers start their purchasing journey with informal research – and it's clear that sales reps and account teams need to look at how to make sure their buyers are engaging with their content, rather than the content of their competitors (Kapost).

HOW THIS EBOOK WILL HELP YOU

Over the next few pages, we'll be taking you on a journey to help you start planning and executing on your B2B social selling strategy on LinkedIn.
We will introduce you to four main areas:

- What is social selling in the B2B sales sector and why do you need to be incorporating B2B social selling into your daily sales practice.
- Developing your own, individual thought leader platform
- Five ways to use LinkedIn as a B2B sales rep
- Plan your personalised LinkedIn connection request message for new prospects
- 3 things not to do on LinkedIn
- How to plan and write compelling articles for LinkedIn
- Develop a prospect process for your new LinkedIn social selling initiative
- Putting what you've learnt into action

THE STATE OF B2B SALES

Selling is changing – it's no longer about having segregated marketing and sales departments. Today, all sales reps need to have a hand in digital marketing and social media in order to better connect with their customers. Individualised social media content, sharing and engagement is crucial, in addition to overall company social media marketing efforts.

However, despite the fact that many buyers are now researching online when making choices about purchases rather than engaging with a sales rep, many B2B Account teams are still not embracing the change that is going on in sales. Selling has become social. So how can you embrace social selling in order to increase your sales revenues and build stronger relationships with customers?

WHAT DOES SOCIAL SELLING LOOK LIKE FOR B2B SALES?

Social selling is all about being where your customers are: whether that's online, on social media platforms, or in-person with your clients. It's about building the relationship and helping your customers along towards making a decision.

Importantly, it's about being customer-centric – and focusing on your customer's agenda, rather than on your product or service. Social media and online research possibilities have put the control in the hands of your buyer; they are in a strong position to research you and your product, engage with other buyers and ask for recommendations from their own network.

Selling in the way that B2B sales reps operated even 5 years ago won't work in the new world of B2B selling.

Social selling is critical for building stronger relationships with prospects and warming up potential customers for other marketing and sales initiatives later in the pipeline. The LinkedIn State of Sales in 2016 Report found that 62% of employees at large organisations thought that social selling enabled them to build stronger and more authentic relationships with customers and prospects (LinkedIn).

Social selling in the B2B sector is about individual sales reps taking personal responsibility for their own social selling initiatives – after all, the relationship between buyer and selling is becoming more personal. Your buyers can research your employment history, what you've 'Liked' online and comments on posts: they are seeing you rather than just your company.

So what do you want your social selling initiative to say about you as an individual and as a representative of your organisation?

Perhaps you want to establish yourself as an expert in particular sector, or maybe you want to be the go-to person for a particular type of product. Or, maybe you want to be known for sharing funny posts that your customers love to read. It depends what type of relationship you're trying to build with your customer and what you want to be 'known' for.

As an individual, what do you want to be known for amongst your customers and prospects:

BECOMING A THOUGHT LEADER

Social media gives account managers and sales representatives the opportunity to establish themselves as thought leaders and to instantly reach their customers with their messages. Previously, you might have had to get a high-profile magazine to feature one of your articles.

Now, with social media and in particular, LinkedIn and Medium, you can publish your articles and get visibility from prospects and customers immediately. The opportunity to become a thought leader has been opened up to everyone, but with that comes more competition so your message has to stand out over and above your competitors.

By keeping an eye on trends coming out in the sectors, product areas and customer industries in which you operate ensure that you are up to date with what is being said in your industry and will help you to start looking at what type of content your customers enjoy – and what content doesn't work, in order to ensure your messages resonate with customers.

What key topics are my customers interested in hearing about?

What sources or online sites should I regularly check to ensure I keep up to date with these topics?

What topic / area / subject / industry do I want to establish myself as a thought leader in?

SALES REP OR MARKETING EXEC?

We get that it probably feels like you're being given extra responsibilities – after all, you thought you were signing up to be in sales and now the industry is telling you to become a digital marketer!

But it's just an adjustment to normal selling habits, based on the changing role of the buyer and the way in which they make decisions about purchases. Research says it takes anything between 6 and 18 engagements between a buyer and seller to connect, regardless of making a sale. Previously, those engagements might have been phone calls, in-person visits, emails or print marketing – now, many of those early engagements might be on social media.

LINKEDIN: ARE YOU USING IT EFFECTIVELY?

The most popular of all of the social media platforms for B2B reps and buyers, LinkedIn is probably the best place to start to begin engaging with clients. Because of this, many B2B reps are already using LinkedIn to connect so think carefully about your messaging and what you want to share with customers.

LinkedIn can be used in a number of ways:

1

FIND PROSPECTS

LinkedIn is a huge database of contacts – and what's even more important – the information is up to date. You don't need to buy data or lists to quickly build information about your prospects as so much is already available online.
LinkedIn can be used to search based on job role, location, name, company name and more. You can connect with people, follow them to see their updates and send messages.

Follow Vs. Connect
It can take 6+ engagements with a client before they become a qualified lead, so before hitting the send button on that connection request to a new contact who you don't know (after all, how do you feel when people send you cold connection requests with no message or background?), instead, think about 'following' them to keep up to date with their sharing updates and activity. This way, you can like or comment on their posts and articles to build up an initial relationship before sending a full connection request. Then when you do connect, you can send a message to thank them for the interesting content they've been sharing to show them that you've engaged with their social posts and have an awareness of what they do already.

Following your contact on LinkedIn is also a really good way to see what content your contact is commenting on and reading (if they have liked or engaged with a post). This can then feed back into your own posting strategy to ensure you're creating content that your prospect wants to read based on their previous social activity.

Top Tip
If you're looking for people in an IT Management role in a certain sector, often the people you find will be connected to lots of other useful contacts in similar roles. A good exercise when searching for new prospects is to search for a new prospect based on job role and target company, then look at the right sidebar when viewing their profile which suggests other contacts with similar roles or interests. This can prove a quick and simple way to build a list of contacts, and saves you having to manually search each time.

2

COMPANY RESEARCH

Before meeting with a company or making a sales call into a contact, it's important to do your research and LinkedIn makes it quick and easy to stay up to date with what your customer has been doing lately. Your customer's organisation is likely to post about any important news and events on their **LinkedIn Company Page** so it's important to check these sources out before meeting with them to show you've done your research.

3

BUILDING YOUR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PLATFORM

If you're creating articles and writing blogs (or plan to start), then LinkedIn is a great place to publish them – especially when you find out their network of registered users tops 467 million. You can copy over blogs you've written on your company blog onto LinkedIn, or create new ones based on your perspectives on your key topics.

As before, the key thing to remember is to avoid salesy, branded content: the focus should be on topics your customer is interested in, or information that can help them. This helps to show your expertise in your chosen topic or sector area, and ultimately builds your position as a thought leader.

See the blog worksheet further on for help with creating blogs and content.

4

BUILDING YOUR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PLATFORM

Of course, the main reason most people use LinkedIn is to connect with new customers and prospects. Connecting with more valuable contacts means that any content or posts you do share is then visible to a wider audience, and if your contacts share that content then it is also visible to their network. If you extrapolate that out, then your content can organically (i.e. without paid ads) reach a huge audience.

When connecting with new contacts, it's important to send personalised messages in your connection request to help your potential new contact understand who you are and why you are connecting with them. Let's just say it's LinkedIn etiquette to send a polite intro message.

5

CAPITALISE ON YOUR NETWORK

Many people send LinkedIn connection requests and then ignore their new connections after a few weeks, but making the most of LinkedIn is about how to draw on your network, and the network of your network contacts, and the network of your colleagues and managers.

How can you get introductions into those hard to reach contacts through your managers' own LinkedIn network? Or perhaps by drawing on the network of your loyal customer contacts – who do they know that you're trying to engage with? Could they facilitate an introduction for you?

You could also suggest asking close connections to share significant posts so that you can reach their network – but the content needs to be valuable, useful for prospects and not sales branded. Your aim should be to create shares and posts which they are keen to share to their network.

Top Tip

Building out your network is not just for the purpose of making new connection requests with prospects, but it's to increase your engagement with stakeholders across your customer accounts. The HR Director within your client might not be the direct decision maker in your customer, but they could be a key influencer. Look at LinkedIn as a way to quickly connect and engage with a wider array of stakeholders in your customers.

Research shows that B2B buyer groups often have an average of 5.4 individual stakeholders in every purchase decision (Forbes). LinkedIn makes connecting with these wider buying communities easier so look at strategies for building out your network to indirect buyers also.

PLAN YOUR LINKEDIN CONNECTION REQUEST

The limit for a LinkedIn connection request message (a message sent to connect with a new prospect on LinkedIn) is 300 characters. It's not much at all. So think about how you can make it professional, succinct and valuable to your prospect.

Professional: Can you explain what you do and how you help customers?

Succinct: It's 300 words! Take out anything that isn't completely necessary, shorten "and" to "&" and keep language simple and straightforward.

Valuable: You don't want your prospect to feel that you are selling at them – so think about how you can make your message valuable. Can you offer to share some valuable research with your prospect? Or perhaps you could show that you have appreciated some of your prospect's research and want to connect with them as you see them as an expert in their field.

Plan your core LinkedIn message here and then use it as a base foundation which you can tailor to each prospect:

3 THINGS **NOT** TO DO

Don’t just see LinkedIn as a place to send connection requests to prospects. Think about how you can build your position as a thought leader by publishing relevant and compelling content for your audience.

Don’t spam prospects who you don’t know. If you’ve done your research and want to use a LinkedIn connection request as the first contact with your prospect, then send a personalised message.

Don’t focus on your product or service: be customer-centric. Think about their problems, challenges, interests, desires and objectives when creating content, sharing posts and writing updates.

WRITING ARTICLES ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn gives you the ability to publish long-form articles from which to build your thought leadership position, and build credibility with clients. Rather than shorter updates, articles should be where you focus on more in-depth topics.

Article ideas to get you started:

List article
E.g. 10 Ways to Get the Most Out of Your Software Investment

How-to article
E.g. How To Build a Business Case for New Projects

Series of articles
E.g. A number of articles all tied to a specific theme; “Week 1 of Maximising Sales Revenues: Defining Your Customer Base”.

FAQ article
E.g. Buying Cloud Services - FAQ

Use the worksheet on the next page to plan and create a blog post that delivers impact for your readers and is customer-centric.

Blog Planner

Blog title:

Subtitle:

Introduction

Key Point 1

Evidence:

Key Point 2

Evidence:

Key Point 3

Evidence:

Recommendations

Counterargument

References / Links

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A PROCESS FOR ENGAGING WITH PROSPECTS

This could be a separate guide in itself, but it's important to start thinking early on about a process for your content and customer LinkedIn engagement.

Once you have connected with a prospect on LinkedIn, how do you plan to start engaging with that contact? What will you send at each stage to your client? How will you engage them enough to bring them into your sales pipeline as a qualified lead. Prospects don't want to be sold at, especially not today in the age of the informed buyer who can do their own research and have the authority in a sale.

So, start to think about the stages that you will go through in engaging your new prospect.

For example, **Stage 1** could be: 'Send personalised message to contact on LinkedIn'.

Stage 2 might then be: 'Share useful research paper with prospect if they accept my connection request.' And so on…

Start to plan your own prospect process below, thinking about what content resources (blogs, whitepapers, case studies, reports, etc.) are available to you throughout the process.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Content to share:	Content to share:	Content to share:

CONCLUSION

Now it's about putting what we've been through into practice. Based on the information we've shared with you, what are the top three actions you're going to take to build your own social selling activity on LinkedIn?

1. ____________________

2. ____________________

3. ____________________

What are some ideas for blog/article topics for you to publish on LinkedIn:

Blog Title Summary	Blog Title Summary	Blog Title Summary

Happy social selling! If you have any questions about social selling or B2B sales then we have a regular Q&A article series where we share answers to challenges faced by B2B sales reps and teams.
Email your questions to **hello@mysalesacademy.com**

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