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Strategic Social Selling for Business-to-Business – A Brief For The CEO –

By Tony J. Hughes



Strategic Social Selling

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B2B STRATEGIC SOCIAL SELLING

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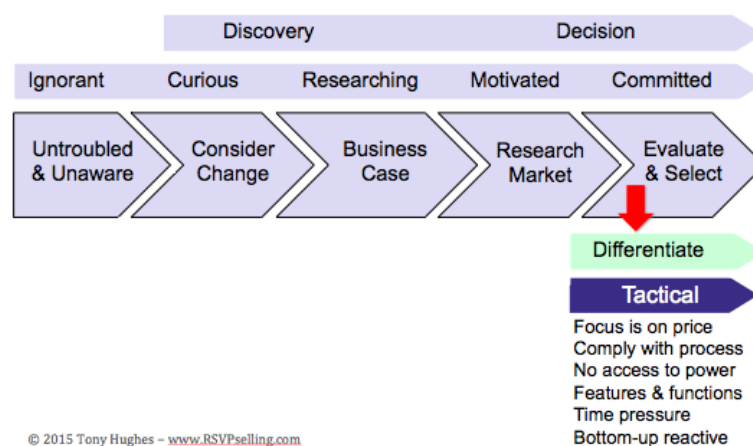
Social selling is important because social buying is a reality. Customers begin their buying journey online well before sellers have the opportunity to directly influence them.

This paper is written for leaders of businesses engaged in business-to-business (B2B) selling, direct and through channels, and defines what strategic selling looks like and why ‘social selling’ is important. The buyer’s journey is explained and engagement points identified that enable sellers to be proactive in attracting and engaging potential customers. The use of social media platforms and tools is discussed with an emphasis on listening and monitoring plus content publishing in social channels to attract customers and accelerate sales results. This paper concludes by identifying risks to manage and potential actions to implement for an organization committed to transforming their sales organization to lead and deliver improved results.

When a sales person says “the deal is strategic” we usually take that to mean that they want to discount massively or invest for a prolonged period of time before there is any prospect of revenue. The term *strategic* is often cliché but this paper provides a real world definition and model for actually being strategic that can be applied in the context of modern social selling techniques leveraging social media tools, platforms and communities.

Before we define what best practice looks like, let's identify the disempowering kind of selling that disempowers sellers due to them being late to the buyer’s process and benchmarked as a commodity against others who have set the agenda and selection criteria.

Illustration 1 – Reactive Selling



Those engaged in this reactive type of selling are often disrespected and treated as a mere commodity with the buyer barking orders commanding the seller to invest in completing onerous tender documents within tight deadlines, then perform magical demonstrations with almost no time to prepare. The buying organization often won't tell you who will be in the audience or what their roles are when you present. They also often refuse to tell you who or what you're being compared with and competing against. On top of all this they can also be adversarial as they seek to disempower your efforts to understand, qualify and craft a value

The hallmarks of

B2B strategic selling are proactive research along with targeting and planning to engage much earlier.

proposition or solution in their best interests. It's no fun being used as leverage against others.

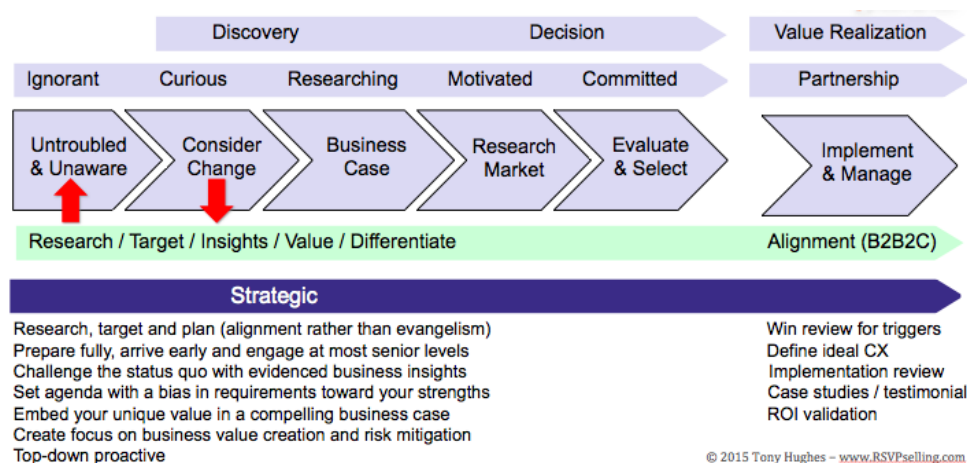
The illustration on the previous page shows the buyer's journey in its varied forms but the defining element of reactive selling is that the customer is in the driver's seat from beginning to end. They decide when to invite you in to their process and it's always according to their rules of engagement. There is inevitably a focus on price, assessment of features and functions, ratings of risk versus bang for buck; and you are blocked from talking with the real decision makers, instead being forced to comply with their process and timing – it feels like you're flying blind. Many adhere to the old adage; if you didn't influence their tender then don't bother responding. You can however win business where you were late to the party, especially with government but the odds are not ideal if you were not the one to set the agenda.

Here is my definition for strategic selling for business-to-business (B2B) sellers:

“The process of engaging early at the most senior levels, aligning with political and economic power, in addressing the most serious problems or opportunities. Then architecting solutions with unique compelling value while setting an agenda that disadvantages or eliminates competitors.”

The hallmarks of strategic selling are proactive research along with targeting and planning to engage much earlier in the buyer's journey. But there is a proven technique for enabling masterful early engagement and it is achieved by focusing on win reviews with your best customers to identify the triggers that motivated them to invest time and energy considering change to eventually buy a solution. There is a very important distinction here – it is NOT about discovering why they bought from you over the competition; it's instead about identifying trigger events that caused them to decide they had a serious problem or opportunity in the first place. The best sellers use buyer trigger events to seek alignment with the ideal prospective customers rather than attempt expensive commercial evangelism. The illustration below defines all the elements of being strategic, including the need to understand the customer's customers (thinking B2B2C) to create conversation that resonate with the most senior executives within the buyer's organization... more on this later.

Illustration 2 – Proactive Strategic Selling



The other reasons that win reviews are so powerful are they validate the benefits promised to customers and create case studies. If there are project services involved in implementing your solution, call the win review a 'post implementation review'. This is where you assess benefits

Customer eXperience

(CX) is the new sales model for driving sustainable competitive advantage.

realization to then present back to the customer concerning whether the business case was delivered with benefits realization. From this you can create an internal case study, whether the client is willing to allow it to be published or not. This enables sales people to create a powerful narrative about the business benefits they deliver to their customers. It's why sales people should be part of the process... it's the best training they can receive because it equips them to identify opportunities early and tell powerful true stories to prospective new customers.

Publishing case studies, without revealing the identity of customers, is a practical way for sales people to begin the journey of becoming micro-marketers by writing content they can publish in LinkedIn Publisher to enhance their profile. It's incredibly powerful for people in sales, professional services, project management or other customer facing roles because it shows the business value they bring clients and the values by which they operate.

However, many sales people continue to regard closing the sale as the end of what matters; but for the customer, signing-up or placing their purchase order is where their risk begins. They therefore seek to buy from someone who cares about delivering the outcomes they are seeking. Customer eXperience (CX) is the new sales model for driving sustainable competitive advantage. Sellers who take the time to do post-implementation reviews with ROI (Return On Investment) validation are the ones who generate the most powerful case studies and testimonials. They also create customer advocates who evangelise in the market. As mentioned previously, the most powerful way to create buyer empathy and alignment is to focus on the world of your customer's customer. The sellers who genuinely care about their customer's challenges and opportunities are the ones with credibility in discussing ways to reduce costs, improve efficiency, gain market share, improve customer satisfaction, retention and more.

The way we sell has always been more important than what we sell. Now look to the left of illustration 2 (Proactive Strategic Selling) and notice the red arrows. This is the most powerful time to influence the customer to shape the agenda but success demands investment with sales teams and domain experts who go vertically deep in industry segments. Yet the rewards are enormous. According to Corporate Executive Board research published in The Challenger Sale, 2012 (n=5,000+ purchasing organizations) 53% of the positive differentiation resulting in the buyer selecting one supplier above all others, came from the sellers ability to educate with insight and provide valuable perspectives on the customer's options for addressing issues and opportunities while navigating risk.

The very best sellers prepare fully, arrive early and engage at the most senior levels. They challenge the status quo with evidenced business insights while setting an agenda with an inbuilt bias toward their strengths. Finally, they embed their unique value in a compelling business case to overcome apathy and the status quo which is the most important competitor to focus on. They positively use fear and risk as a weapon to position as lowest risk and best value. They create a strong focus on business value creation and risk mitigation while aligning with those who have genuine power within the customer's political structure.

But the very best sellers today also combine proven strategic selling methods with modern technologies and platforms to monitor for buyer organization trigger events and then leverage social tools to create direct access to those who have real influence. Importantly, strategic social sellers accept responsibility for building their own pipelines. They research extensively before engaging the right people with credibility and relevance. They also collaborate and amplify their efforts in social to accelerate results and drive sales efficiency.

Differentiation occurs in the way we sell rather than in what is actually being sold.

Forget push marketing and interruption selling; instead engage buyers early in their online journey by attracting them to you with useful information, insights and value.

Why Social Selling Is Important

Without doubt, there is a problem in B2B selling. Gartner Research believes 85% of interactions between businesses will be executed without human intervention by 2020. Buyers are clearly in control today and in many B2B sales organizations only 40% to 60% of sales people meet or exceed their sales targets. I believe that 30% of B2B field sales people won't have jobs in professional selling by 2020 and this will be due to their inability to adapt to the forces of commoditization and disruption to deliver the necessary value to funds their roles.

Inadequate management is a key contributor to poor sales performance and sales managers need to focus on coaching and driving the activities and behaviours that create success in their teams. According to Jason Jordan, co-author of *Cracking The Sales Management Code*, 83% of sales metrics being reported in systems such as CRM cannot actually be managed. Sales people need guidance to become truly consultative and create the right conversations and value for both customer and employer. According to Corporate Executive Board research, 95% of buyers expect insight from the seller yet 86% of sales people fail to differentiate. Forrester research findings state that 85% of sales engagements fail to meet buyer expectations.

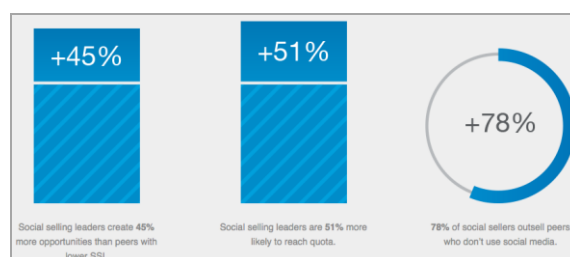
Sales teams need to step up and execute at a higher level and when they do, the results are transformative. According to Corporate Visions research, 74% of buyers choose the seller who first provides insight and value. The best sellers don't talk about themselves, what they do and how they do it; instead they establish their credentials before a meeting to instead focus on why the conversation is important and what can be achieved for the customer supported by a strong business case.

The biggest issue for sellers is therefore securing meetings with the right people at a point in time where they are able to shape requirements and help set the agenda. When leads come to the sales organization it's then very difficult to exert the right level of influence and that's because buyers are typically 57% (Corporate Executive Board) to 70% (Forrester Research) through their change and procurement process. According to IDC research, 75% of buyers research the seller before meeting or agreeing to engage.

The key to influence is obviously early engagement yet a Harvard Business Review article highlights that 90% of decision makers never respond to cold outreach and according to Corporate Executive Board research, 97% of cold calls yield no result.

The corollary of the negative statistics is in research conducted by C9 Inc who found 7 times more pipeline and 11 times more revenue (36 companies and 9,000 sellers) with those who embraced LinkedIn's Sales Navigator tool. LinkedIn themselves analysed a cross section of new and existing sellers who increased pipeline by 45% and the probability of achieving their sales targets by 51% simply by improving their standard LinkedIn social selling index (SSI) scores.

Illustration 3 – LinkedIn Research 2014



The term 'social selling' is a misnomer because in the context of business-to-business (B2B), the best social sellers don't sell at all – they instead provide insight and value.

Strategic Social Selling Defined

According to Steve Richard at Vorsight, “In B2B selling only 3% of your market is actively buying at any given time, 57% are not ready and 40% are poised to begin.” Importantly, their buyer’s journey begins online and this is why social selling matters.

Social selling also matters because social buying is a reality – we live in the age of massively empowered buyers. Our customers can research and commoditise what we offer with just a few clicks. They can assess our assertions of value and then introduce competitors with ease. Sellers therefore need a framework for attracting customers through strong personal and corporate brands that enable early engagements of influence. Individuals as well as corporations need social strategies for complex business-to-business (B2B) selling where, according to CSO Insights, there are on average 6 people involved in the typical buying decision.

Before we explore social selling it’s important to again understand that those who spam, push, annoy, narcissistically drone or aggressively sell are unfollowed and disconnected as quick as a click. Connecting someone new and then immediately seeking to sell is a serious mistake. I define strategic social selling for business-to-business (B2B) as follows:

The strategy and process of building quality networks online that attract clients and accelerates the speed of business and efficiency of selling, as achieved with personal human engagement through social listening, social publishing, social research, social engagement, and social collaboration.



On a foundation of a strong personal brand I have identified the 5 pillars that enable the best results in social: 1) Social Listening/Monitoring, 2) Social Research, 3) Social Content Publishing, 4) Social Engagement and 5) Social Collaboration.

In my definition, technology is merely an enabler but can be leveraged to create truly incredible results with the right strategies. Obviously, social initiatives are supported by the use of technology and social platforms but it’s really all about human connection and interaction to provide real value through insight or assistance with relevant content and conversations.

Social platforms, especially Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Google have driven the era of personal brands and a new reality of transparency. The days of being able to project a manufactured persona are gone... people can quickly uncover the reality of who you are, how you operate, how well you’re connected, and the value you offer... all before you ever get to say a single word on the phone or face-to-face. Social proximity is a real factor that enhances or undermines potential connection, often without the seller ever discovering how their network (or lack thereof) helped or hindered their efforts.

Social platforms, especially Facebook and LinkedIn have driven the era of personal brands and a new reality of transparency. The days of being able to manufacture and project a false persona are gone.

Your social strategy will depend on what you're seeking to achieve and where your market is but don't fall into the trap of becoming busy in social without having a strategy for both connection and content. For example, think about the reasons for posting in LinkedIn Publisher or creating Facebook pages. Are you seeking to attract and build an audience platform? Are you wanting to evidence your credentials? Are you wanting to provide insights and credibility to support your new business meeting requests? Are you wanting to proactively deal with potential objections you could encounter? Are you seeking to associate yourself with admired brands and thought leaders? Are you perhaps chipping away at commonly held myths about your disruptive solution set to cause a sea change?

Social selling is a strategy, not a set of technologies. Most importantly, you need to know exactly who your target audience is and what insight or value you can provide before they would be interested in what you sell. Once you know what you're seeking to achieve and have defined goals and metrics, then you can design your strategy and action plan to cascade down to the individual elements. Here is an overview of the five pillars of strategic social selling.



Social Listening and monitoring: The process of proactively searching and monitoring for trigger events that provide potential opportunities to improve your own customer service, intercept competitor's customers, or engage potential clients early in their own buying process. Hootsuite, TweetDeck and Meltwater are a few examples of tools that could be used. Social monitoring is especially important for intercepting unhappy clients by capturing incidents and then managing in a case management or CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. According to Forrester Research, when customers leave a supplier, 68% of the time it is because they believe the supplier does not care – this alone is the business case for implementing social listening solutions such as Lexer, Radian6, Brandwatch and others.

Social Research: "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe" – Abraham Lincoln. Anyone who initiates contact or arrives at a meeting having failed to do the necessary homework is an amateur. Social research allows you to identify social proximity, background, financial performance, industry trends, competitor relationships, common interests and much more. The amount of information freely available online to research individuals, corporations and industries is staggering. LinkedIn is the most important platform on which to focus and investing in training for sales people to become masterful in using it as a research and engagement tool is essential.

Social Content Publishing: What do buyers see when they click on the sales person's profile? *Quota crushing, Porsche driving, uber-sales dominator*; or do they see 'social proof' of credibility, business value, insight and integrity? Publishing insights, opinions and valuable information is a strategy for attracting audience or evidencing credibility and value. A brutal truth for sellers today is that if they cannot write then they cannot sell. You need to impress with both your business value (what you do for your clients) and the values by which you operate (your ethos and the way you engage and deliver). LinkedIn Publisher is the number one blogging platform on the planet based on mathematical network effects and propensity for virality, and it

For both B2B and B2C companies, here is the important question you must ask yourself: "What do my buyers look for online before they look for me?"

integrates with your personal brand – some pundits have named this ‘networked blogging’. Video content is massively powerful attraction marketing and YouTube is the leading platform but Facebook with autoplay has amazing momentum and video is increasingly popular for mobile users. Twitter can also be used to amplify your publishing efforts. Do you know what your potential customers are looking for online before they look for you? You need to publish in a way that leverages search engines (SEO) so they find you as a source of insight and education early in their buying cycle.

Social Engagement: By listening for relevance, attracting interest and establishing credibility through publishing, and by doing your research – you’re now ready to engage. Social media enables you to be where your clients are in forums, groups, communities, blogs and special interest groups. The best social sellers engage with context and relevance and their success rate is above 90% for securing meetings. They join relevant LinkedIn Groups and build trust through insightful comments and never promote their product or service. They instead provide people with relevant content to add to a conversation. They also find ways to secure warm introductions rather than make cold calls or send hapless e-mails. Importantly, never ‘connect and sell’ which is the biggest sin of social selling. Everyone should avoid sending spam style InMails within LinkedIn.

Social Collaboration: We live in a world of mash-ups for creating best of breed solutions for sales, marketing and project management. The best sales people execute flexibly and collaborate using online tools such as Skype, go-to-meeting, Web-Ex, Dropbox, Google Docs, Hang-outs and many others. They also utilize their own CRM software and other tools to rally internal resources and manage expectations. The very best sellers are engineers of outcomes rather than warriors of persuasion. Research from the Rain Group unearthed that collaboration is one of the rarest experiences for executive buyers. They crave this and social allows you to do it while driving down the cost of the sales process. Further, it transfers the psychology of ownership of the ideas to buy from seller to buyer. This is because people are best motivated by reasons they themselves discover.

Have A Strategy And Ask The Right Questions

Have a strategy before you jump into social media platforms and technologies. Where are your customers online and what are they looking for before they search for you? Forget push marketing and interrupt selling; instead engage buyers early in their online journey by attracting them to you with useful information, insights and value.

Focus activities in social that result in you being invited to participate in the most important stage of the buyer's journey. This is where they are considering change and establishing a business case. It takes a serious investment of time and real skill to attract buyers and engage at this level because you have to create valuable original content that doesn't push your product, service or solution. This is why the term 'social selling' is a misnomer because in the context of B2B, the best social sellers don't sell at all – they instead provide insight and value.

Many sellers seek to make their website the honeypot of content hidden behind forms designed to capture visitor details to then drip-feed marketing messages for eternity. A key part of this strategy is creating content and meta data tuned for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) using keywords and Google AdWords. This is a sound strategy but most wrongly tune their content

Here is the second big question that B2B and B2C companies must ask: "Both on and off my website, what do buyers see online when they find me?"

for when buyers believe they want what you're selling and are seeking to select and negotiate; the savvy online sales and marketing professionals create content to attract buyers much earlier in their journey... when they're considering change and doing research.

Content publishing is hugely powerful and the essential ingredient for online success. There are important questions that sales and marketing teams must ask themselves in order to inform their social content strategy and initiatives:

1. What do my buyers look for online before they look for me?
2. Both on and off my website, what do buyers see online when they find me?

Do they see transparency and genuine commitment to integrity and service or do they see a façade, easy to penetrate. As previously stated, 74% of buyers choose to buy from the seller who first provides value and insight. This is why every sales person on the planet should build a LinkedIn profile that serves as their personal brand microsite. It is critically important to avoid having a profile that reads like an online CV seeking to attract the next employer.



74% of buyers choose the sales rep that was FIRST to add value and insight.



When buyers research sellers they look for social proof that the person is worthy of their time and trust. They seek proof that the person has integrity, insight and is well connected and respected within their industry. Employers themselves are now facing this same problem with websites such as Glassdoor that enables past and present employees to anonymously rate the company.

Everyone today can peel back the marketing façade of websites and social media pages to discover the real state of an individual's credentials, product reputation and corporate brand.

Social Selling Benefits and Overcoming Resistance

I work with CEOs helping them with their company's social selling strategies and although all this paints a compelling picture, I regularly encounter concerns. Before I share the 6 CEO fears of social, let me state the most important reasons for why social selling matters:

- **Social listening dramatically reduces customer churn.** 68% of the reason that customers leave is because they think you don't care (Forrester). Listening and having empathy has always been the key to resolving customer satisfaction issues. Failure to monitor where customers are communicating almost guarantees substantial brand damage with unnecessarily high churn and low Net Promoter Scores (NPS).
- **Social buying is a reality** with 75% of buyers doing their research online before engaging sellers (for significant purchases as published by IDC). We must be where our prospective customers are and attract them as early as possible in order to have the opportunity to influence.
- **Social strategies enable sellers to research and engage early** in the buyer's journey which is essential because purchasers are progressed somewhere between 57% (CEB) and 70% (Forrester) of the way through their own buying process before they invite non-preferred sellers to the table. It's impossible to execute strategically in sales today without embracing social selling.

We must acknowledge and then embrace fears stemming from letting go and empowering our people to engage in social to build their own brands and the brand of the company.

- **When sales people use social well they dramatically increase their pipeline and revenue performance.** Using social engagement platforms masterfully increases pipeline by 45% and the likelihood of a sales person achieving their sales target by 51% (C9 LinkedIn research). It's not overstating the situation to say that it's negligent for sales management not to invest in LinkedIn for their B2B sellers.
- **Social publishing transforms the way people sell.** Sales people need to learn to engage earlier and at more senior levels by leading with insight. Publishing blogs is the key to them honing their narrative to move away from talking about who they are, what they do and how they do it; to instead lead with why a conversation is important for the buyer and how they can assist through insight and value in delivering the client's most important outcomes and managing the client's risks.

Sales people need to become micro-marketers to build their own credentials and create opportunity pipelines. They need to engage earlier and at senior levels to create the necessary value for both the buying and selling organizations to fund their role. Content publishing is how they can effectively achieve all this and it can be done with the support of management marketing and sales working together.

The business case for social selling is compelling but we must also acknowledge and embrace fears stemming from letting go and empowering our people to engage in social. Here are the six common fears of CEOs concerning social selling, along with my responses:

1. **"I don't want my sales people building their personal brands, only to have them leave the company and take our customers with them."** Every CEO is seeking to build the company's brand but we now live in the age of personal brands... people buy from those they like and trust and 75% of buyers research the seller before engaging. What will they see online before the meeting to decide whether to respond to an e-mail or return a call? Do they see a sales animal or do they see someone online of integrity and value who can bring insight to their business? People in business have always had personal brands... accept it and embrace the fact that social media merely amplifies an existing reality.
2. **"I don't want my staff building their social profiles only to then be poached by our competitors."** LinkedIn is the #1 research platform for people in business and it has severely disrupted the recruitment industry. Many employers are bringing the head-hunting function in-house and powered by LinkedIn. Sales people have LinkedIn profiles and no CEO can change that fact. What can be done however is to work with the sales team to help them transform their profiles to move away from online CVs (targeting new employers) to instead be interactive personal brand micro-sites evidencing the business value they offer clients and the values by which they operate. Their LinkedIn profiles can dramatically assist in business development through 'social validation' evidencing credible 'social proximity' and credentials for relevant insight to positively influence potential customers.
3. **"I don't want my competitors tracking the social activity of my staff enabling them to intercept prospects or engage our customers."** LinkedIn is the most powerful research tool on the planet and an essential resource for identifying the power-base in an account, important inter-relationships and obtaining referrals. But settings can be managed to ensure that only those you wish to see your connections

The CEO must change their job description and accept responsibility for creating the best Customer eXperience (CX) with a genuine customer centric culture.

can do so. Educate your own sales and marketing teams on how to go stealth in LinkedIn and also on how to take advantage of ignorant competition in this regard.

4. **"I don't want my sales people to be distracted, wasting time in social when it doesn't monetize for the company."** Being strategic means doing the appropriate research and connecting with influential people and buyers at the right time on the basis of value. Sales people need to understand how to measure and manage the right activities and inputs that create social selling success. Intelligent use of social tools absolutely creates revenue and enables the best to be truly strategic. With the right approach to change management and with appropriate KPIs, sales people will be focused on the right activities and priorities in how they manage their time.
5. **"I don't want my sales people damaging our brand by posting inappropriate comments in social."** Sales people have always had the power to damage the brand and yes social media gives everyone a megaphone. Therefore, it's never been more important to create a positive culture and employ people with positive values and integrity. Manage people out of the business who are a liability due to incompetence or poor values.
6. **"I don't trust what I don't understand... surely there's a dark side to social with our data being used in ways we don't approve."** Yes, dark social is real but the best way to manage risk is to embrace it yourself... that's what leadership is all about. Be guided by experts and trusted advisers who have already executed successfully. The interweb is now, cloud computing is changing businesses, technology is enabling disruption of long-standing business models, social is transforming sales and marketing channels and creating mega-empowered buyers. It cannot be ignored; the risks can only be managed.

It won't be long before 75% of the workforce will be Gen-Y or Millennials. The new generations of workers and executives understand the 'consumerization of IT' which means that people increasingly expect to be able to execute their workday in a similar manner to how they engage in their personal and social lives. Do these phrases sound familiar? Surely there's an app for that? Why do we need training... it should be intuitive? Why can't I use my own device at work?

Importantly, we must all embrace the things that we fear and here are my recommendations for managing the risks associated with social selling. Firstly, the CEO must change their job description and accept responsibility for creating best in class Customer eXperience (CX) with a genuine customer centric culture. Richard de Crespigny delivered exceptional CX aboard a Qantas Airbus A380 in the air and on the ground to transform a near disaster into legendary customer service. This is the subject of another white paper available on my website at www.RSVselling.com.

Make the decision to adapt to the way people now research, engage and buy. Adopt modern selling techniques, bring sales and marketing together, engage in customer journey mapping exercises to create customer eXperience (CX) models, and build the right attitudes and skills into your teams.

The following recommendations address all of the social selling fears and can transform sales and marketing efforts to accelerate the revenue engine of your business.

Have a strategy before you jump into social media platforms and technologies. Where are your customers online and what are they looking for before they search for you?

Recommended Actions To Consider

Lead your sales and marketing teams to collaborate in identifying the trigger events that cause people to consider change and begin their research. Relentlessly ask: “What starts a potential customer down the path that leads to us?”

Provide training for staff to transform their LinkedIn profiles and write content and then implement incentives to measure, recognise and reward those who shine. Identify the content topics that will attract buyers early in the buying cycle by asking: “What do customers look for online before they look for us?”

Transform staff LinkedIn profiles away from being online CVs. Everyone who interacts with customers needs a profile that provides 'social proof' of their integrity and value, positively linked to their employer's products, services and solutions. Once the sales person is evangelically promoting the transformation delivered for clients through the company's solutions, it makes it very difficult for them to go to a competitor and still maintain their credibility. They will also be more loyal knowing that their company wants to help them build their personal brand and advance their career.

Identify individual brand champions. Think of Richard Branson, Michael Dell, Joel Manby and others. In your own way, who will you build personal brand campaigns around? Which loyal long-term team members can deliver insightful thought leadership content that others within your company can amplify through their own social platforms? These other people can post updates, like and Tweet the 'hub' content with additional commentary.

Implement a social listening/monitoring tool and identify where your customers are in social media and what's important to them. Identify how you can assist and engage anyone who is unhappy but do so with empathy rather than defensiveness.

Create a content calendar around monthly or quarterly content campaigns with high value thought leadership or insight publishing to attract buyers to be amplified by as many people as possible in your company and the marketplace.

Go and be where your customers are online. Constantly ask yourself this question: What are my prospective customers looking for online before they look for our product, our service or our solution? Where are they searching online and what cyber-communities are they part of? I moved away from my own website for blogging to write in LinkedIn Publisher for this very reason... it's hugely powerful.

Create incentives for customers to write positive content and create their own mini case studies and testimonials on social sites. Your customers are the ones that your prospects will believe. Customers who advocate for you are more influential than the best sales people.

Integrate with your Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system so that you can create a ticket/case for unhappy customers. Your CRM software is where you should be enabling sales processes and creating a single source of the truth about prospects and customers to manage their entire lifecycle with you.

Implement an effective web to lead system to automate website traffic into opportunities within your CRM and **with a marketing automation tool** to execute lead nurturing / drip marketing with valuable content rather than sales and marketing collateral alone.

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Have a social media and social selling policy. Be clear about what people can and cannot do on social platforms, especially when it comes to expressing opinions. Distinguish between content curation (posting other people's content) and social publishing (original thought leadership). Offer training and support while providing access to best practice tools such as LinkedIn Sales Navigator

Be brave and set your people free. Provide training to enable them to intelligently execute. Hold people accountable but also empower them to make decisions that create delighted customer advocates.

– End –

Footnote: Infographic on page 9 provided by Jamie Shanks.



About Tony Hughes. Tony is an internationally recognised speaker and author in the field of sales leadership. He created the term 'strategic social selling' which is the subject of his next book. He has three decades of international business experience and has taught for the University of Sydney. His widely acclaimed book, *The Joshua Principle*, is in its 6th printing.

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Videos: <https://youtube.com/RSVPselling/videos>

These Concepts can be delivered as a keynote and Tony can be contacted via e-mail tony@RSVPselling.com. This recorded radio interview also discusses strategic social selling here with a focus on content publishing as a key strategy: <https://bit.ly/1R6plyj>.

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