

## Sales Content – Are We On The Same Page?

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## Does it make sense for you to read this?

If you or your sales-team...

- Sell in an environment where there is very little competition...
- Sell by processing transactions versus wrestling down sales...
- Possess a 'sales bag' with basically one offering...

Then it probably would make more sense to peruse the pile of unread magazines or books sitting under your desk rather than read this short paper.

If, on the other hand...

- Your selling world is highly competitive with **hand-to-hand** selling contests...
- The **wisdom of selling** your key offerings is trapped in the 'heads of few' but needs to be in the 'heads of many'...
- **Cross-selling** is a wish but not a practice...
- You have a **New Product Introduction** which must have early traction with your sales-team & your market...

- Your '**Sales Bag**' has many important items but the sales-team just understands how to sell a few...
- You are **integrating separate sales-teams** from different divisions or companies...
- You announce **new products for new markets** that will significantly shape your company...
- You have experienced a pattern of losses where your **better solution has been out-sold** by better sales campaigns...
- You have ambitious **growth** plans...

Then the few minutes spent reading this short paper might make sense.

## **What is Sales Content?**

Sales content might be described as

The selling material that  
equips  
the customer-facing team for  
face-to face or phone-to-phone or web interactions  
that win  
the daily sales contest – the sales battle.

## **In what ways might we evaluate the quality of our Sales Content?**

Here are Six Tests:

1. Behaviors of the Customer-facing Team
2. Selling Accuracy
3. Sales Efficiency
4. Articulation of Value
5. Time to Contagion
6. Leveraging the ‘Wise Ones’

## Test #1 – Behaviors of the Customer-facing Team

For every significant item in their ‘sales bag’ can the entire customer-facing team do the following?

- Articulate and evaluate who is a good fit for each offering and who is a weak fit
- Ask effective questions to appropriately assess the right fit
- Articulate with great consistency the key messages
- Anticipate the likely objections
- Provide consistent, effective best practice responses to likely objections
- Identify and establish the winning buying criteria that a prospect needs to embrace for us to win the sale
- Give examples and tell stories that capture the interest of prospects

A wise man once said that, “To know and not to do, is not to know.” By measuring what they- the field-‘do’, we can measure what they know.

What they know is an indicator of how well we have prepared them for the fray.

## Test # 2 - Selling Accuracy

What kind of fish does the sales-team catch?

Do the opportunities they ‘catch’ consistently fit the ideal customer profile?

In addition to some of the ‘right’ fish, does the sales-team consistently catch the wrong fish:

- Fish that are too small –
- Fish that are too big –
- Fish that are the wrong type –
- Fish that are ‘dead fish’ -.

Does the rest of company have to regularly marshal resources to solve problems caused by customers who are the wrong fish?

## Test #3 - Sales Efficiency

When you look at the material given to the customer-facing team about your offerings, in which of these ‘buckets’ does most of it fall?

The **WHAT** bucket?

What is the offering: features, benefits, attributes, feeds & speeds?

The **WHO** bucket?

Who is a good fit and who is weak fit?

The **HOW** bucket?

How should I sell this? The best practices for questions, messaging, capturing interest, handling objections, and establishing winning ground-rules.

If your answer is –

“Most of the Sales Content falls into the **WHAT** bucket”

- then ask yourself,

“What percentage of the information falls into the **WHAT** bucket?”

A common answer is between 80 to 95%.

Why is 80-95% ‘WHAT’ information’ a problem?

If customer-facing professionals do not have high quality sales content, they must make translations & creations for every significant item in their ‘sales bag’

They must Translate the WHAT information to the WHO.

Then once they understand the WHO, they need to Create the HOW information.

For everything in their ‘sales bag’, the customer-facing team must determine the following:

### The **WHO**

1. Who is a good fit and a weak fit?

The **HOW** – best practices for selling the offering

2. Which questions should be asked to determine the prospect’s fit?
3. Which objections are we likely to get?
4. How should we appropriately and effectively respond to these objections?
5. Which messages will resonate with a customer in a face-to-face or phone-to-phone scenario? *(These messages are almost always different than the brochure and web-site messages.)*
6. Which stories and examples can be used to capture the imagination of the prospect?
7. What facts, images, and stories gain credibility with the prospect?
8. How do we empathize with the prospect and speak their domain or industry language?

What is the cost of these creations and translations to the organization?

- **Misfit Sales** - square pegs are sold to round holes?
- **By-passed Opportunities** – good fits missed while chasing misfits?
- **Creation & Translation Time** – individual field members create content rather than leverage existing content.
- **Trial & Error** – learning by mistakes vs. best practices.
- **Good, Bad, & Ugly Content** – the varying individual skills of the customer-facing team members determines the quality of the content, messaging, and customer interaction.
- **Brand & Message Variance** – messages & brand are determined by individual creations vs. consistent best practices.
- **Speed of New Product Acceptance** – the speed of new product up-take is determined by time it takes for the customer facing team to learn through trial and error.

## Test #4 - Articulation of Value

How consistently does your sales-team 'out-articulate' the competition?

Wherever the competition is steep, there is competition for 'air time'.

In competitive selling situations, each competitor is graced with a scarce number of prospect attention units. When sales-teams fumble through the messages, contradict each other, flinch at objections, and confuse the prospect, they experience a double loss in 'air time'.

First, the sales-team wastes the initial attention units the prospect gave them.

Second, the sales-team needs to use subsequent attention units to clarify misunderstandings and even –sometimes- rebuild credibility.

Those sales-teams that are clear and coordinated in their messaging and that handle objections with grace, gain tremendous advantages:

- They engender more trust and credibility.

- They enable more members of the prospect organization to effectively carry the seller's banners or messages.
- They have the time to take the discussion to a deeper level so their solution is viewed as more robust.

Good sales content prepares the sales-team with customer-centric, consistent, crisp messages. It also provides a list of likely objections with appropriate answers. Sales-teams that have high quality Sales Content tools multiply their 'air time' and 'out-articulate' the competition.

Good sales content also has 'Pass-it-on Stickiness'. Pass-it-on Stickiness' is the ability of a message to be effectively passed in the following way:

- From the sales-team to a prospect advocate or sponsor.
- From a prospect advocate or sponsor to many influencers & decision makers within the prospective account.

## **Test #5 - Time to Contagion**

How long does it take for a new product, service, or solution to reach the point where the company is realizing its return on its investment?

Consider the impact of the points we have just discussed.

**Translations** – the sales-team might have to translate the WHAT to the WHO.

**Creations** - the customer-facing team might have to create their own HOW to sell information.

**Trial & Error** - the timeline for success of the new product or service could be dictated by how long it takes for the entire sales-team to learn through trial and error.

**Wrong Fish** – if the sales-team initially sells to the wrong fish how will this impact the faith the sales-team has in the new offering? Sales-teams typically function with a herding instinct; the herd could avoid the product if they do not trust it.

**Value Articulation** – if the sales-team is not crisp about the messaging and handling of objections how many ‘right’ fish could be lost until the messaging and objection handling matures?

## Test #6 - Leveraging the 'Wise Ones'

How effectively do you leverage the 'wise ones' in your organization - the experts?

Any customer-facing team of more than three professionals is likely to have an 'expert'. Expertise can come in many forms:

- Expertise on a product or service.
- Expertise on the technology of which the product is an element.
- Expertise on the customer's domain or industry.
- Wisdom about how to sell the product or service.
- Wisdom about how to implement the product or service.

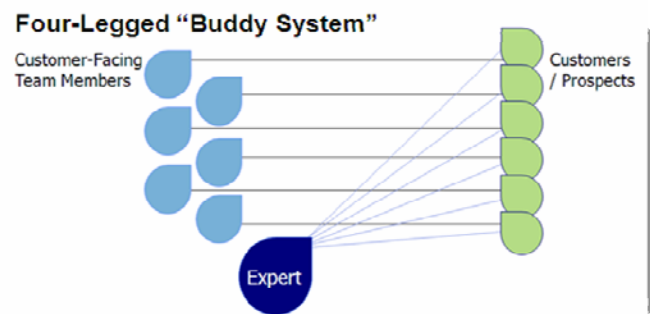
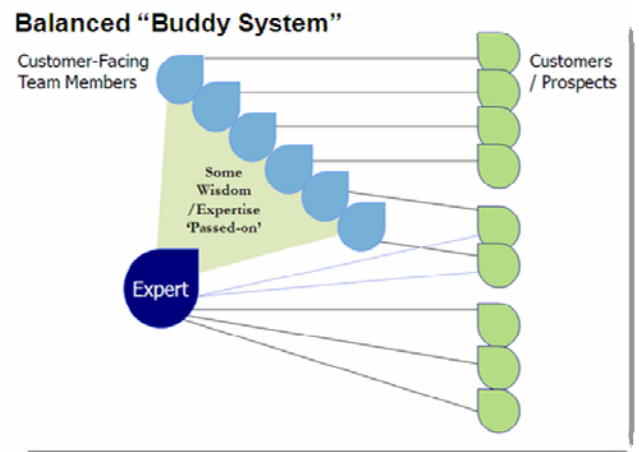
This expertise or wisdom can be leveraged in three fundamental ways:

- Helping a customer.
- Enlightening the rest of the customer-facing team.
- Forming a go-to-market strategy.

How effectively does the organization 'pull the expertise out of the heads of the wise ones' and impart the wisdom to the rest of the team?

How effectively does the organization leverage the authoritative voice of the experts with prospects and customers?

Which kind of Buddy System is common in your organization?



## Is Improving Sales Content Worth the Investment?

If your sales-team is engaged in daily competitive frays - hand-to-hand selling contests- then high quality Sales Content is probably important.

If the six Sales Content Tests discussed here have highlighted some significant gaps – then improving your Sales Content is probably important.

But why make the investment in improving Sales Content?

### Opportunities

What is the bottom-line impact?

1. If you improve your selling accuracy and eliminate just two ‘misfit sales’? (The square peg sold to the round hole)  
\$ \_\_\_\_
2. If you improve selling time by just 5%?  
\$ \_\_\_\_
3. If you win just three more highly competitive selling in engagements because you ‘out-articulate’ the competition?  
\$ \_\_\_\_

4. If one significant new product reaches its volume objectives three months ahead of schedule?  
\$ \_\_\_\_

Having queried over four thousand sales professionals on the quality of their Sales Content, we are confident that less than 10% of all sales organizations provide their sales-teams with high quality sales content. Given all the current ‘me-too’ approaches to selling, what opportunity does this provide for you to win sales because you are better prepared?

### Risks

What is risk to you if you continue with business-as-usual and your competition substantially improves their selling accuracy, their selling efficiency, and their ability to ‘out-articulate you? What if the competition can bring new products to market with 50% faster traction?

The key questions are...

Which organizations will continue with the **Stone-Age Selling Approach** whereby every customer-facing person crafts their own ‘seat-of-the-pants’ sales content?

Which organizations will equip their customer-facing team with consistent – best practice tools for messaging, objection handling, qualifying, and ground-rule setting? – **High Quality Sales Content**.

Seize the opportunity.

Find an expert who can help you.

They are many messaging experts who can help with the high-level messages but do not have a ‘roll-up-your-selves’ process for developing ‘field-ready’ Sales Content.

Make sure you select someone who has a **proven content development process...**

a process that will engage cross-functional resources to develop ‘field-ready’ tools.

a process that can be used across product groups.

a process that establishes a methodology within your company for building  
consistent,  
documented,  
high-quality  
Sales Content.



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