

Social Engagement: Beyond Social Selling

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Strategic Decision

Sales professionals who embrace social selling are seeing a performance advantage over those who do not. The benefits extend beyond new-account sales to include improvements to existing customer metrics. Social selling is evolving into social engagement, a strategy that integrates social communications into all aspects of customer management. As more of their customer community engages socially, sales professionals will need to adapt.

Strategic Issue:

How will social media, technologies and selling evolve beyond identifying and creating transactional opportunities?

Strategic Issue: A complex question that requires research, data, perspective, knowledge and context to answer

A New Language

The invention of the G3 facsimile machine in the mid-1980s introduced a new communications device into mainstream business. No more waiting for a letter to arrive or a courier to deliver a document. The fax machine digitized content, and through existing telephone lines, created a duplicate on the other end. Salespeople quickly learned to appreciate its value on the last day of the quarter. However, the fax machine's dominant run was short because personal computers, telecommunications and email moved in with a new and better way to communicate. Today, social communication has arrived, and while it may never completely replace email or other forms of communication, it offers a better way to understand, connect and communicate with customers and teammates.

High or Low Social

In our Research Note *Social Selling: Impact on Performance*, we segmented those respondents to the *2014 MHI Global Sales Best Practices Study* who self-identified as being highly active with social media from those who identified themselves as low users of social media. Predictably, those with higher levels of social acumen outperformed those categorized as low

users along several key metrics: new-customer acquisition, lead generation and prospecting productivity.

The adoption of social media continues to grow among salespeople of all types. Those who are actively embracing

social media as a business communication medium have also found it presents a tremendous opportunity to engage with a new type of buyer and to create a performance advantage.

Prospecting has long been seen as one of the least productive and most time-consuming activities. Every sales professional must do it, but few resources are focused on it. Social selling as a strategy for creating opportunities is readily accepted, but few organizations have developed any formal social selling training. To leverage social selling's potential, sales leaders must incorporate foundational social selling training into their sales enablement programs.

Unexpected Data

Although social selling is widely recognized for its ability to help sales professionals make an initial contact with a prospect, once connected, the sales professional naturally transitions to a more personal communications format: email, phone, webinar, video or face to face. Through these media, they can exchange information, ask qualification questions and begin to understand their prospects' needs.

The opportunity creation gains produced by social selling were anticipated. What was unexpected was the impact social selling had on managing opportunities, customer relationships and sales performance. Existing customer revenue growth, customer retention and overall quota achievement all showed double-digit gains for the high-social group over the low-social. Again, in the absence of any formal training program, those sales professionals with high-social-selling skills have created an advantage by extending social technologies beyond prospecting.

Social Engagement

Social media allows for a digital connection to the social persona of our prospects and customers. With socially adept customers, the social communications channel remains active during the life of the opportunity and long after it ends. Social media is simply another communications channel that can be used to connect with those customers that actively engage in

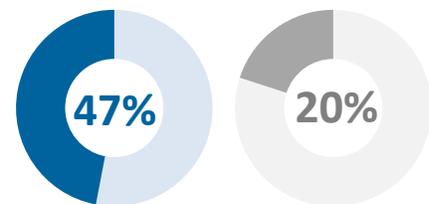
the social sphere. Even passive customer participation makes social media a unique platform for connecting, communicating and influencing customers.

Social engagement is a strategy that integrates social communications into all aspects of customer management.

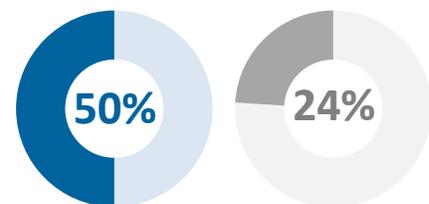
Strategic Data

- World-Class Sales Performers
- All Respondents

"Social media is a highly effective tool to identify new business opportunities."



"Social media is a highly effective tool to identify decision makers."



Initially, sales professionals valued social selling because of its power to help them identify prospect organizations and decision makers. As adoption of social selling grows, the sales professional's skills will develop and advance, increasing the impact of social technologies on sales performance and productivity.

SOURCE: 2014 MHI Global Sales Best Practices Study

Building on the tactics and strategies of the first generation of social selling demand-generation concepts, social engagement recognizes the importance of the social persona of people and companies. Social engagement capitalizes on

the unique communication attributes of social media platforms, the nature of communities and the power of social media as an internal collaboration tool.

Social Engagement Elements

There are five major components of social engagement. Each connects the functional capabilities of social technology to customer interactions.

Social Marketing: Personal marketing skills are necessary for social engagement. Sales professionals must maintain a professional and consistent brand and social persona throughout their presence on popular platforms such as LinkedIn, Google+, Facebook and Twitter. New opportunities are created through the first-generation social selling tactics of source, seek and connect, and demand generation is augmented when combined with the campaign management functionality and marketing automation functionality resident in most customer relationship management (CRM) systems. Compiling compelling content and sharing it with customers enhances the brand and credibility of sales professionals while developing their customer community.

Social CRM: Social data provides a unique level of transparency into customer and company behavior that didn't exist 10 years ago. We can now track and monitor our customers' social presence. We can connect to them, follow them and have visibility into their contacts and announcements, as well as what they share online – all useful bits of sales intelligence. We can track their interactions with our social environments by monitoring what they view, participate in or download. In the analog world, this level of customer insight demanded strong existing customer relationships. Social CRM includes a social profile with summarized social data for individuals and organizations, along with the ability to add industry or competitive social profiles as well.

Social Customer Collaboration: Social technologies have unique collaboration capabilities that make them ideal for passive communication. In a shared, secure environment, sales professionals can share and store a variety of content types, building a customer-specific library of market analysis, solution capabilities, customer case studies, business justifications and proposals. A running chat stream manages discussions sequentially, as messages can be left at any time and retrieved from anywhere on any device. As with any social platform, every touchpoint and interaction is tracked. Aggregating, analyzing and capitalizing on this data adds another level of insight into customer behaviors and sales best practices.

Social Customer Community: There are elements of content that all customers value. The job roles and personas with which sales professionals interact are somewhat similar, based on what they sell and how they connect with customers. Consequently, these personas will be drawn to similar business, market and capabilities issues. Sales enablement can develop, compile and curate a variety of content in multiple formats that sales professionals can select from and disseminate to their customers and communities.

Social Sales Collaboration: Social technologies will have the biggest and most immediate impact on the sales organization through collaboration capabilities such as competitive forums, subject matter expert chats, product specialist blogs and discussions. Sales professionals connect to their personal knowledge networks to acquire the intelligence, knowledge and content they use in their customer communications.

Elevating those interactions to a social platform engages the entire sales community.

A Long Road

The road from social selling to social engagement will be long, treacherous and anything but straight. It took the business culture over a decade to learn how to use email to replace memos, letters and much of the physically published or copied materials. Yet, for the majority of business roles today, we purchase memory and storage, not folders and file cabinets.

Each element of the social engagement concept will move through a unique metamorphosis. With social selling leading the way, social marketing has already made huge advancements. Some organizations and many sales professionals are already socially fluent and connecting to customers who are fluent or at least conversational in the social sphere. As marketing automation becomes common, socially savvy organizations are using social technology to analyze the data from their campaigns and craft more effective

As our research shows, some sales professionals will adapt quickly and capitalize on their advanced social skills as a competitive advantage. Sales organizations are beginning to realize the importance of developing these marketing and social skills across their entire sales force. As more of the customer community engages socially, sales leaders will need to add social selling as a core competency, and sales professionals will need to adapt.

customer-engagement strategies. In the immediate term, social data is useful information for those who understand the value of that data. Customer collaboration happens every day in a multitude of random forms. Many see the value, but best practices remain sparse.

After surviving an initial wave of failures, social sales collaboration has found a foothold in many organizations through Salesforce.com's Chatter and Microsoft's Yammer. These micro-blogging technologies are the vanguard of social sales collaboration, allowing the extended sales, marketing and customer-service community to share, interact, collaborate and communicate. Opportunities, contacts and accounts can be followed, providing visibility to the various chat streams in which they are discussed.

Related MHI Research Notes:

Social Selling: Increasing Adoption
Social Selling: Impact on Performance
Marketing: The New Sales Skill
Social Selling: A New Way to Prospect
Social Collaboration: Creating a New Culture
Social Communications: Leveraging a New Medium

Webinar: Social Selling: Beyond Broadcast

About MHI Research Institute

The MHI Research Institute is a research organization dedicated to improving the performance and productivity of complex B2B sales organizations. Through extensive research into the best practices, strategies and decision frameworks that drive World-Class Sales Performance, we help sales leaders develop and hone sales strategies to improve sales performance. To provide strategic support for our clients, we publish thought-leading research, conduct World-Class Performance Studies and offer members customized insight into their strategic issues. For more information contact our [Director of Member Experience](#) via email or phone at +1 775-284-9035.

Four Reasons To Invest in Frontline Sales Managers

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Strategic Decision

Frontline sales managers (FSMs) remain the most underdeveloped role in sales despite their pivotal impact on sales execution and performance improvement. To create scalable and sustainable sales results, enablement must develop programs designed for the FSM. However, MHI Research Institute data shows that there is still an investment gap. This Research Note provides four reasons to focus development programs on FSMs first along with insights and data from our research to help sales leaders build a strong business case.

Strategic Issue:

How can sales leaders build a research-based case for a dedicated FSM development program to drive scalable and sustainable sales results?

Strategic Issue: A complex question that requires research, data, perspective, knowledge and context to answer

The Priority Principle

“The Principle of Priority states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what’s important first.”

– Steven Pressfield

Rethinking Budget Priorities

Budgeting helps translate priorities into action by making the necessary financial resources available. Investments in sales productivity are a primary budget line item that needs to be tailored to achieve the business’s goals. According to the *2014 MHI Sales Performance and Productivity Study*, the majority of investments in sales productivity are still focused on salespeople. *In the 2014 MHI Sales Performance and Productivity Study*, 82 of respondents said they focused

sales productivity investments on salespeople, whereas only 55 percent made FSMs a priority.

Given the key role of FSMs in sales execution and sales performance (see MHI Research Note *Frontline Sales Managers Triangle*) and the huge leverage effect their span of control creates, this investment focus needs to change. If an investment in one sales manager can impact the

performance of eight salespeople, why would sales leadership not prioritize this investment over others?

Training and Product Knowledge Leading Initiatives



In this Research Note, we will lay out four reasons sales organizations need to focus development programs on FSMs first along with insights and data from our research to help sales leaders build the business case.

FSMs Are the Linchpin to Performance

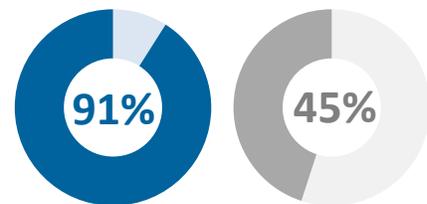
FSMs have a greater impact on sales execution, sales productivity and sales transformation than any other role. As our *2015 CSO Insights Sales Management Optimization Study* shows, FSMs have to balance multiple top priorities. They also need to strike a continuous balance between three often-competing areas – customer, business and people, and do so in constantly changing and complex selling and buying environments. Plus, FSMs are always sandwiched between the competing goals and motivations of their team and corporate executives as well as between those of customers and the internal organization.

Having been the best sales professional in the organization does not automatically qualify an individual to be a top-performing FSM. Sales leaders with ambitious growth and performance goals cannot afford mediocre sales results. Yet, that is exactly what

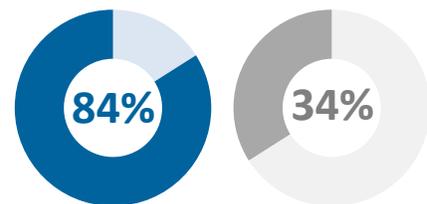
Strategic Data

● World-Class Sales Performers
● All Respondents

“Our sales managers are always held accountable for ensuring the accuracy of our sales forecast.”



“In an average month, our sales managers definitely spend adequate time coaching each individual on the sales team.”



While FSMs are the key to driving sustainable improvements in sales execution and performance, there is still a huge investment gap when it comes to FSM development and enablement. World-class sales leaders have closed this gap and invested wisely in the role with the greatest leverage effect.

SOURCE: 2015 MHI Sales Best Practices Study

2015 Top Sales Management Effectiveness Priorities



they get when they leave FSMs to figure out their role on their own. Poorly developed FSMs drive top performers out of the organization and promote mediocre performance from those who remain. Their approach comes from a lack of training and development, and not malicious intent, but the results are the same.

World-Class Sales Performers understand that FSM development is not about adding costs to the bottom line, but adding growth and effectiveness to the top line. They understand that the cost of doing nothing is much bigger.

For more on the complexity of the FSM role, see MHI Research Institute Note *Frontline Sales Managers Triangle*.

Coaching Is Key to Realizing Untapped Potential

Coaching is not a required capability for individual sales professionals, so most new FSMs need to develop the skill as quickly as they can. Coaching is a leadership skill that aims to develop each individual salesperson's full potential. FSMs use their domain expertise in sales along with social and communication skills to facilitate conversations with salespeople and discover areas for improvement. Sales professionals are accountable for applying the coach's guidance in their day-to-day selling activities.

To have a positive impact on the business and help sales professionals put advice into action, coaches must use the common language of the sales organization, one that is based on the stages along the customer's journey and mapped to the sales process. Coaching must also incorporate the implemented sales methodologies, processes, tools and the enablement services provided through content and training. Of course, this requires coaching enablement that is also mapped to the sales system and the enablement framework.

Win Rate of Forecast Deals



Data from the *CSO Insights Sales Management Optimization Study* clearly shows that coaching has a measurable impact on business results. Furthermore, the more formally the coaching process is designed, implemented and embedded in the sales system, the better the win rates of forecasted deals. No sales leader can afford

to overlook a strategy that can lead to a 9 percent jump in win rate.

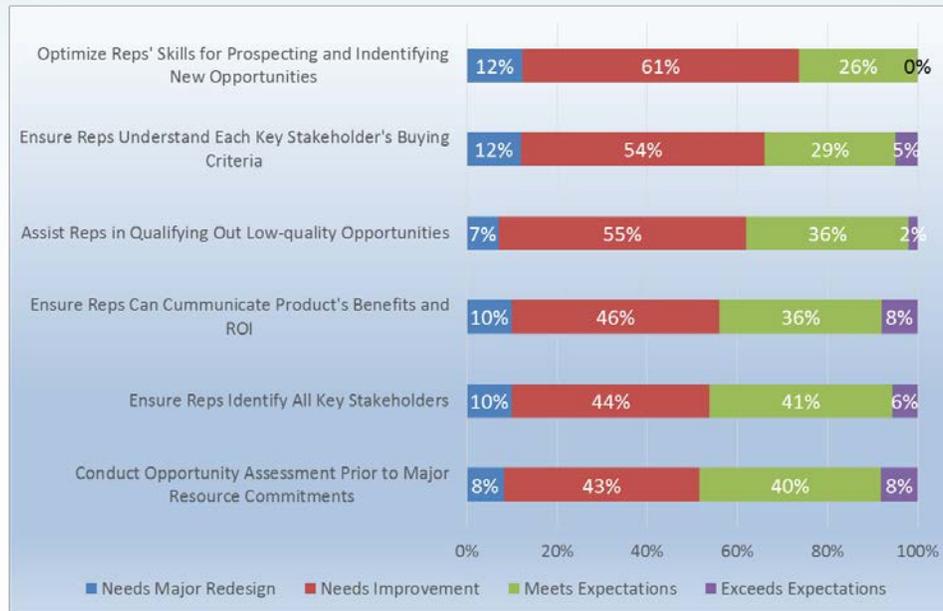
For more on FSM enablement, see MHI Research Note *Frontline Sales Managers: Enablement Needed*.

Aligning FSM Focus to Sales Strategy Increases Impact

To be effective in their role, FSMs must focus on the things that matter and that can be managed, influenced and measured directly. FSMs, especially if they have never had any training and development, often focus on sales objectives. But sales objectives and business goals, such as various revenue goals, cannot be managed directly. They are a result of the decisions made by buyers, so they can only be influenced indirectly and measured after the fact.

What FSMs can manage, influence and measure directly are the sales activities and related behaviors that lead to these sales objectives. Sharpening the FSMs' focus on *managing the right set of activities and coaching the related behaviors* is as important as developing the specific coaching capability. Both elements have to go hand-in-hand to create business impact. For details, see MHI Research Note *Frontline Sales Manager: Sharpening Focus*.

Sales Leaders Shift Focus to Prospecting



The FSMs' focus also needs to be adjusted to the funnel management strategy. FSMs have typically focused their attention on forecasted deals in the latter stages of the customer's journey. However, as our *2015 CSO Insights Sales Management Optimization Study* shows, sales leaders are shifting their focus to the early stages of the customer's journey to increase the number and quality of opportunity in later stages.

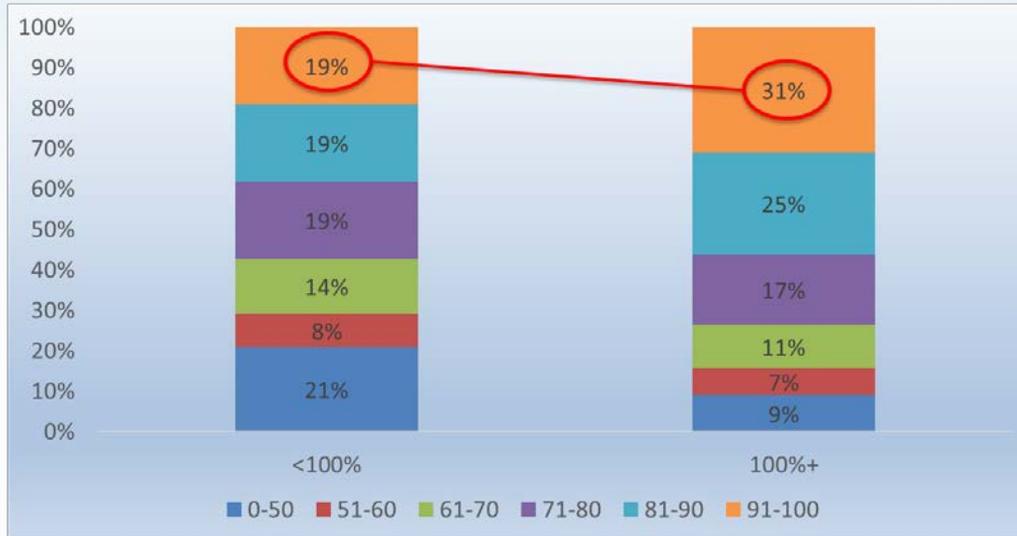
To align to sales strategy, FSMs must sharpen their focus by applying sales analytics and metrics to each stage of the customer's journey. When FSMs manage activities and coach behaviors early along the customer's journey, their impact on the business is greater. However, without enablement programs that are aligned to the *entire* customer's journey, FSMs will continue to do what they have always done - focus their attention on the deals they think will close next.

Forecast Accuracy Is Key to Sales Effectiveness

According to the *2014 MHI Research Institute Sales Performance and Productivity Study*, forecast accuracy has a measurable and significant impact on sales performance. As shown in the chart, those organizations with higher forecast accuracy were more likely (31%) to anticipate reaching or exceeding plan than those with lower forecast accuracy (19%).

Forecast accuracy is a highly relevant metric for a number of reasons. Sales forecasts are not only the foundation for financial forecasts, but also provide necessary insights for the organization's entire supply chain. Production schedules, fulfillment, vendor relations, human resources, etc., all rely on accurate sales forecasts. In addition, executive management relies on forecast information to shape their communication with board members and shareholders.

Forecast Accuracy



FSMs can play a pivotal role in improving forecast accuracy, but they need a sales system derived from the customer’s journey, with defined activities and customer decision gates.

This provides the foundation for coaching conversations that provide clarity on the true stage of an opportunity and allow FSMs to commit to a realistic forecast.

MHI Research Institute data provides ample evidence for the sales leader looking to make the business case for FSM development. When FSMs receive well-crafted and executed enablement services that are aligned to the sales strategy and the entire customer's journey, their leadership and coaching practices reinforce other enablement investments and sales initiatives. It is an investment that creates a win-win for the sales leader and the organization.

Related MHI Research Notes:

- Frontline Sales Manager Triangle*
- Frontline Sales Manager: Sharpening Focus*
- Frontline Sales Manager: Maturity Assessment Model*
- Frontline Sales Manager: Capability Framework*
- Frontline Sales Manager: Get Agile*
- 2015 CSO Sales Management Optimization Study*

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