The key to sales productivity and growth? 
Spend less time selling.

Jason Angelos and Philip Davis
A review of past years’ sales performance reveals a disturbing trend. In 2014, nearly a fifth of CSOs failed to meet their revenue targets. They attained, on average, just 82 percent of their revenue goals.¹ This year, 79 percent of CSOs have seen an increase in their sales targets of 5 percent or more. But only 16 percent are confident they can achieve them.²

It's not supposed to be this way. CSOs have made sales productivity a top priority. Yet, after a decade of investing in technologies intended to free sales teams to spend more time selling, sales productivity continues to tumble—from 41 percent three years ago to 35 percent in 2014.³ The problem is not with the quality of available sales technologies. Nor is the answer to simply give more time to sellers. Sales organizations must adapt to the digitally disrupted sales reality in which they now operate, both with their customers and within their own organizations.
Looking for sales in all the wrong places

Historically, CSOs won—or lost—their customers at the point of purchase. That’s no longer the case. Digital has killed the traditional sales and marketing funnel. Today, the buying process is nonstop and highly fluid. With more information, opinions and choices than ever before, customers constantly evaluate how well a company lives up to its promises. They want consistent and tailored experiences every step of the way—from consideration to purchase, through service interactions, renewals and future purchase opportunities.

These changes to the buying process have had a profound effect on sales organizations. The field of play for traditional sales is shrinking quickly, with implications for both direct-to-consumer and enterprise selling. Business customers are often 57 percent through the buying process when they meet sales representatives for the first time.\(^4\) That’s more than half of the sales journey during which time sales teams are effectively shut out, unable to influence buying decisions. In this environment, an increase in actual selling time may be nice. But it’s not the silver bullet for sales growth. CSOs need to reconsider their interactions with current and prospective customers and better understand where, when and how often they have opportunities to truly advise and influence them. In addition to recognizing the new nature and sources of leads, CSOs’ best bet for driving sales growth is to shift their focus from increasing selling time to helping their sellers optimize precious moments of truth with customers.

Some companies have taken notice and shifted their focus from closing transactional sales to cultivating “evergreen” customer relationships. They make sure sellers have plenty of opportunities to engage with customers and advise them on things they notice and value. And they inform sellers on all dimensions of a customer’s experience with the company, including service interactions, past purchase patterns and future buying propensity. That builds long-term relationships. Each digital or service interaction is a chance to generate more leads. Each encounter with a sales agent is an opportunity to enhance customers’ experiences. Those experiences are now central to selling.
This is not your father's customer experience

CSOs have been generally dismissive of the customer experience (CX). They felt their job was to get customers in the door; it was someone else's job to keep them. They considered leads that CX generated unqualified. And they believed measures of experience and satisfaction were based on “soft” metrics. That meant they couldn't calculate or monetize the true value of experience. Digital has revealed the fallacy of all these long-standing beliefs and helped make the formerly loose correlation between service, experience and sales more tangible.

In the digital age, high-quality interactions enhance relationships, provide cross- and up-sell opportunities, and serve as a prime source of lead origination. Accenture's 2014 CSO Insights research confirms that the best-performing B2B organizations originate the majority of their leads (58 percent) from non-sales-related experiences. In addition, with new metrics and instrumentation, companies can accurately calculate the effect of CX on financial results. Analytical tools that enable sales leaders to measure the correlation between customer loyalty and long-term economic benefits are particularly important. Some CSOs are taking notice and elevating the importance of their experience metrics.

Rackspace, a managed cloud computing company with 300,000 business customers, builds on Net Promoter Score® measures to not only assess the loyalty of its customers, but the health of its business. Fleetmatics is another company that is focusing on NPS and has seen success by embracing the value of customer satisfaction.

Quantifying experience and satisfaction is a step in the right direction. But CSOs who accept the premise that CX is central to the selling process and integral to sales momentum must do more. They need to adjust their accountabilities and information-sharing capabilities to better meet customer expectations across the buying cycle. They must refocus their selling processes from products to experiences. And they must take advantage of every opportunity to influence customers' buying decisions and build lasting customer relationships. At the most fundamental level, they need to embrace CX as the totality of interactions that buyers and other stakeholders have with a company across all sales, marketing and service touch points over time. In this definition, CX becomes more than a “soft” attribute divorced from the bottom line. It becomes a transformative sales lever and major point of sales differentiation.
The case for CX as a critical sales lever

CX impacts the bottom line in several ways. The delivery of engaging customer experiences persuades customers to buy more. It incents them to stay longer. And it encourages them to refer others.

B2B companies that generate higher revenues get this. They are more likely to prioritize and monetize CX and maximize selling opportunities by aligning their sales approach to the entire customer experience. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of high performers can directly attribute business results to CX investments. Only 22 percent of low performers can.9 Not surprisingly, B2B high performers also are more likely to acknowledge the importance of CX in cross- or up-selling. They are better at building long-term customer relationships. And they are more successful when it comes to farming additional sales opportunities from existing customers.10 In these ways, they are capturing millions more in revenue than their competitors.

Importantly, these CSOs are not improving their sales performance by simply devoting more time to traditional "selling." They are enabling their agents to make better, more strategic use of the time they have with customers. Other companies can learn from their example. To use CX to its fullest advantage, CSOs should:

**Stake their claim.** As a first step, CSOs need to shift their mindset. They need to embrace the premise that each customer interaction is an opportunity to position sales agents as trusted advisors and relationship managers. As customers accept fewer sales calls, sales agents must approach every experience—not just the sales meetings—as a chance to strengthen the relationship, generate leads and influence sales. Once they've accepted that CX is an engine for sales growth and a core contributor to P&L, CSOs need to take an active role in governing, measuring and improving the experiences that occur across the customer lifecycle. This means:

- Re-imagining sales strategies, aligning sales operations to the "always on" customer environment, and educating ecosystem partners about the value of CX and the role all parties play.
- Revisiting accountabilities and evolving roles such as Chief Customer Experience Officers or Customer Success Officers to develop sales growth strategies based on tailored and integrated experiences across all channels.
- Promoting collaboration as a critical enabler of experiences that drive sales. CSOs must work with their counterparts in service, marketing and finance—either as part of the same organization or explicitly connected—to crush the functional silos that impede the delivery of meaningful and consistent experiences across the customer lifecycle.
Inject CX discipline into sales. CSOs have devoted considerable attention to making sure their sales teams have more time to sell. CX calls for CSOs to refocus their priorities and balance account origination activities with account expansion initiatives. This means:

- Creating new accountabilities that recognize the critical role sales plays and to ensure that the organization is delivering the strongest CX possible.
- Retooling sales talent with new technologies, analytics and guided selling techniques. CSOs can use proven coaching techniques, as well as collaboration tools and recommendation engines, to position sellers as trusted customer advisors, educators, guides and relationship builders.
- Matching sales with opportunities. CSOs can use analytics-driven insights to understand customers’ needs, as well as the context of the sale, and deliver experiences that customers notice and value. Equally important, CSOs need to select the team members and channel partners best suited—and most motivated—to deliver experiences that influence sales.

Clean house. Accenture's 2014 Global Consumer Pulse Research confirmed that negative service experiences such as long wait times, multiple handoffs and impolite representatives can have dire sales consequences. Customers will leave if they are not satisfied. And more than three-quarters will tell others, which jeopardizes future sales from prospective customers. When they “own” CX, CSOs can:

- Identify what's working in CX, as well as the “toxic” experiences that erode customer loyalty.
- Invest in targeted service improvements that produce better experiences. Areas of focus might include first-contact issue resolution, data privacy and multichannel service access.
- Work with service and marketing teams to tackle the root causes of toxic interactions.
A new era of sales growth and productivity

CX is turning sales on its head. Old thinking about the relevance of customer satisfaction and loyalty measures no longer applies. Leading CSOs get this. They are already harnessing CX as a critical engine of sales growth. Equally important, they are acknowledging that they can't afford to NOT be owners of CX.
References

1. Accenture 2014 CSO Insights
2. Accenture 2015 CSO Insights
5. Accenture 2014 CSO Insights
10. Ibid
11. Accenture 2014 Global Consumer Pulse Research
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