

Why the
**RESPONSIVE
SALES TEAM WINS**

Written by Phil Kreindler

Contents

THINGS ARE CHANGING FAST IN B2B SALES	3
WHAT RESPONSIVENESS IS – SPEED AND QUALITY	6
WHY BUYERS LIKE RESPONSIVENESS	8
WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE	11

1

Things are changing fast in B2B Sales

Before we start talking details about Responsiveness, lets look at some of the real shifts in the world of B2B Sales that have made selling both more challenging and more important.

No more competitive advantage

Firstly, from the customer's point of view, you are all starting to look very much the same. Your products and services look increasingly similar and as soon as one company creates a competitive advantage the competition responds and catches up.

So things like quality, price and reputation will get you on the shortlist but you will be up against competitors who are offering virtually the same thing at a similar price. At this point Selling becomes the Competitive differentiator. As we say "How you sell is why you win". This is both a huge challenge and a great opportunity for Sales people.

Responsiveness is recognised as a significant factor in winning business

Business leaders are talking about Responsiveness. Eighteen months ago the Wall Street Journal reported that the CEO of IBM sent out a video message to the entire workforce. In it she said: "Our customers are hammering us and our competitors are hammering us because we're not responsive. We don't answer phone calls, we don't answer questions, we're not responding to inquiries." She said, "Starting today, every inquiry, every request gets answered within 24 hours."

What's driving Responsiveness

There are two main drivers behind the demand for responsiveness. Firstly there are huge pressures on your customers to move quicker to get their products and services to market. The second factor is that customers have recognised that buying takes too long and that it's slowing down the business.

Getting products and services to the market faster

This is an example of how one of our clients has taken on board the need for Responsive selling. Their customers make laser eye surgery equipment. Once a potential improvement has been identified everyone in the supply chain is under pressure to deliver new designs as soon as possible. They cannot wait months for their suppliers to submit proposals for a new design. Until recently the Engineers working for our client were rewarded on productivity alone so they had little time to work on new product designs. But in response to innovation demands from their customers, they have started to factor in speed and quality of response as well. They are now focused on delivering the right quality responses as quickly as possible.

Procurement is too slow

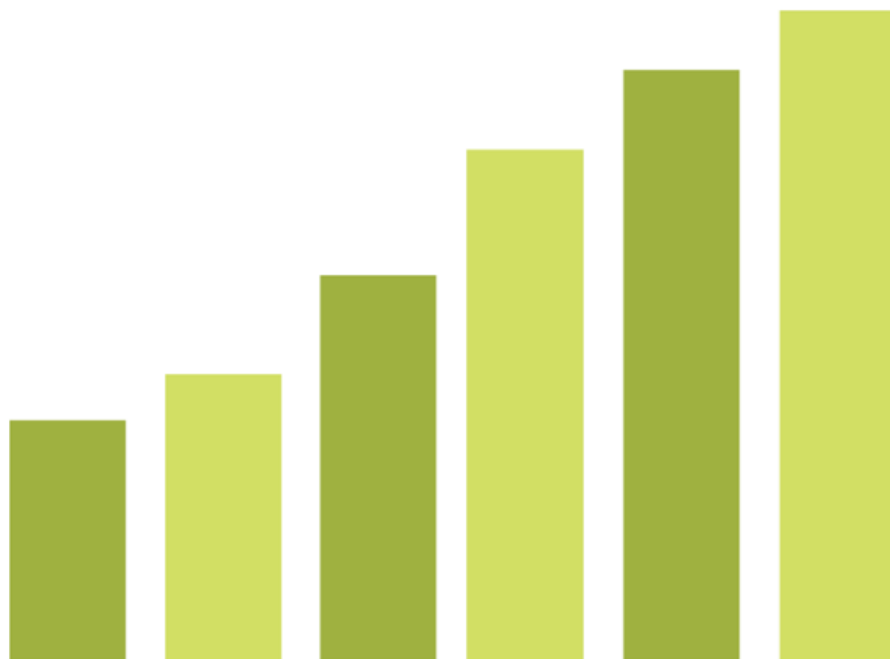
International Data Corporation (IDC) is a global leader in market intelligence for the information technology market. Their recent study into IT buyer experiences said: "IT buyers want to cut nearly 40% off the time they take to make IT purchases" The report's research manager, Gerry Murray in his excerpt says: "However, the trend is going in the opposite direction. IT buying teams are getting bigger and taking more time. IT vendors have a significant opportunity to reverse this trend by implementing marketing and sales activities designed around the IT buyer's journey. As buyers progress through the exploration, evaluation, and purchase stages of their journeys, their needs change radically.

Vendors need to design their marketing and sales activities accordingly or risk delaying or losing revenue."

Frédéric Sebban, CPO at Alstom Grid and chairman of the 2014 Procurement Leaders Zurich Forum is a man who has built a reputation on bringing functions up to speed and transforming their capabilities. He told delegates at the forum that that when he came into his role the organisation was too complex and there were too many procedures in place. Speed and simplicity were watchwords. They still are.

He said that one of his first tasks was to simplify the structure and processes that surround procurement to help make the company and his procurement function more responsive to the increasing demands that are now being placed upon them.

So your customers need to be more Responsive to their customer's demands and are under pressure to accelerate the procurement process. This is an opportunity – but only if you understand what Sales Responsiveness really means and do something about it.





What Responsiveness is – Speed and Quality

Lets be clear that Responsiveness is not a new and different way of doing business, it's always been part of a good Sales Process. But it is an aspect of Sales Professionalism that is now becoming increasingly important. It also fits well with our definition of Customerization - making sure the Sales Process revolves around how customers define good selling.

Quick and Responsive are not the same thing

Quick is important, of course it is. But being Responsive is a different thing. You need to get back to people quickly with the information they need. If you respond hastily, without making sure the information you deliver is exactly what your customer needs, they won't trust you. Get it right and they will.

There are other big potential advantages to being quick to respond which should not be overlooked. If a client gives you a week to come back with information there is no point in going back in a day with something that is not tailored to their needs.

But if you can get back in 3 days with high quality information you may get an advantage over your competitors. Your customer may be looking at your response before he or she sees anything from the competitor and forming views before they even see your competitors' response. The cognitive processes in buyers' heads are not always what we think, I will talk a little about that later.

Oh, and if your response is late, that certainly doesn't build trust.

So being Responsive means you don't take any longer than you absolutely have to before you get back to your customer when they request information. And you make sure that information is of the highest quality.

To really understand why Responsiveness is so important you need to know what Procurement in your customers' organisation is really like.



3

Why buyers like Responsiveness

“Procurement is more about selling than buying” this is what a successful Procurement professional will tell you. Once you understand why, the need for Responsiveness becomes much clearer. Typically one side of their business wants the most sophisticated and expensive solution and they want it now, while other parts of the business want to buy the lowest cost solution that will do the job. Procurement has to keep both sides happy.

So buyers are trying to identify the best possible solution and then sell it internally, using many of the techniques of a good Sales Process. They have to align all internal stakeholder needs, make sure the procurement process doesn't cause delays and get buy in from all the stakeholders once the best solution has been identified. They need your help to do this.

So although buying is basically about getting all the information together (from inside and outside the company) and using it to make a good decision, it's not quite as simple as that. In his best-selling book, ‘Talent is Overrated’ author Geoffrey Colvin talks about buying and he says, “Getting information pushes at the two constraints everyone faces. It takes time and it costs money.”

You can see the opportunity here for you. If you give potential customers the right information quickly, you save them time and that saves them money. Better still, if you give them the information they need before your competitors you are further down the road towards a sale than your competitor. And they can use the information to sell the right solution internally.

A bit of science

The Nobel Prize winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman has done a lot of work on how people make decisions, some of which is directly applicable to how and why people buy. The most important element for us as Sales People is the Peak-End rule. Put simply this says that people judge the Sales experience by the most valuable moment – The Peak – and the End. In the context of a first meeting, the Peak could be the relevant case study you showed to illustrate your experience. The End could be the follow-up mail received by the customer within 24 hours.

You have to make sure every interaction with the customer delivers value to them and pushes the process along. These sorts of interactions build trust.

Ask yourself "Am I giving them everything they need to help them move forward in the buying process?" Value doesn't have to be big steps. It can be small steps. The best way to know if the information is valuable is to ask yourself if it answers the buyer's needs for information and knowledge, and to ask the customer for feedback.

So you don't want to just chuck information at a client in the hope that something will jog them into action – it has to be valuable. And when you know an interaction is due, or likely, plan how it's going to go. And not just meetings; phone calls and even emails need careful consideration. Even if you end up having to leave a voice mail for somebody make sure it delivers value.

The on going value of Responsiveness

Being Responsive in the Sales Process gives customers a taste of what it will be like to work with you – if they like it they will want more. And that certainly helps to secure the sale. What's more, if they feel good about the way you are handling this sale they will ask you to pitch next time and be willing to recommend you to others.

So we have looked at why customers want you to be responsive. It makes buying quicker for them and they can gain a competitive advantage by developing their own solutions more quickly. We have understood that buying is about gathering information in order to make a decision and the quicker you can deliver good quality information the better. And we know that a Peak and End Moment can influence the customer hugely so they both require planning.

Ok, so that's the theory – lets look at what you can do to make sure you are truly Responsive.



4

What you should do now to be more Responsive

Before we talk about the detail lets take a moment to think about why Sales people may not be responsive. It's very rare they choose not to be. So why is it? Most will tell you they don't have time – and that's because they are being asked to fill in forms and do admin rather than selling. If you don't give Sales people the time and space to be Responsive they can't be. It is the responsibility of management to make sure Sales people have that time.

These are 4 areas you can work on to become more Responsive and positively influence the customer's experience.

1. The Sales Process
2. Sales Playbooks
3. Internal Service Level Targets
4. Feedback

The Sales Process

Some of you may be thinking that a Sales Process is about doing things in an inflexible way with lots of admin that slows you down even more, while responsive means being lean and agile. But a good Sales Process is an agile one. Here are some suggestions to help you be Responsive at the different stages.

Research

In this phase you are learning about your customer's industry and business, planning your approach strategy and identifying reasons that will motivate the customer to want to meet you and. Research makes it easier

to respond quickly with high quality information tailored to your customer's business.

First Meeting

The first thing to do is throw away your company creds presentation; they have seen your web site already. Instead you create an Appointment One-Pager. This shows the research you have done on the customers' industry and business, the challenges you believe they face and how your solution would address those challenges, substantiated with a relevant case study. It's all about them not you. And it's not over when you go out of the door. Good follow up makes all the difference. Send an email within 24 hours, summing up your understanding of their goals, solution requirements and decision criteria along with the agreed next steps. You might even suggest a follow up call to validate your understanding. That's being responsive.

Buying Centre

The key element here is about understanding the individual needs within the Buying Centre. With this information you can tailor responses to individual members of the Buying Centre – taking Customerization to another level.

Proposal

Here you are producing a Management Summary and a Proposal using all the information you have gathered. You should define your value proposition first, and then ensure that everyone's contribution supports it. You demonstrate Responsiveness by ensuring the proposal meets the requirements of all the stakeholders. The objective is that the customer feels well understood and that the proposal was really written for them.

Presentation

Remember that like the First Meeting this about the customer not you. Keep it short and focused on their needs – that's what you are responding to. Talk about your solution purely in terms of how it will benefit them - with

the exception of using case studies that show direct parallels with them. Take along the people who will do the work. But first brief them carefully, show them the Opportunity Roadmap and make their role clear. Allow them to provide real insights and involve the customer in the presentation – customers like that. Summarise it all with a Deal One-Pager.

What about objection handling and questions? There shouldn't be any surprise objections if you have done your homework – you will have thought of what they might be and prepared your responses.

The American General Dwight David Eisenhower is often quoted as saying “Plans Are Useless, But Planning Is Indispensable”. You can't be expected to guess every question a customer might ask. But you should have a plan to make sure you can respond quickly and effectively. Create a Question bank – the same questions will arise over and over again so start to record the questions and the answers though be sure to adapt your answers to the customer.

Negotiation and Closing

We have written a separate eBook on Negotiation. But here are a few pointers about making the negotiation process Responsive. Start with the idea that it's not about winning or losing; it's about finding a solution to suit both parties. Have a Plan with a Target, Starting Point and bottom line for each issue. Make sure your Team is carefully briefed and everyone knows his or her role. And have your winning cards ready – trading variables which add value to the customer but have little cost to you. And ensure you have a decision maker from your side in the room so you can close the deal there and then if things are going well.

It should be clear now that the Sales Process is the best way – the only way – to ensure you are Responsive.

Sales Playbooks

The idea of responsiveness is to deliver customer-specific information with the minimum delay. But Responsiveness is not so much about being reactive as proactive. You need to be prepared. And that takes time.

This is where industry-specific Sales Playbooks can help. It involves developing good examples of all the tools of a pitch; approach email, appointment one pager, needs assessment, management summary, case studies with benefits and deal one pager. Then add in a question (and answer) bank and you have everything you need to answer almost any question you are likely to get. All you have to do is tailor it to your customer.

Internal Service Level Targets

Set yourself and your organisation targets for response times. Maybe it's the 24 hour turnaround demanded by the CEO of IBM or something more relevant to your business.

Either way set targets and monitor compliance. It may well be that responding to clients disrupts peoples plans and schedules but with no customers nobody is going to have a schedule. And it's the responsibility of Management to make sure Sales people have the time to be responsive.

It requires the right mind-set in all the people and functions involved in the Sales Process – not just Sales. So follow these simple rules and you will be seen as more Responsive and more Professional:

- Always get back to clients promptly when they contact you – if only to tell them when you will provide the information they require.
- Always deliver what you have promised when you promised – or slightly before.
- Make sure the information you deliver is as relevant to the customer as possible.

Feedback

Experience in itself is worthless. It's only the ability to learn from experience that is valuable. And the only way you can really find out if your customers think you are a Responsive organisation is to ask them. This applies to pitches you have lost as well as wins. You can call them up and talk to them or you could try using a survey, but to become more Responsive you need answers to these types of questions:

- How well in your opinion did we understand your needs?
- How relevant was the information we provided?
- What did you find positive and negative about our proposal?
- How well did we address the requirements of individual stakeholders?
- How do you rate our communication skills and responsiveness?
- How well did we support your internal communication?
- With which words would you describe our sales approach?

Questions to ask yourself

So we know that differentiation through "How you Sell" is key and that customers want a shorter Buying Process. We know that once we get to the short list the customer's perception of your Sales Process is the greatest differentiator and Responsiveness is central to that.

So if you ask yourself these questions and you are not 100% happy with the answers you may need to think much harder about becoming more Responsive.

- Do you have a Sales Process that focuses on Responsiveness?
- Do you have Service Level Targets and monitor them?
- Do you know if your customers think you are responsive?

If you would like any help with this please call – we promise to get back to you really quickly.

Contact Infoteam Consulting today - we're ready to talk

Infoteam Sales Process Consulting AG

Chamerstrasse 56

CH-6300 Zug

Switzerland

Tel: +41 44 804 11 77

Fax: +41 44 804 11 70

www.infoteam-consulting.com