



# Style-Matching

## Three things to know about selling to younger buyers

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**S**alespeople are getting older. Buyers are getting younger. And, now, you have a disconnect. In raw terms, the average age of a professional B2B salesperson in the United States is 47.1 years old. Fifteen years ago, that number was 42, so the sales profession is graying. Meanwhile, the average age of a B2B purchasing agent today is 36. In fact, according to a 2024 survey, millennials (aged 29 to 44) make up to 73% of B2B buying decisions.

While an 11-year age gap does not sound like much, it can be a chasm as wide as the Grand Canyon. Society underwent significant cultural and technological changes between the tail end of Generation X and the leading edge of the millennial generation, and those changes have greatly impacted what millennials want and expect from salespeople and the companies that employ them. Generation Z, which is coming behind the millennials, have the same tendencies — just amplified. In this case, “younger buyers” refers primarily to millennials and Gen Zs.

This does not mean that you have to age-match; millennials and Gen Zs will certainly engage with — and buy from — more seasoned salespeople. What it does mean is that you have to style-match. In other words, you need to sell the way they want to buy. While this seems intuitive — and it is — it means that some salespeople who were acculturated to different methods of selling and different buyer expectations have to do some serious adapting to stay relevant. Here are three things that you must know about style-matching in order to sell to younger buyers:

### **(1) Younger buyers flip the relationship-building script.**

The conventional way to build a relationship with a buyer used to be pretty simple. You would walk into the office, look around for family pictures, hobby pictures, a college diploma or other clues as to the buyer’s personal life and then you would start a conversation based on those interests. This approach has become so hackneyed that it has a name — “fish-on-the-wall selling.” For example: “Hey, you like to fish? I like to fish, too. Let’s talk about fishing and then I know you’re going to want to buy from me.”

It sounds a little disingenuous because it is. Salespeople have, for generations, been starting conversations about personal issues they did not really care about. That is because, for generations, you had to find the personal connection first and bond



over it. It was only then you earned the right to talk business.

Younger buyers flip that script completely. They are business first. They are not going to schedule an appointment to talk football for 30 minutes. Instead, you get the appointment by telling them how you can help them do their jobs better. Then, when you get in the door, get to the point with great business-focused questions and show them that you can help them do business better. If you are able to actually solve their business needs, then they are open to lunch, drinks, golf or personal conversations. For salespeople used to the old ways, this is a significant but very important shift — but it is one that you must make in order to succeed.

**(2) Younger buyers demand versatility in communication.** “All these younger buyers want to do is text. They don’t want to have phone calls.” This is a common complaint from older salespeople. The solution? Become good at texting. Learn how to send a persuasive, grammatically correct (yep, that is important) message in 240 characters or less. That is difficult for salespeople who are used to lengthy phone conversations or meetings or, for that matter, long emails.

The good news is that tools are available to help you with this. AI apps like ChatGPT or Claude are very good at distilling longer communications down to their essence while retaining persuasive ability. You just have to be able to write good AI prompts and edit when necessary.

Texting is not the complete solution, however. Younger buyers have a variety of preferred platforms and what works well for one might not work well for another. Video conferencing ability is mandatory — and not just on one platform. Become conversant with Zoom, Teams and Google Meet. Other tech is on the way. If your buyer says, “I want to talk on WhatsApp,” do not be the salesperson who has to say, “What’s that?” Younger buyers respect adaptability, especially when it is coupled with experience and expertise.

**(3) Younger buyers are social media savvy — and you should be, too.** Buyers today have a variety of ways of learning about you and your company, and social media is one of their primary tools. If you leave a prospecting message for a younger buyer, be aware that there is about a one-in-three chance that he will look you up on LinkedIn before he thinks about calling you back. And if you do not look legitimate on LinkedIn, you are not going to get that call (or email or text). “Looking legitimate” is about more than just having a profile on LinkedIn. You need a good professional headshot, “about me” verbiage, a complete professional history and some activity (i.e., posting and engagement). Recommendations and a strong network are

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a definite plus. If you are not using LinkedIn as a professional tool, you will not be taken seriously.

But LinkedIn is not enough. You also need to be aware of other ways buyers can research you. Do you know what your company’s Google reviews say? Your buyers probably do — and you better have explanations for any recent bad reviews.

Here is the exception to the “younger buyers” rules: Many older buyers are learning from and copying the habits of younger buyers. That means you cannot just stereotype by age — you have to be versatile, smart and adaptable to buyers’ needs, no matter their age.

If you do not keep pace with changes in buyers, you are just going to be the old guy yelling, “Get off my lawn!” And no one buys from that guy anymore. ■

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