



# The Top Four Trends

## Collectively, they will drive sales into the future

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The sales profession is at a turning point. I've been saying for years that sales is changing more quickly than ever before, so pardon me if I sound repetitive, but sales is changing more quickly than ever before. In fact, it's changing more quickly than it was last year or the year before. The reasons are technological, generational and even cultural. Essentially, there are four big trends that will drive sales into the future. I plan to be on the forefront of these trends, which means that if you are reading this article, you will be, too. Here they are:



### Younger Salespeople: Embracing Fresh Perspectives

Just as younger buyers are shaping the sales landscape, younger salespeople are bringing fresh perspectives and approaches to the profession. These digital natives possess an innate understanding of technology and are quick to adapt to new tools and platforms. Their agility, creativity and willingness to embrace change can help revolutionize the sales process.

However, you must invest in training and mentoring these younger salespeople, harnessing their energy and innovation. And you have to be flexible in how you convey that knowledge. In fact, if you do it right, you can cross-pollinate the tech-savviness of your younger salespeople with the wisdom and experience of seasoned veterans and make everyone better. Are there challenges? Absolutely! Sales managers need to up their games in the same way salespeople do. If you do, big wins await you.

### AI: Transforming the Sales Landscape

Artificial intelligence (AI) will be a game-changer in the sales industry. AI-powered tools will allow you to streamline processes, enhance efficiency and do a far better job of communicating with your customers with a lower time investment. Don't get me wrong — AI is not magic. It is not a cure-all. It is a tool. It is the most robust tool ever developed for improving sales communication, but it is still a tool and, as such, it is useless without people utilizing it properly. If it is used properly, the capabilities it can give you are things I couldn't have even imagined a couple of years ago.

### Younger Buyers: A Shift in Sales Dynamics

The rise of the digital generation has given birth to a new breed of buyers — younger, tech-savvy individuals who have grown up in a connected world. These buyers expect personalized experiences, instant access to information and seamless digital interactions. To succeed in this new era, salespeople must understand and adapt to the needs and preferences of younger buyers. This requires proficiently incorporating technology, embracing social selling and modifying your current ways of customer approach.

One refrain I hear about younger buyers is this: "Younger buyers don't want to see salespeople." Not true. They will see salespeople, but when they do, they expect more per-minute value for their time. They expect you to be on your game, informed and ready to help them do business. And if you aren't, you probably won't get a second shot. I actually empathize with this; as anyone who has ever sold to me can attest, these have been my habits. Maybe everyone else is catching up to me.

### Empowered Buyers: The Shift in Power

Here's the one I've been talking about for the past few years. In the past, salespeople held the reins, guiding buyers through the purchasing journey. However, the tech and information revolution has flipped this dynamic. Today, your buyers have access to an abundance of information at their fingertips. They conduct extensive research, read reviews and seek recommendations from peers before engaging with a salesperson.

In fact, studies show that today's buyer has completed 57% of his (or her) buying process before ever seeing a salesperson. Sales professionals must acknowledge this shift in power and adapt accordingly. You are no longer the star of the show — the customer is. And your "sales process" is worthless. What matters now is the buyer's journey and your ability to help the customer navigate his journey.

### You Must Embrace the Trends

Spoiler alert: If you want to succeed, you must embrace these four trends. When people converse with me at conferences about these four issues, they mainly complain:

- "That gosh-darned AI stuff is gonna replace us!"
- "Dang kids don't even want to talk to salespeople!"
- "Young salespeople just won't go make sales calls!"
- "My customers want to call all the shots!"

Look, you can get on board, move forward and succeed, or you can be the old guy yelling, “Get off my lawn!” As I noted before, each one of these four trends presents opportunities and challenges. How you handle the challenges will dictate whether you can capitalize on the opportunities.

This also doesn’t mean that every sales skill you have learned is worthless. Unless it’s one of those techniques that depends on manipulating uninformed customers, it probably has a place in your repertoire going forward. It just needs to be augmented with new skills and capabilities, refined to speak to new buyer preferences and, perhaps, rechanneled a bit. Here are some bullet points to think about:

- To succeed with AI, you need to start learning about it, get proficient with it, and use it to generate content and communications. Meanwhile, you need to be training your salespeople to be better at the human-centered skills in selling that AI can’t do (yet).

- Younger buyers want more per-minute value for their

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time, but they have great attention spans for a good story. How good are your people at storytelling?

- Younger people are not loyal to companies anymore. The 40-year career, the gold watch and the pension are gone — and they know it. They are, however, loyal to people. How good are you at building relationships with your salespeople?

- To navigate the buyer’s journey, you must first understand it. Do you?

As I look forward, the future is bright for great salespeople and great sales leaders. In future articles, I’ll be helping you navigate the path forward. ■

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