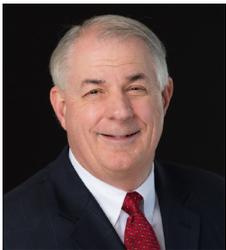




Digital Business



Art Waskey

Art Waskey is a speaker who truly delivers. In addition to a 45 year career in sales and marketing, Art is the author of multiple books on selling and a monthly column *The Art of Sales*. He shares these insights as an in demand event and conference speaker as well as leadership coach.

My 50-year career in distributor sales has been punctuated by the digital changes that have transformed society—and the way we do business. I started out as a “Sales Engineer” calling on distributors in North Texas for Airco Welding Products. As part of my training I spent a couple weeks at Airco’s customer service department in Houston. While there, I was able to solve a problem the company was having with a computer routine on its IBM System/370. Having taken courses in programming Fortran for engineering applications just a year earlier, I was able to fix the problem. The punch-card solution worked like a charm; I was viewed as a computer marvel. This was my introduction to the world of digital business.

Enterprise Selling

Airco became BOC in 1978 and by then I had been promoted to Assistant Regional Sales Manager for Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. I was asked to participate in the negotiations for the purchase of an IBM minicomputer for one of our distributors in Oklahoma City. During that transaction I learned about IBM’s sales cycle, which

was called “**Enterprise Selling.**” It involved getting the company’s CEO, as well as its key managers, administrators, and sales reps, to agree to the purchase. I served as BOC’s representative in the transaction.

The Power of the Internet

My first computer was an Apple III on which I saved documents on a floppy disk. This piece of technology was left behind in 1984 when I ended my days with BOC and joined a welding and gases distributor, General Air. There we used a series of Macintosh computers and became connected to the world-wide-web in the ‘90s. I can still hear the squealing buzz of the dial-up internet connection that linked General Air’s first computer network to the outside world. The rush to establish an online presence followed. We developed websites with a collection of our products and services and began to use email. As broadband and Wi-Fi replaced dial up connections, digital communications went into high gear. Now our phones are a thousand times more powerful than our first clunky computers and our storage is in the Cloud.



Digital Business

Digital Transformation

Today, we live in a digital world where eCommerce, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) platforms have transformed the way we do business. These applications are all significant game changers. For example, eCommerce is altering the revenue stream — rising by 44% over the past three years. These changes represent progress. The implementation of digital technology has improved efficiency, value, and overall innovative effectiveness. Data driven capabilities for people, products, processes, and technology have accelerated business results.

Distributors are now up against a mountain of online competition and must employ eCommerce, integrated ERP software, and B2B distributor-customer platforms. Distributors also need to focus on product content that sells, and marketing capabilities that help them capture their digital revenue market share.

Enterprise Selling

With the digital transformation we enter yet another era of building key stakeholder relationships and the buzz words are Enterprise Selling. The enterprise sales strategy was first used by IBM to sell mainframe and

micro-computers in the '70s and '80s. Its best practices have evolved over time and today's top salespeople have taken Enterprise Selling one step further — using it to act in a business advisory capacity with clients.

Distributors need to incorporate Enterprise Selling to compete in the digital marketplace. A survey conducted in 2021 by the Distribution Strategy Group revealed that in the next 5-years, without a radical change in sales methodology, traditional distribution will lose 14% of their revenues: 7% from suppliers selling directly to the customer, and 7% through other online channels (Distribution Strategy Group, "The Challenger Sales, Taking Control of the Customer Conversation", February 23, 2021).

Adopt Sales Strategies

Albert Einstein said that the measure of intelligence is the ability to change. **Be smart - make sure you are adopting the sales strategies necessary to meet market demands in the digital age.**

5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Digital technology has improved business efficiency, value, and innovative effectiveness.
2. Distributors are now up against a mountain of online competition.
3. Distributors need eCommerce, ERP software, and B2B distributor-customer platforms.
4. Use Enterprise Selling to build key stakeholder relationships.
5. Adopt sales strategies necessary to meet market demands in the digital age.