



Enterprise Selling Requires the Use of Digital Tools



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Adaptability

Each January I like to make observations about the previous year. I find this exercise helpful in preparing for the business year ahead.

Looking back, 2023 was replete with some big challenges for business. Stubborn inflation affected pricing. China's post COVID chaos continued to exacerbate supply chain issues and accelerated attempts to reshore manufacturing. Labor shortages plagued many business sectors. The third-worst year of global economic growth this century (behind 2009 and 2020) slowed sales and geopolitical tensions made us all uneasy. And finally, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) accelerated the pace of change in how business is conducted.

The secret to success in 2023 was adaptability. The best distributors got creative in confronting the year's biggest challenges. **The most important consideration in finding the right path through the weeds was maintaining focus on customer-centricity and using the latest development tools.**

Selling then

In the 1970s and early '80s, I worked for an international company that distributed welding supplies and atmospheric gases. We sold primarily through independent, privately held businesses. **Our field salesforce was comprised of both generalists and specialists.** The generalists, who were sales engineers, called on distributors in 8 to 10 local territories. The product specialists covered a larger geographic region. Both sales engineers and product specialists reported to regional offices. The sales engineers were responsible for maintaining personal relationships with their distributors. They managed new product demonstrations, pricing, backorders, administrative issues, and all other corporate communications. The product specialists managed specific technical offerings. For our industry, this included cutting and welding products to identified industries such as railroads, large manufacturers, and other highly sophisticated end-users. All product specialist accounts were assigned to sales engineers to ensure customer-centric relationships.



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Selling now

The sales model above changed radically with the introduction of the internet. Consider today's digital-driven Enterprise Sales approach. Account reps have the IoT (Internet of Things), which connects them to all manner of advanced technology applications. The Enterprise Sales rep is now a customer advocate. Communication is largely online and things like product demonstrations can be virtual. Enterprise Selling in 2024, therefore, requires that sales reps be tech savvy and use the latest development tools.

Development tools

Here are two important tools to use in 2024 to compete in the digital marketplace.

- **Virtual calls**—One important tool in Enterprise Selling is the virtual call. While personalization with your customers should include both in-person and virtual calls, data shows customers are beginning to prefer the latter. For your high profile accounts, I recommend two virtual calls for each in-person call. Consider that a salesperson can make an average of 3 to 4 in-person calls per day versus 6 to 8 virtual calls. **Time is saved and transportation costs are lowered with virtual calls.**

- In addition, virtual providers now offer AI companion summaries of calls. For example, Zoom calls can

include a quick recap, summary, and list of next steps. These reports are automatically generated, and can even be read aloud to you.

- **The digital schedule**—Keep track of your schedule with a digital calendar. This tool provides a history of calls and is excellent for planning purposes. Digital calendars minimize time spent scheduling or rescheduling meetings.

- The days of waiting in the lobby for a client to squeeze you in at the last moment are over. If you are not already doing so, **all appointments, virtual or in-person, should be initiated using digital calendar software.** Before ending a meeting, share calendars with your customers and prospects. Then send them your suggestion for your next appointment. Your contact will send back an email accepting, rejecting, or changing the appointment.

Strong customer relationships

The greatest advantage independent, privately owned businesses have over alternative channels is the strength of their customer relationships. Using tools like virtual calling and digital calendars helps fortify those relationships and saves you time and money.

5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Enterprise Selling in 2024 requires that sales reps be tech savvy.
2. Your sales team needs to be using the latest digital development tools.
3. Data shows customers are beginning to prefer virtual calls.
4. Time is saved and transportation costs are lowered with virtual calls.
5. All appointments, virtual or in-person, should be noted using a digital calendar.