



How Marketing Can Radically Impact Sales

Jill Konrath, Chief Sales Officer
Selling to Big Companies

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eBook by Jill Konrath,
Chief Sales Officer

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times: Sales is really tough in today's business environment. This isn't a complaint; it's simply a statement of reality.

Without a doubt, sales cycles are getting longer. At the front end of the selling process, it frequently takes 10 or more contacts to catch busy corporate decision makers on the phone. Fewer of these initial contacts are converting into appointments. Even finding out whom to contact in an account takes an inordinate amount of time.

This is what salespeople are dealing with – and many are really struggling. I know because as a sales strategist I work with them every single day to improve their sales effectiveness by helping them:

- Focus on targeted accounts where they have a high likelihood of success.
- Gather sales intelligence so they can craft a customized approach.
- Clearly articulate their value proposition so that it highlights business outcomes.
- Craft totally personalized and enticing account entry campaigns.
- Engage corporate decision makers in a business-oriented dialog.

For many experienced sales professionals, these new strategies for cracking into corporate accounts require a total re-jiggering of how they sell. Newly hired reps face an even bigger challenge because they have so much to learn at once – including product/service info, business knowledge, customer understanding and sales savvy. Opportunity leakage is at an all time high too – despite sellers doing their very best to maintain momentum and keep prospective customers in the sales funnel.

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In the past few years, it's become blatantly obvious to me that:

1. Traditional methods of sales prospecting are grossly inefficient in today's business climate.
2. New strategies are needed to shorten the sales cycle, improve seller productivity and reduce new rep ramp-up time.
3. By embracing new technologies and a thought leadership mindset, companies can create a sustainable competitive advantage.

As a sales purist, these things aren't easy for me to admit. But the truth is, no matter how hard I work with my corporate clients to improve sales effectiveness, it's just not enough anymore.

Sales desperately needs Marketing to take the lead and up the ante. No more "same old, same old." It's time to make a Radical Impact.

The Sales Challenge

Today's savvy, but stressed out customers are under intense pressure to achieve ever-increasing objectives with fewer resources and in less time. They have minimal desire to meet with "product-pushing peddlers" (aka salespeople) until they're ready to select a vendor.

Yet that's the worst possible time for sellers to initially engage with prospective customers. With the decision criteria already set, sellers have little room to influence the outcome except by cutting price.

The very best way for your company to have a radical impact on sales is to get involved with prospects when they're searching for ways to address their challenges, solve their problems or achieve their objectives.

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But not every sales rep is capable of doing a good job at this! Let's step back for a moment and look at the various "personas" who make up the sales organization. Then you'll see why these radical strategies are so necessary given our current business climate.



Pat the Pro is a long-term sales professional with a consistent track record of success. He has established relationships, strong communication skills, solid business knowledge and in-depth customer understanding. He works with your top customers, focusing on account growth. He's always looking to upgrade his knowledge and skills.



Stacy the Star joined the company several years ago. As a very achievement-oriented person, she works long hours to get ahead. She's cracked into a couple big accounts and landed several substantial contracts. As a creative and strategic person, she constantly experiments with new approaches and technology to increase her effectiveness.



Average Joe has been in sales for a while, but his career has never taken off. He worries about meeting quota and losing the few hot prospects in his pipeline. He works hard, but invests little time in upgrading his business knowledge or sales skills. Most recently, he's bounced around in a few different companies hoping to find something that's easier to sell.



Nate the Newbie is a virtual sponge. He wants to learn everything he can about your products, customers and marketplace. And he can hardly wait to share what he's learned with his prospects. Because his sales skills may be limited, he's looking for all the support he can get. He loves technology and could spend all day online if you let him.

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Because we're talking about having a Radical Impact, it's imperative for Marketing to:

- *Focus on the Average Joes who are the true bottlenecks of the sales organization's growth.*

Comprising about 60% of the sales force, they're the least impacted by training and the least creative of all the sellers. Their selling skills are adequate at best, but typically not good enough to create significant demand for your offering.

The Average Joe consistently looks for the "low-hanging fruit," thinking that's the way to best make his numbers. However, his late engagement with prospects puts him at a serious competitive disadvantage and he loses way too often. To maximally impact their sales productivity and effectiveness, feed them well-nurtured leads and give them sales tools for each stage of the selling process.

- *Leverage technology & tools to bring Nate the Newbie up to speed as quickly as possible.*

With so much to learn, Nate needs resources he can easily access to give him customer insights, business information and sales direction. As an inexperienced seller (or new to an industry), he's the least skilled in cracking into corporate accounts.

Because of his own desire to get some "quick hits" and prove he's a good hire, Nate the Newbie frequently creates his own obstacles and delays his sales success. By creating the right sales tools, you'll also ensure that he uses the most effective sales strategies and techniques in every customer interaction.

- *Maximize Stacy the Star's and Pat the Pro's strengths.*

Ensure your top performers work with more of your best prospects more of the time. Free them from early stage lead follow-up and get them out using their knowledge and expertise with customers.

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Finding good prospects will always be a struggle for your Average Joes and the newbies.

Involving corporate decision makers early in the sales process is only getting more difficult. So is keeping them interested over the many months when making a decision for your offering is a low priority.

While you may hope these sellers finally “get it”, wishful thinking does not bring enough good prospects into the sales funnel. **Besides, it’s an incredibly unproductive use of your salespeople’s time.** If 95% or more of your calls landed in voicemail and no one called you back, you’d know what I mean. This is true even for your top performers who would be much better utilized working with your company’s biggest and best opportunities.

When you finally accept this as “truth,” then you realize that fresh strategies are a necessity. **It all starts with Marketing making some fundamental changes, while engaging the sales leadership team in the process. Here’s what you can to do to radically impact sales!**

Strategy 1: Radically Embrace a Thought Leadership Mindset

For sales success, Marketing must position your company as the “go to” resource for potential users of your products, services or solutions. Please note: I did not say for active buyers of your offering – which is probably who you’re trying to impress right now.

Instead, focus on reaching the “seekers.” They’re actively looking for information on how to:

- Gain insights into their current challenges.
- Address business problems and issues.
- Achieve their ever-increasing goals and objectives.

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- Determine the ROI of making a change.
- Develop a competitive advantage in a tough marketplace.
- Evaluate the best solution for their business direction.
- Implement change initiatives.

Give the seekers what they're looking for: knowledge, fresh perspectives and ideas on the business issues relevant to your offering. Turn your website into an educational hub that attracts these seekers. Fill it with white papers, case studies, ask the expert columns, podcasts and webinars. Use internal expertise as well as external resources. Create your own materials or leverage material produced by others. Expand this strategy into print media, conferences, newsletters and more.

By radically embracing a thought leadership concept, you'll draw **seekers into your world where you can begin a conversation with them long before they're ready to buy**. Because they see your company as a valuable resource, they'll return to your site as their purchase readiness progresses. Plus your thought leadership materials will have educated them in a manner that plays to your firm's strengths, taking the burden off the Average Joes rather limited capabilities in this area.

Expect to see dramatic results when you radically implement a thought leadership strategy. Even very small companies will be amazed at the impact it can have on their business. What's most important though is to get started now and to keep at it. Little by little your corporate expertise grows till you become the "go to" resource in your industry.

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Strategy 2: Radically Optimize Lead Generation and Lead Nurturing Efforts

In today's crazy business environment, it's no longer enough for marketing to gather a whole slew of leads and throw them over the wall to the sales organization. The newbies and Average Joes lack the skills to consistently turn these long shots into orders. Plus, it's a colossal waste of your top sellers' time.

It's imperative to begin with a common definition of a lead. Marketing and Sales need to agree on this and sometimes it's a bit of a challenge. Marketing then needs to take charge of the moving the leads through the funnel – from when the seeker initially raises his hand expressing interest until he's a sales-ready prospect.

By radically implementing integrated lead generation and nurturing technologies, Marketing can have a huge and measurable effect on sales. If your website is a thought leadership hub, the impact can be exponential.

New marketing automation technology enables your company to track the seekers' online behavior and creates profiles that are updated in real time. This gives Marketing and Sales, visibility into:

- What they're clicking on.
- How long they're on your site.
- When they return.
- The topics are of greatest interest.
- What they're forwarding to others.
- ... and much more.

But that's just the start. Savvy marketers then leverage this technology to further engage the seeker with relevant digital content (e.g., success stories, articles, archived webinars, podcasts, white papers). Or they may invite them to upcoming events such as webinars, teleseminars or trade shows. This closed loop

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system nurtures prospective customers till they're ready to be handed over to the sales organization or an inside sales team.

Here's where the radical impact starts coming in. First of all, you have more decision makers in the pipeline. Over the months of interacting, you developed a trusted advisor relationship with them. Because they've read all your materials, they're predisposed to your way of thinking and already see your company as a viable solution to their needs.

Your Average Joe and Nate the Newbie have a much better chance of winning the business because of all the nurturing that's taken place. Your sellers can also receive real-time alerts when a prospect is exhibiting online behaviors (i.e., downloads, page views) having a high correlation with purchase readiness, enabling them to initiate contact at a most opportune time.

Finally, prior to meeting with these decision makers, the Average Joe and Nate the Newbie can review their profiles, read all previous communications with your firm and know what's of maximum interest. With that "inside scoop," their sales effectiveness radically increases and as does their productivity.

Strategy 3: Radically Develop a Sales Enablement Portal

Marketing needs to work with the sales organization to create a rich resource for the field sales force. What goes in it? The first thing to start with is a decision maker's database that gives detailed information about typical positions involved in your customer's decision process.

For example, if your offering is sold to sales organizations, these positions could be in your database: SVP of Sales; Vice President of Channel Sales; Vice President of Sales Operations, and Regional Sales Manager.

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Make sure to include roles & responsibilities, common goals/objectives, likely issues, performance metrics, strategic initiatives and an overview of how they're likely handling things today.

Then create a "persona" for each position: "Eric, age 44, is a senior vice president of sales. Although he began his career in marketing, he's been in sales for 18 years now moving rapidly up the ranks. In the last decade, he's worked with 3 different companies in the technology industry. He's on the road 2-3 days every week: meeting clients, attending trade shows and industry events – all of which puts a big strain on his marriage. This year he's expected to bring in 23% more revenue than last year. He's not sure if it's possible. He lives in fear that his top reps will jump ship or that a couple big customers won't renew contracts ..."

You get the picture. Taking it a step further, leverage the expertise of Pat the Pro and Stacy the Star to create a sales enablement tool kit. When Nate the Newbie and the Average Joe start using materials developed by your top performers, their sales will radically increase.

Specifically, you'll want to develop these materials to appeal to each of the personas:

- Value propositions
- Email messaging
- Provocative questions
- ROI analysis tools
- Voicemail scripts
- Direct mail samples
- Positioning statements
- Presentation and proposal templates

Allow sales reps to build their own customized communications within well-researched and previously tested parameters. Link to relevant case studies, white papers, and webinars that support this persona's business needs, issues and concerns.

To have a radical impact on sales, make it easy for your sales force to sell. Give them high quality tools they can easily personalize. Keep them out in the field where they're most effective.

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Strategy 4: Radically Leverage Sales Intelligence

To be successful today, salespeople need to be savvy about their prospective customer's business, marketplace and industry. Smart sellers invest significant time doing the necessary research to keep on top of potential opportunities. It's not unusual for them to spend hours online searching for that one piece of information that could help them get their foot in the door, create a strategy to win the business or to outthink their competitors.

Let me be perfectly clear: This is not the best use of a salesperson's time. Yes, it's currently part of their job. But if you want to impact sales, you will get them some help.

Marketing's first step should be to clearly define those "trigger events" that create an urgent and compelling need for your offering. Trigger events can be either internal or external. Examples are:

Internal

- Merger/acquisition
- Product launch
- Management changes
- Bad 3rd quarter earnings
- New facilities

External

- New legislation
- Competitive move
- Technology breakthrough
- Airline strike
- Global warming

Your reps need to know this. It's the fastest way to radically shorten your sales cycle. And, they need to understand why these trigger events create opportunities and how to leverage them. (This info should be in your sales portal.)

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But you don't want to have your salespeople spending all their time looking for them. Invest in online subscription services (e.g. Hoovers, Factiva, OneSource) that contain excellent in-depth information of accounts your sales team is pursuing.

Check out companies like TrueAdvantage or iLantern – two services that aggregate online data, sort through it to identify pre-selected trigger events and then push the info out to your sales team daily. Your salespeople will be acting on these trigger events while their competitors are still searching for them online. Now that's a radical productivity too. Pat the Pro and Stacy the Star will jump on this technology right away, providing you with an immediate return. But this technology will help the Average Joe and the newbie even more because they're the ones who are wandering around lost online, not sure what they're looking for and wasting tons of time.

Strategy 5: Radically Invest in This Now!

As Ben Franklin once said, "The early bird gets the worm." If you haven't embraced a thought leadership mentality yet, you're already behind. It is the way to reach potential decision makers today – before their ready to buy. It's impossible for your sales reps to carry the full prospecting load anymore. The vast majority of them literally cannot get in enough doors, meeting with the right people at the right time to achieve your company's aggressive growth goals.

According to Aberdeen's research, 53% of companies are using marketing automation systems today for lead management – and seeing a 10% improvement in lead to sales conversion rates. But in the next 24 months, it's expected that 83% will be using these technologies.

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CSO Insights studied firms who have invested in demand-creating marketing automation systems and also discovered impressive results:

- 9.3% higher sales quota achievement rate
- 16.5% higher conversion rate of leads to first calls
- 7% higher sales win rate
- 10% decrease in new rep ramp up times

They're also having a major impact on revenue per deal, opportunity close rates and overall revenue – at the same time that sales cycles are being shortened. Those results come from simply embracing in the first two strategies mentioned in this report. When you implement a sales enablement portal and get your sales force using sales intelligence, the results will be even more dramatic.

Yes, it's going to cost you money upfront. But you've got to reframe that in your mind. These are not things that are just nice to have. They're an absolute necessity in today's market and an investment in your company's future.

Just do the math. Figure out what any of the metrics above might mean if applied to your own situation. The results could be staggering. We could be talking millions of unrealized sales that isn't going into your company's coffers.

Stop playing the old game. It's time to get radical.

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The Author

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, is a recognized sales strategist in the highly competitive B2B market. A popular speaker at sales meetings and industry events, she helps her clients crack into corporate accounts, speed up their sales cycle and create demand for their offering.

Most recently, she launched the Sales SHEbang which kicks off with a big conference for women in sales featuring top women sale experts on November 5-6, 2007. For more info, check out www.SalesSHEbang.com

Konrath publishes online newsletter with subscribers from more than 88 countries plus an industry-leading blog. She's a contributing author to *Masters of Sales* and *Top Dog Sales Secrets*. Her sales advice and strategies have been featured in *Selling Power*, *Entrepreneur*, *New York Times*, *The Business Journal*, *Sales & Marketing Management*, *WSJ's Start-Up Journal*, *Sales & Marketing Excellence*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Business Advisor* and countless online publications.

Amazon Top 25 sales book

Stop struggling to get into big companies. Learn practical strategies to entice corporate decision makers, deal with voicemail, leverage email and more in Jill Konrath's bestselling book. Download the first two chapters at <http://www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com/book>

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