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Weconomy has been included in the ADI Design Index 2019, among the best research projects



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Cristina Favini

Manager of Design, Logotel

Who can say they've never bought an utterly useless accessory or item of clothin<mark>g and felt the instant pang o</mark>f buyer's remorse? With myriad temp-Ctations — in the stores, in the sales, during Black Friday, abetted by shop assistants or the "buy with 1 click" button that can turn a sleepless night into a smartphone binge - it's hard to resist. And who has never given in to the blithe patter of a salesman who wanted you to buy something at all costs? These situations lure us into accumulating stuff that has no real value to us. We might decide to pass it on to someone, hoping to prolonging the life of objects that are superfluous to our requirements. Or maybe, to expunge that twinge of guilt after an impulse buy, we throw it all in the trash. Knowing full well that it's not just physical trash. For the idea of virtual "bins", where the intangible goods we no longer use end up, has been around for a while now. But getting rid of an unwanted service can often be a real pain (like hanging on the line while desperately trying to change phone company, after being suckered in by the latest promotion).

Behind every trash purchase is a trash sale.

Trash is what comes from an ineffective sale. Trash leads to dissatisfied customers, superfluous or unsuitable objects, and damaged brand reputations. Trash is "all that stuff you sell me" that isn't right for me and just creates hassle and stress. Trash is everything that doesn't meet a need - thinking of a need in the broad sense of something that relates to people's lives. So, as organisations, we should always ask ourselves: do the products and services that we sell solve a problem that's worth solving? Are we working just to shift goods (e.g. cars), or are we aiming to offer a real idea of what they can do (e.g. helping you get around)?

These may sound high-flown questions, but the answers can't be taken for granted. For, as organisations, we are often tempted to "virtualise" the customer's needs, so our offering and our way of making it accessible do not fulfil real, specific, timely needs. Instead, we believe that when selling, "solving a problem" means devising the best ways to meet a need, by giving it form and meaning, translating it into something tangible, and adapting it to habits and behaviours.

From what to why

In a world where people are drowning in products, services and countless options, where you can buy anything and everything, the basic questions now aren't just "what" and "how" but also "why". In the past, consumers chose the products that worked best. Their needs were already clear, and companies made sales by creating a competitive differential based on offering better solutions (this is the realm of "what"). Then came the first change: they started to build a new differential in the form of their sales service, and salespeople began to sell "customer benefits". (The "how" dimension had arrived.) Nowadays, "how" often trumps "what": customers prefer to choose how they want a product (e.g. via home delivery) before deciding whether to buy.

Trash is all that stuff that "you sell me", that isn't "right for me" and just creates hassle and stress.

In short, we know it's no longer enough to think in terms of "what we sell". We've realised we must plan "how to sell" in order for customers and businesses to understand our offering, gain access to it, find their way

around it, make their choice, make their purchase and use it. (And, moreover, dispose of it later.) But there's one more step: starting to see selling not as a linear process (with a before, during and after) but as a circular one. For the act of selling cannot just be about touchpoints and data on conversion and buyer intent. The sale happens when customers have a limitless experience with us that is no longer product-centric. Being at home, eating, having clothes, getting around, feeling good, learning, having fun – these needs don't disappear when you buy something; these stimuli need to be sated with new responses. For us, then, selling is increasingly about filling these macro-needs with meaning and devising concrete, consistent responses for "that customer" (an individual not a generic target) and "that community" (which is alive and does not consume).

The quest for meaning

The key to matching a product/service to a need, then, is increasingly unlikely to be the outcome of a linear process. In our society, people don't seek out and buy predefined solutions; they are looking for the right questions that enable them to crystallise problems that are in constant flux. We are all continually looking for meaning. We're looking for a purpose not a ready-made thing. And that also affects our purchasing decisions. For the same perceived quality and accessibility, the pleasure is in finding, choosing and buying – in rewarding whoever can offer us the vision that gives most meaning to our life. So the organisations that make the difference do it not just by offering "better products" but by making customers fall in love: by offering a new perspective that makes a real (even if small) impact on

their lives, not merely by "solving" problems but by making them obsolete. It's an increasingly valuable way of thinking at a time when the ethical dimension and the culture of responsible action are growing ever stronger.

Reality bites

Even this first step is a struggle to get our organisations on board, for sales can never stop striving for the volumes we need to shore up our business. Imagine, then, when we start to grasp that the leading companies are adding another point of differentiation: the strong brands go beyond the "what" and the "how" to steer customers towards ways of thinking that bring meaning to their lives. In other words, brands are taking re-

sponsibility for producing, propounding and promoting a final perspective that is meaningful for customers, the people who work for them, their communities and the society they live in, by building trusted relationships and championing the choices they offer.

Selling also means devising the best ways to meet a need, by giving it form and meaning, translating it into something tangible.

What is the salesperson's role?

I'm thinking of shop workers, professionals who visit our offices or homes, people who call us on the phone. They are often seen as barkers and touts. Organisations sometimes pigeon-hole them with standardised approaches and procedures. We believe, though, that to enact the transformations that we've been discussing, the image of the salesperson has to change, too. Let's think of them as educators of customers (B2C), companies (B2B) and government bodies (B2G), who adapt to the context where the sale takes place (B2All). Let's see them as

custodians of the customer relationship – because it is by relating to people that we avoid creating damaging, impersonal, bland experiences. Let's endow them with a new strategic value, where they understand and explore needs and behaviours, build empathy, ask the right questions, and offer a perspective that really improves people's lives. From this standpoint, the features and benefits of a product/service presented to a customer act as a guide, not just a lever to push with. For salesmen and -women support people as much when they buy as when they don't. They embrace the responsibility of not selling you a product that's not right for you; they work out alternatives with you; they assist you in gaining access to and using something you want to buy. Salespeople aren't lone wolves; they can work together with the rest of the organisation, increasingly often through "automatic" sales platforms. It's up to them, after all, to make the experience unique, as they are the ones who reassure you, help you, guide you, recognise you and remember you.

Strong brands go beyond the "what" and the "how" to create perspectives that bring meaning to customers' lives.

Perhaps, as entrepreneurs and bosses, we should change how we select potential salespeople. We should rethink their importance to our organisation, their responsibilities, their role in the overall physical and digital sales system, how they are trained and supported by other departments. Providing the latest apps and cool tools without the right foundations would obviously have the same effect as the old sales scripts – further stultifying the sales force and crushing their ability to improvise and handle the sales conversation.

We have so much more to do ...

Selling has always been vital for organisations to survive. But sometimes it is relegated to an operational not an executive issue, tied up in silos reporting to specific parts of the company. That's why this edition of Weconomy is striving to shape an open perspective that – we hope – will offer inspiration to those who sell. We have gathered ideas and viewpoints rather than shutting ourselves up inside one of those funnels that litter sales management manuals.

Selling is vital today. It is everyone's responsibility. And that's why we've launched a process of reflection with this 14th issue of the *Journal*, with people who care about selling, who do it every day and are working to reshape it: salespeople, sales & marketing managers, CEOs, entrepreneurs, sociologists, researchers, futurologists, designers and more. Together, we have explored how to liberate selling from the old clichés that undermine and trash it, to understand the import of the changes we're grappling with.

We'll know we've got it right if this *Journal* doesn't end up in the trash! ■

An imaginary dialogue on the world S Dear reader, how would you like to grab

of sales

Dear reader, how would you like to grab a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity? Only I can do you the best price. Trust me.

But I haven't told you what I want yet - or whether I need what you're selling.

That doesn't matter. You won't find better quality than this. And that's not all. Whatever it is you want, I can ship it to your door, or you can collect it in store. But if you're a company, my integrated solutions will soon have you beating the competition.

Help! I only wanted to read Weconomy, but I've stumbled into telesales hell! I knew this *trash* business was a rip-off.

Fear not, dear reader. I invited a *trash* seller because they embody to perfection everything we want to defeat: the kind of selling that's only about flogging gear at all costs, regardless of whether the products or services are useful. Trash selling, then, is the type that works only for itself, not for the customers. It leaves a sour taste of dissatisfaction, with negative fall-out for wider society.

in minumin

Sure, "customer first". I've heard that slogan a thousand times. What's new?

we

Let's break out of this vicious circle. Often, when we talk of trash, we're looking at the end result: trash is something to throw away, that exists purely for its kitsch allure. But we want to look at where trash comes from. We believe it happens when selling fails to solve real, practical problems in people's lives.

So selling is a serious business! But what "problems" are you talking about? When I buy something, often I'm not trying to solve anything.

we

Sure about that? Imagine you've just had dinner, and you've nothing particular to do. You're telling me you don't need someone to "solve" the problem of entertaining you and saving you from boredom? Maybe you don't know exactly what you want, but a well-designed sales system can guide you in defining your need and offering you an answer. It might be a book to read, a streaming service, pay TV, an event or an ad hoc trip somewhere.

\$

..And I sell all that — at a great price just for you. I have an all-inclusive package with the best 10,000 e-books and the top TV shows.



Trash seller, you're way off beam. OK, I'm starting to understand now. A sales system gets to know me and can take me on a journey.

we)

Got it in one! Guiding, interpreting and enabling are increasingly key words in sales, for various reasons. In the digital arena, the sales process begins in people's homes. Consumers research and complete purchases at any time and in any place. But they often lack joined-up support. Which is why the word "need" is acquiring a much broader scope than it once had. And selling is increasingly about filling these macroneeds with meaning and devising concrete answers. For us, then, selling means solving a problem. It means turning an abstract need into something tangible, by reflecting what people need.

\$

That's a herculean task! I'd rather keep playing the price game, optimising processes so I can offer my wares even cheaper. I'm out.

we

Fair enough, trash seller. Sometimes the prospect of saving even just a couple of euros affects people's choices (one way or the other). It would be crazy to claim that the price point is irrelevant. But we want to work on something else: what it takes to make this "need-meeting" system work.



I know; it's trust, right?

we)

Yes, but it's more than that. Trust is something you have to earn, sometimes by making radical decisions. It means avoiding a trash outcome from the outset, devising alternatives, and taking a critical look at your own short-term performance. This strategy is more than long-term; it's endless. It works best by creating more touchpoints with the customer, by getting them involved and building a shared vision. That's why the sales system that we envisage is circular. And that's what this *Journal* is all about.





Forget what we're selling. Focus on how Selling is pure service, always has been -

we're



Nicola Favini

General manager, Logotel

Beyond trends and buzzwords, here is an overview of the essence of selling and the factors to take care of, even when the variables at play are changing. Selling is pure service, always has been — from the days when it was about purely physical models (representatives, salespeople, shelves, shops, ringing phones, glossy catalogues) right through to the present, where the purchasing experience has broadened to include some strongly hybridised and digital models.

To simplify, all commercial businesses are based on "what we sell" and "how we sell it". Selling as a service is the ability to build differentiating elements around what we sell, whether that's books, cars, Allen keys, electricity supply services or legal advice. For a given what, then, it's the how that makes the difference. Which explains why some companies have done better than others with the same product formula — in many sectors, like the service world (selling gas, water, telecoms or media content). We often mutter to ourselves that the better the product, the worse the sales side must be. Yet the best schools of selling can often be found in companies that rely on a product—price formula that is not easy to sell and therefore needs a more powerful how.

Either way, selling was but a minor divinity in the economic pantheon for decades, despite being arguably the profession that employs most people and shifts most money. It was often reduced to a combo of a few decisions about sales volumes, price discounts, "talented" salespeople to motivate, special sales techniques to use or webpages sprinkled with UX magic! Over the years, though, I have met managers, entrepreneurs and professionals who have elevated sales to a mission that – in its systemic spirit and in its execution – requires a corpus of models and high-level skills. The emphasis intensifies until "sales" becomes a company's distinctive, differentiating feature: essentially, "forget **what** we're selling; focus on **how** we're selling it!". So the planning issues become about "why a customer should choose this sales channel/format rather than some other", "why a customer should choose to buy this thing from us and not someone else" and "how sales can extend the experience of choosing and buying a product to embrace the specific moment of unpacking it, switching it on or using it".

Even twenty years ago, talking about sales meant talking about customer experience, before it became a buzz phrase that got taken up by the digital transformation and "omnichannelisation". Selling is planned and executed as a story, in a series of touchpoints. Each one must be designed and staged to be of service, above all, to the customer. If the contact does not generate content and conversations that somehow develop rational and emotional wellbeing, the deal is off: it becomes a trash sale. Useless. For it to be useful, then, we must ask ourselves, "how can we help customers save time and mental or

physical effort and reduce risk in the selection and buying process?" and "how can we make them feel comfortable, an active player and coproducer in the buying process?".

Sales is both a service and an experience that acquires value according to the stage in the story that the customer and we are at (where we are the channel, seller or digital interface). A sale that works is a sale that creates useful value for the customer at every point, from an introductory email, an appointment booking call and a webpage that assuages all doubts to a label on a product, a meeting to take a brief, or a pitch to a purchasing committee (if they are still called that).

Selling is about numbers too, of course. If the scarcest resource is time, then designing the sale means devising the whole decision-making and investment machine to put our offering before the largest number of prospects, to generate opportunities to be channelled into a funnel that leads to an economic transaction. Whether with an app or with the square metreage of a shelf unit, whether with a sales process that lasts 5 seconds or one that takes 5 years, selling is always a story made of touchpoints. A flood of indiscriminate touchpoints with no strategy to back them up is trash. Failing to seize the opportunity of a spontaneous contact with a customer is trash. It's trash when a neighbourhood

Sales is both a service and an experience that acquires value according to the stage in the story that the customer and we are at

store works to gain followers on the other side of the world without even bothering to learn about and map those living nearby. So is collecting leads (whether online or at a trade fair) without following up immediately.

Selling always has and always will demand a multidisciplinary approach and a continual honing of different perspectives on a model that has evolved amid an explosion of system relationships and variables. But the fundamental problem will remain one of planning and thus observing, interpreting, designing, experimenting, implementing and measuring. Selling that thinks that it's only about products and features or prices and patter, though, is trash.

Well, it's been quite a general discussion, an attempt to join all the dots in the commercial universe with a single thread. If this article, this touchpoint, has made you think, then great; otherwise, it was just yet another piece of trash.

weconomy

It's not (just) about performance.

In sales, seemingly excellent results can conceal unresolved issues and a brand-customer relationship that is about to break down.

Trash selling really exists:
it's about offering products
that meet no needs,
pursuing an idea
of performance based
purely on numbers

The world has ended. The planet has drowned in waste. Only a small band of humans have survived, holed up in a refuge. Close by, fleets of drones are delivering boxes large and small. A huge e-commerce company – now entirely robot-run – keeps on sending goods. After many trials and tribulations, the survivors make contact with the artificial intelligence heading up this mega-corporation. They just want to leave a message: stop the shipments; all they're doing is polluting the planet (what's left of it). The reply they receive? "But all we want is to satisfy you."

This organisation of the future has crushed all the competition and is doing extraordinarily well, with superb-quality goods delivered super-fast. Shame no human being wants them, though, as they don't meet any need.

That, dear reader, is the post-apocalyptic scenario depicted in *Autofac*, an episode of *Electric Dreams*, a TV series inspired by the stories of Philip K. Dick and distributed by Amazon Prime Video (of all people). *Autofac* is quite enlightening, in a sense: it tells us how selling must go on, even after the apocalypse: it is innate in human society. The dystopia makes you think, as it shows how you can be super-efficient but sell the wrong way.

And this is the idea that we want to defeat: *trash*. Sure, the apocalypse hasn't actually hap-

pened for us yet, but that kind of selling really exists; we've seen it many times. It's about offering products that meet no needs, persuading people to buy rather than finding out what they need, pursuing an idea of performance based purely on the number of products bought or delivered – without questioning what you're doing or analysing people's habits or behaviour.

Trash selling has only one goal: generating superfluity rather than generating satisfaction. It can be engineered to perfection and even produce excellent results, in the short term. But little by little, it erodes brand reputations and, if left unchecked, the damage can be permanent.

Our vision is based not on idle speculation but on the findings of a 2019 report by CSO Insights, the authoritative research centre for the world of sales. The title says it all: All That Glitters is Not Gold. The study lays bare a contradiction. In the period studied, the organisations' revenues grew, and the sales divisions' targets were met. So far so good, superficially. But if we scratch below this gilded surface of good performance, we find that over half the sales fall through and customer retention has dropped 5% in the last two years. What's more, whereas the customers (primarily B2B) increasingly see salespeople as a resource to solve their problems, 84% of the organisations believe that their sales force lacks the skills to meet this need. Maybe it's not entirely the salespeople's fault.

According to CSO Insights, in the world of sales, "all that glitters is not gold"

That, then, is the contradiction that the *CSO Insights* study reveals: the slow global recovery continues, and selling technologies are increasingly widespread. But that all seems to leave unanswered some questions that might prove crucial when sales forces need to react to the changes under way, as offerings restructure, fresh channels open and new selling experiences emerge. We've tried to formulate these questions, in an attempt to form a long-term perspective:

- · What are the foundations of a lasting customer relationship?
- · How do you nourish a sales ecosystem that is always in touch with the customers that you have gained?
- Which tools and experiences help salespeople to send their customers messages and insights that are aligned with their organisation and that have a positive impact on society?

And to outline some answers to these questions is precisely this *Journal's* aim.

Further reading

Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams on Prime Video

bit.ly/we-electric

CSO Insights, All That Glitters Is Not Gold: Results of the 2019 World-Class Sales Practices Study

bit.ly/we-cso

Sustainable consumption amid social chang



Roberta Paltrinieri

Professor at the University of Bologna, where she teaches Consumption, innovation and sustainability

Because responsible action is profoundly influencing the consumer society. It's a long-term change affecting purchase decisions and social systems.

Italy's ten-year economic crisis has brought profound changes in consumer behaviour. Not entirely surprisingly, the realisation arrived that sustainability has become a key factor in consumer choice. According to figures from Lifegate's national observatory on sustainable lifestyles, as many as 2 out of 3 Italians have embraced it. Aided no doubt by Greta Thunberg's global movement, sustainability has now emerged from its "niche" to become a popular mainstream way of living, although the trend actually precedes Greta and her school strikes.

It has gradually changed how we shop, as we adopt good practices like reduced plastic use and waste separation for recycling. The motives behind our conversion to responsible consumption are primarily but not solely environmental. They reflect a growing awareness acquired over time, including on a cultural level. The economic crisis showed that our habitual consumption model had had its day. This clarion call shook us into the realisation that we are all responsible for our actions and how they affect the world around us.

If we think about it, our shopping and consumption practices reveal our approach to the world. Unsustainable consumption, then, means failing to take responsibility for ourselves and the generations to come. No wonder Greta has admonished us for denying her, and by extension our own children, a future. Of course, this renewed interest in consumption ethics involves not only end consumers but also the entire production and distribution chain, even the authorities. Sustainability cannot be left to consumer choice alone. It requires a partnership among all social stakeholders: citizens/consumers, society, business and the state. The promotion of shared social responsibility based on collaboration has now gone mainstream. Sustainability, then, in all its many senses, is now driving a cultural change. It is behind a new culture of responsibility, which is essential if responsible behaviour is to take root and spread. Consumers, therefore, have increasingly begun to seek authenticity and suppliers they can trust (endorsed by certification). That said, they are still demanding, precisely because they have seen the familiar old consumer society comfort blanket and its certainties fade away. A corollary of all this is that responsibility has become a long-term strategy

for businesses and consumers, not just a flavour of the month.

Interestingly, as researchers from MIT in Boston have found in their work on cooperation, people tend (subconsciously) to cooperate and seek shared strategies; it is the law (i.e. rational thinking) that sometimes leads to more or less altruistic models. I believe that environmental movements (Greta et al.) and broader social movements (the Sardines latterly, in Italy) are evincing a profound change in our cultural norms. In particular, the new generations are both impacted by and instruments of sustainability. The glossy, glamorous, unsustainable world of the recent past seems very remote from that inspired by the narratives that feed our current social imaginary. In business communication,

for example, advertising and the language of marketing more generally spawn process and product storytelling that is a far cry from the symbolic values of the past. The superfluous, the useless, ostentation and compulsion are giving way to a moralising that chimes with an idea of public or responsible happiness, an idea of happiness that is inherently intersubjective. Egotistical individualism bows to a far-sighted self-interest, where wellbeing is never about individuals but communities as a whole.

Further reading

Roberta Paltrinieri, Felicità Responsabile, FrancoAngeli 2015

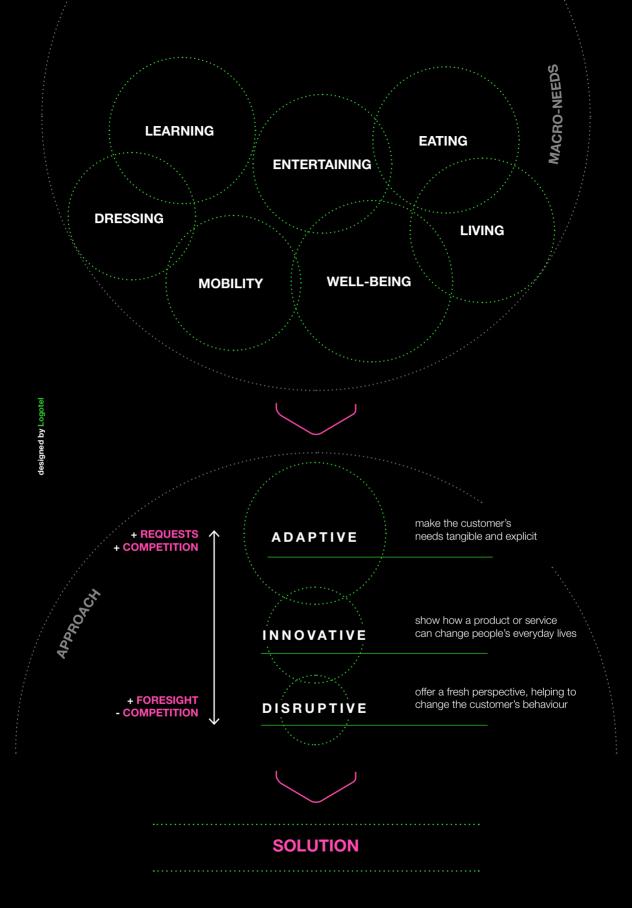
Responsibility has become a long-term strategy for businesses and consumers, not just a flavour of the month



processes and strategies for selling better, we need to change perspective and ask ourselves a vital question: do the products and services that we're selling solve a problem that's worth solving? And can we then offer concrete, measurable solutions?

isn't about finding solutions to equations but devising the best ways to meet a need (by giving it form and meaning) and translate it into something tangible for customers (adapting it to their habits and behaviours).

important to work on the connections between two concepts: need and experience. That is, how – through selling – satisfying a need has a transformative effect on peoples' lives.



A new concept of need

To understand how selling can "solve problems", it's important to redefine our concepts and offer structured responses, to plan how to react – to adapt, innovate or disrupt.

Selling has always been about meeting needs. Real selling, that is. Clearly, offering the best possible price will no longer suffice. "Transactional selling" is a thing of the past; it would be rash to bin it altogether, but it certainly is not enough.

Regardless of what you offer, selling is a service that can be termed "end to end". It means turning a need into *value* for customers. From business' perspective, it is one of the most visible external functions, the only one that takes the customers through a process – or rather, an experience – from start to finish. All the rest gets called many things: marketing, communication, logistics. But it's not selling.

We believe, then, that a selling experience should offer plenty of moments when needs can connect to a brand's offering. Nowadays, that can all happen independently of the actual transaction. Selling is less and less about distribution: it means enabling people to choose something, as painlessly and conveniently as possible. Simply put, selling solves problems. It's an adaptive process structured on several levels that generates value at every touchpoint in the brand–customer relationship. We believe, then, that selling must:

 \cdot be able to meet a need that transitions from being implicit in the customer's mind to becoming explicit.

Value created: the customer's needs take shape.

· identify how the brand's products/services fit with a customer's behaviour.

Value created: the customer learns to position the products/services in their everyday life and understands how it can change.

 \cdot offer a fresh perspective, guiding the customer as their behaviours and habits change.

Value created: a circle is closed; new needs to meet are uncovered, and new ways to satisfy them present themselves.

Beyond Maslow's pyramid

Before going any further, we need to redefine the concept of need. This is not an academic exercise but a key step towards breaking away from *trash selling*. The consumer society has accustomed us to thinking of needs as something self-contained and – in some cases – created by brands themselves. We believe that classifying needs in a rigid hierarchical model like Maslow's is no longer helpful. We think that products/services can no longer

be divided into those that meet primary needs and (superfluous) others that lead to self-realisation. A phone, for instance – does that meet a primary need, or does it boost self-esteem? Probably both. And, for a non-tech example, do we plan our holiday only after securing our needs for food, water, safety, etc., in Maslow's pyramid? Or is it a goal that's open to anyone? In mature societies, so many goods have become so interchangeable and accessible that any essential-vs-superfluous distinction

has become meaningless. Even luxury has changed, in futurologist Doug Stephens' interesting estimation: "luxury is an idea of freedom", something that's very hard to put a price on.

From our perspective, needs have a broad, inclusive meaning that relates to people's lives. Satisfying needs improves individuals' existence and impacts positively on society. This is a potentially infinite challenge, a new responsibility for the world of sales. Let's take a practical example. Nowadays, people don't "need a car"; they need to get around. A car is just one possible way to meet that need at a particular point in their lives. At another point (e.g. after moving to the town centre), the need to get around may take other forms, requiring other responses that the selling process needs to provide. That's what we mean by adaptive selling.

Selling means solving problems

There's more than one way to solve a given problem. And that's not a philosophical truism; it's a way to give meaning to a need that organisations often articulate: to put yourself in your customers' shoes. Homing in on a need that's part of people's lives is a way to break out of that impasse that often leads brands to create virtual customers corresponding to virtual needs – resulting in self-referential responses involving their own products or services. For clarity, let's revisit our example about mobility and put it into a sales context.

- **SCENARIO 1.** A customer can now ask a car salesperson to recommend the petrol vehicle best suited to their needs. <u>It's up to the seller to ask the right questions and to present the features and benefits of the cars in their portfolio to guide the customer in their choice.</u>
- **SCENARIO 2.** Both the seller and the customer can proceed from this initial stage to the next level. The customer might ask, "Or should I buy an electric car?". Here, the seller's response cannot be based (only) on presenting the vehicle's features. They must begin by exploring the customer's

behaviour, how they might use a product that they're probably not familiar with, to offer a perspective that makes their life better.

• SCENARIO 3. The response to the first two levels generates direct connections between a need (getting around) and a product (a traditional/electric vehicle). But there's another level to consider in the selling strategy, where sellers become trusted advisors. Here, salesperson and customer build a response together that hasn't yet taken shape in their minds. Today, a customer can come to a seller with an extremely generic question—like the ones we ask Google: "To get around, do I really need to own a car?". The customer is asking the salesperson to work out new habits with them. We believe that this is the most ambitious challenge in the sales process. For at this level, selling becomes the catalyst for building a customer—brand relationship that can exist independently of the products and services. And that's how selling becomes infinite.

The seven big needs

We've just begun to scratch the surface. This interpretation of need concerns various aspects of people's lives. The book *Unlocking the customer value chain* by Thales S. Teixeira identifies seven core needs: besides getting around, the others are where you live, what you wear, what you eat, learning, living better and being entertained. It's probably not an exhaustive list, but those are the things that people can't do without. We can interpret them as "containers of meaning" that selling can fill with satisfying answers.

Teixeira calls these needs "the big 7", and we can use them as a spring-board to add another level of interpretation. Companies operating in these sectors have been going through huge changes since the turn of the millennium. Think of what Netflix has done to the entertainment world, or Airbnb in accommodation, or the electric revolution in transport. These transformations aren't driven by technological innovation alone, for we're not interested only in disruption.

Understanding how selling can satisfy the "big 7" is a way to give customers answers to the problems of continual, constant change. Consider how the focus on sustainability is changing the food sector. It has now been shown, for example, that intensive animal rearing is a prime cause of the rise in atmospheric CO₂ emissions. And the role of selling is also not necessarily about surfing a wave of disruptive innovation but understanding the micro-signals of change and offering lasting solutions.

Further reading

Thales S. Teixeira, Unlocking the Customer Value Chain, Currency 2019

Consumption OCCASIONS: the ingredients Touchpoints, multichannel customer journeys, before-during-after ... these are all elements that, if well designed, can help to satisfy customers (boosting NPS) and increase sales. But is that really enough to make a difference? On paper, maybe, but surely there's



Antonella Castelli

> Senior Manager Design, Logotel

Linear customerexperience models can be disrupted. Nowadays, it's the customer who makes the experience. Companies have a higher-level task: to create consumption occasions that customers can combine, personalise and "live" as they please. People today buy on a mix of physical and digital channels, which shows that they are thoroughly accustomed to the multichannel approach. Different customer profiles pick their preferred channels and thus select their kind of experience. Companies, then, have a primary requirement to address: to make the channels talk to each other to offer an experience that enables the key before-during-after occasions in the buyer journey. But this is a linear perspective that we can disrupt. For if we take a truly client-centric perspective, we realise that merely having all our touchpoints in place is now considered a commodity, a necessary but insufficient element, where things are done in a precise sequence. I believe that selling must go beyond linear models that confine themselves to identifying leads or getting clients to buy: we must work harder on making experiences circular. So another increasingly vital requirement if we want to make the difference is to extend the dialogue so that, when people use a channel, they are free to personalise the experience based on their preferences, the content, and aspects like the context and var-

more to it than that. Why, then – and how?

Experiences become circular through the relationships that people *spontaneously* develop through the tools that we, as businesses, provide. For it is the customer who creates their purchase experience. Our role is to design and offer *consumption occasions that the customer can combine as they please*. These occasions are elements based on needs that have been expressed to a greater or lesser extent and that enable customers to find us independently of the touchpoints and channels where the interaction occurs. Besides being effective and efficient, these occasions must be increasingly surprising and exciting, creating new sensations and new expectations.

The four keys to these occasions are that they must be:

1. Real: prime-time + non-fiction

ious "special moments".

Now you need more than a basic understanding of your custom-

ers. Every company knows who its customers are, where they live and how old they are – but that won't suffice any more. You really need to dig deep, because only by treating customers as individuals can companies offer plenty of genuine "prime-time" occasions that are more than mere fiction.

2. Valuable in terms of relationships: being in the experience in a non-superficial way

Today's customers expect more. They want more added value in the relationships that brands offer. This can be achieved only when we as organisations understand the people we're dealing with and what they need. Value, now, isn't just something to exchange. It's an ever-tangible element that lives, if you like, in what customers recognise as their own personal space. That is how it can become an integral part of an experience of great personal, interpersonal and intellectual merit.

3. Based on trust: personal, not impersonal

We can win customers' trust when we do the right things, we do things the right way, and we are proactive. So what kind of company do customers trust? Well, a transparent, open one that keeps the customer experience obstacle-free and above all that personalises that experience, helping customers to choose products and services based on the available information. This trust gives the business solidity and insulates it from potential social changes.

4. Unpredictable: offering occasions that are extraordinary not one-size-fits-all

Surprise must continue to be an element in the customer journey. As companies, then, we need to offer our customers remarkable experiences – good service isn't enough any more; the experience needs to have the WOW factor! The difference between good service and an extraordinary experience is fairly simple. Good service is something we design *for* our customers, to resolve or help with certain situations; an extraordinary experience is something we do

Selling must go beyond linear models and work on making experiences circular

Further reading

Martha Rogers

Massima fiducia: L'onestà come vantaggio competitivo, Egea 2012

NPS

Net Promoter Score acronym: a tool management used to evaluate loyalty in a business-customer relationship. It is an alternative to the traditional search for customer satisfaction and can be correlated with revenues It is up to companies to design consumption occasions that are increasingly surprising and exciting, creating new sensations and new expectations

with our customers, to amaze them. And all because the real driver in designing the experience is the customer.

The customer is the heart of every experience. To underline the point once again, they are the ones with the power to choose the consumption occasions that our companies offer to them.

Selling, then, becomes an opportunity for contact with the customer that begins from various entry points and continues ad infinitum in a relationship that allows us to keep discovering their needs, to serve them ever better.



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Omnichannel is an illusion



Interview with Doug Stephens

retail futurist. Ceo & Founder Retail Prophet

Today's stores are media and they need new KPIs. To achieve that a new design experience is needed that empowers every moment in customers' purchase journey.

What - for you - is working today in the retail industry? What existing practices are no longer working?

On the "what's working" side, I'm seeing some really intriguing innovation coming from brands with respect to the retail experience. Brands like Nike for example are really testing the bounds of treating their stores as a media channel for unique and personalized experiences. On the other hand, I'm also loving what some of the disruptors, like Neighborhood Goods and Camp are bringing. They're essentially throwing away the script for what a "department store" or "toy store" is for example and reinventing the whole concept - revenue channel included.

Physical stores are becoming more and more experiential. In this scenario, where "stores are media", what is actually driving sales?

If executed effectively, the store experience has the power to galvanize a relationship with consumers in a way no other channel can. If retailers can involve the consumer on a sensory, cognitive and even emotional level in the experience, they become extremely difficult to forget. If I leave a store feeling at one with the brand's values, their story and people, the likelihood of later life-long purchases, across channels, becomes exponentially higher.

Are there new KPIs that companies could use? And what performance indicators should be avoided?

Yes, if we accept the idea that stores are indeed a media channel and not simply a product distribution channel, then we need to measure them accordingly. In fact, if we're sensible and ambitious about it, we should even be able to measure that physical media value in a monetary way. Ultimately the number of people that visit your store, multiplied by the relative value of those physical impressions in dollar terms, and then modified positively or negatively by the store's net promoter score, will result in a monetary value representing the store's media value to the enterprise. This figure, plus four-wall store sales, plus any attributable online sales from the immediate market area are a true representation of the store's value to the enterprise. The good news is that we now have a host of technologies, platforms and systems that can give us unprecedented insight into the moment to moment experiences that shoppers are having in-store.

Stores today are part of an integrated omni channel system. When - for you - online and offline channels work well together?

I don't believe that consumers consciously consider channels when they're shopping. I think they find themselves in various moments - researching moments, choosing moments, trying moments, buying moments etc. In

each of those moments different channels and shopper problems come into play. I'm also not a fan of the word "omnichannel". I think it lulls us into thinking that the shopping is one, seamless end-to-end experience. It's not. Moreover, it dumbs down the meticulous nature of experiential design. We recommend that retailers break the journey down into its smallest conceivable micro-moments and use the unique attributes of each channel and the various aspects of

Stores are no more about logistics. They are media channels and they need new tools to measure their value

people, place, technology to solve for every customer moment along the way, regardless of which channel that moment most commonly occurs in.

Logistic systems are becoming faster and cheaper and a 1 hour delivery is yet possible. In this scenario what is the future of physical stores? Physical stores will no longer be the most efficient or effective means of distributing products, given the escalating demands and expectations of shoppers. They will however, become the most vital and valuable tool for customer acquisition. Rent, staffing, utilities, etc. will cease to be viewed as operating costs and instead become viewed as effective marketing spending.

Stores such as Amazon Go works without humans. When - for you - human factor is still a value? And when "automated selling" will become the new standard?

Any low customer-impact, marginal value tasks like inventory management, checkout, store maintenance etc. will be routed out of the cost structure and replaced by automation. We're seeing this happening already as companies from food and beverage, retail logistics and hospitality introduce robotics and AI to take over repetitive and routine work. The flip side is that we've never had a greater need for human Brand Ambassadors - super users of their products and effective human connectors - to bring brands to life. So, as chess master Gary Kasparov once said, "technology won't replace us. It will promote us.

Further reading

Retail Prophet

The Retail Prophet site offers blogs and podcasts about the future of retail.

sit.ly/we-prophet

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The B2B side of Deliveroo



Interview with David Bryant

Head of Sales, Deliveroo

The perspective of a company–platform that sees selling as solving problems, including for the B2B arena

Deliveroo "solves problems" through selling, by turning restaurants into virtual brands

What sales problems does Deliveroo solve?

Lots. The first one is about restaurants' business growth. In a mature sector where growth margins and percentages are there but, in material terms, are quite modest, the restaurants that choose us get access to a reliable incremental sales channel that does not affect their fixed costs, except for raw materials and packaging. This makes the restaurant's service more efficient and ultimately boosts turnover by up to 30%, on average. Not forgetting another order of "problems", namely restaurateurs' ability and capacity to invest in digital communications and digital marketing. Once they join our platform, restaurants enjoy a level of digital visibility that they couldn't get before. And there are also new tools, like a "virtual brand", which gives them the additional positioning on the market to develop a brand for new kinds of cuisine to attract new consumers. The virtual brand is a virtual restaurant to full effect, which our partners can create with a different, dedicated food-delivery brand. So they combine their traditional business with a new tailor-made channel underpinned by market research and consumer preferences.

What are the ingredients in Deliveroo's sales success?

Ours is a win-win service. Deliveroo grows if the restaurants grow. We embrace our partners' mission 100%, so our approach is en-

tirely focused on growing the restaurants. Supporting them goes hand in hand with our main aim: to become the go-to company in the food world. That is our sole focus, and we want to keep concentrating on that.

Deliveroo is also a data company. How do your sellers use this data? How do you balance technical skills and human qualities?

We are a tech company – a data company that leverages insights and aggregated data that we make available for our partners to grow with us, all in a totally transparent way. First and foremost, though, we're a people company. Deliveroo people are passionate about their work. Take our sales team, who receive dedicated training sessions on how best to analyse and interpret trends to support our partners as effectively as possible. That's why our sales team is a great example of a mar-

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riage between tradition and innovation: human skills and sensibilities alongside a profoundly innovative technology.

What is the key to your customer retention?

Ours is essentially a fast, efficient service with integrated logistics. We work every day to improve our standards, as we know that our service reliability – for both the restaurant and the end consumer – is the central driver in our customer relationships. Here too, the technology we use and our passion for what we do are crucial.

Ours is a win-win service; Deliveroo grows if the restaurants grow

What sets Deliveroo's selling proposition apart from the competition?

The variety of our offering, in terms of different restaurants and types of cuisine. Plus quality at the right price. Above all, though, we tap into the latest consumption style trends and pass the benefits on to our restaurant partners. As with poke, for example, a Hawaiian dish that became our most ordered item in 2018.

How do you get to know your consumers better?

By keeping a close eye on trends and what different places need. Only a company like Deliveroo can do this, and the restaurants working with us reap the rewards. We help them become increasingly efficient and profitable by tailoring their offering to consumer demand.

Which companies have inspired you?

Innovators and tech companies – brands that are defined by technology but that highly value what people can do. As I said, we want to become the go-to company in the food sector, just as others have done in their respective arenas.

For Coop food is not a commoditv



Interview with Maura Latini

MD of Coop Italia

Sustainability, shop formats and pricing. How these factors play off each other in the commercial strategy of Coop Italia.

What does selling mean for you at the Coop?

It means finding a balance between affordability and all facets of a product's value. Take our core business, for instance: food. For us, food is not a commodity but a primary resource to safeguard and offer our customers.

How has selling changed in the mass retail trade? What changes do you expect next? Has the relationship with customers changed?

Very much so, and it continues to change, just as consumers themselves keep changing. Coop members still account for almost 80% of our network's sales, and they have in a sense been ahead of the times; we've certainly been spurred on by their input. This desire for information, for details about where the products have come from, the producers' ethical standards and the sustainability of their supply chains is now part and parcel of operating in this sector. But it has been for decades for us. In 1980, for example, Coop members launched a campaign to disincentivise the use of traditional carrier bags and an appeal to dispose of them properly without littering. That was 40 years ago. Unsurprisingly, then, we'd already taken action before it became a legal requirement to replace plastic with compostable Mater-Bi. In fact, we switched over in 2009, thus keeping around 450 million bags a year out of the environment, while launching a campaign to promote re-usable bags. The various re-usable shoppers that we have developed since 2009 have saved about 7,000 tons of CO₂ emissions a year. And we'll keep on going.

The Coop has decided to pivot from hypermarkets to local markets. How has this affected turnover? What about your product range?

Hypermarkets are an outdated shopping concept. These days, the format struggles to stay profitable. We are rethinking that kind of outlet - reducing the store space or enlarging the food section at the expense of the non-food areas (like home goods and electronics), which have suffered most from the consumption slump in our market segment. Today's consumers are asking us for more compact, better-performing formats, ideally in convenient parts of town for quicker, more frequent trips, mainly to buy perishables. And we're certainly including more fresh produce in our range, with a strong focus on where the products come from and local sourcing. Ranges

reflect a greater sensibility to health and wellbeing, with more organic or premium items and products to meet specific needs. The major and medium-sized brands have been leaching market share for years now to own-brand products and dynamic new small businesses that are highly attuned to consumer demand. Our own Coop products are very important, too. Their various new ranges vaunt our hallmark dual virtues of being great value for customers and great for communities and the environment with strong production ethics to boot.

Compared to other major retailers, what benefits are there in being a cooperative of consumers?

We are very different from our competitors - in our history, our mission and how we began. Unlike the others, the profit motive is not our raison d'être. Rather, we are obliged to redistribute our gains, to channel resources to the areas and communities where

we operate. Just to mention that last year we reinvested €60.4m in social projects, research grants, school prizes, and local and international community ventures. That is another side of the Coop.

The act of "going shopping" has changed. Nowadays, people can order online, have a hot meal delivered to their door or even (in the future) visit automated supermarkets like Amazon Go. Is this influencing how the Coop goes about selling?

We have an array of initiatives both in individual cooperatives and nationwide. First, take Coop Alleanza 3.0's e-commerce venture, EasyCoop. Launched in Rome and then rolled out to Bologna, Emilia and the Veneto, this

advanced, innovative online-shopping service offers over 10,000 products including 3,000 super-fresh lines. Then there is Coop-Drive in cities across the north-west, where customers buy online and collect in store in dedicated areas. At the Coop in Milan Bicocca, successor to the "supermarket of the future" at the Expo, you can collect your online purchases from refrigerated lockers. Each unit is at a different temperature, and the compartments open in

The hypermarket is part of a way of shopping that no longer exists; Coop is rethinking its formats, reducing the store area in some cases and reviewing the range in others

Price, values and the supply chain are factors that must be kept in balance

sequence from the dried products at ambient temperature to the frozen goods.

Coop Italia also operates a dedicated non-food e-commerce channel across much of the country. We expect digitalisation and the web to become extremely important. But we've opted to integrate digital into our physical network, on the expectation that the physical store — maybe in a different guise — will be at the heart of things for many years to come.

Coop is taking a series of interesting steps to recover margins, a problem that seems common to all major retailers. Sales-wise, which of these initiatives would you term strategic?

Our sales strategy is based on the right price, not low prices at any cost. With tomatoes and derived products, as a specific example, we try to set a price point that achieves a balance between emphasising the quality of the product and paying a fair wage for the work that goes into it. That means a higher price in percentage terms than some competitors, but that is the right price for us. This way of operating – by boosting the efficiency of our supply chain and every player in it while helping consumers make informed choices about what's in the products they buy – is what I would call strategic.



Combatting trash, a question of principle.



A conversation with Andrea Lecce

Executive Director Sales & Marketing Retail – Intesa Sanpaolo

Trash isn't only about impulse buying.
The banking sector offers an interesting perspective on how one antidote to trash selling involves a socially responsible act: building in positive outcomes for society

The new challenge is to operate on the market by creating a commonality of interests and, above all, values

I believe that the antibodies to defeat trash can be synthesised from within it. Proceeding from this idea, two lines of thinking open up. The first is negative, and it serves to define the boundaries of what it is that we want to overcome. I believe trash exists because we often find ourselves buying things to fill a void. In an attempt to imbue increasingly elusive values with meaning, the act of buying offers immediate satisfaction. It all springs from a desire to possess not only physical objects but also digital services. (I don't think pay-per-use formulas alone are enough.) Marketing - trash marketing, that is - knows full well how to exploit this desire. We've gone from "we need to engage the customer's brain" to "we must go for their gut" and now "we must lead them by the finger", the finger that taps the buy-with-one-click button. It's an unthinking approach aimed at prompting lots of low-value little purchases, to minimise those moments of buyer's remorse when you realise you've spent too much. Hence the proliferation of open-ended offers, irresistible discount formulas and Black Friday. But the satisfaction generated by these strategies is but superficial: the void is not filled, and you sense soon enough that what you've bought wasn't really necessary and is, therefore, trash.

If we stopped there, we might jump to the conclusion that trash has won. But I believe we have a big responsibility in sales and marketing, for if we want to change things now, we're forced to think. I

think the ground is being laid for a new awareness and new consumption choices. So here is the positive angle: we can think of trash as a virus that, once defeated, makes the organism stronger.

That applies in my world, too. Ostensibly, the banking sector doesn't suffer from trash: financial products aren't for immediate gratification, so they're less susceptible to impulse buying; they're highly regulated, thus shielding customers from risks that are incompatible with their profile. But ours is a different responsibility: to help design a future for society and its members. That's why, in my view, bankers must be "architects of choice", helping customers to visualise a higher value.

We might think that the rules that bind us take away our scope for initiative and debar us from those forms of engagement that are typical of traditional selling. But banks are no ordinary kind of for-profit organisations: they must also be *fit and proper*. Before selling a financial product, we must thread the needle by meeting the customers' needs without leading them into wrong choices, breaking any rules or exposing ourselves to reputational risk.

Until recently, banks were supposed to "move money, give money and advise about money". Now we're going further. Our account managers are offering products informed by a commonality of

interests that goes beyond short-term gain. For example, when a customer buys a private healthcare service on a monthly subscription, we constantly monitor it and – if it goes unused – we're duty-bound to be proactive, by suspending it and refunding their money. Extrapolated over large numbers of customers, this tends to erode our turnover. But we have no choice, because to maintain a long-term relationship with the customer, we must make it a question of principle.

We have a bigger opportunity: to create a positive impact not only for the two immediate parties (bank and customer) but also for our entire sector, society and the planet. Thus a new challenge takes shape: making a profit by contributing to a society that believes in a vision of the future.

We can think of trash as a virus that, once defeated, makes the organism stronger

This is not abstract philosophy; it's something that transforms the very design of our products. Our pension packages, for example, exist to assure an individual's future wellbeing. But that future can exist only if the companies that the fund invests in act responsibly towards the environment and society as a whole – in other words, if the investments are ESG. Thus the approach changes, to create a commonality of interests and, above all, values. This concept of operating on the market by building this kind of relationship is our way to combat trash.

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L'Erbolario: Ethics and sincerity are

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A conversation with Franco Bergamaschi

Co-founder and CEO, L'Erbolario

Being sustainable isn't just about the products and the marketing strategy; it encompasses an entire approach to sales where the "purchase advisors" are there to "educate the customers"

From a sales perspective, what are the major challenges that L'Erbolario has had to face since it was founded in 1978?

Especially in the beginning, we worked on developing a new way to enjoy cosmetics, to make them useful and appealing, starting with the packaging. We believed that consumers found our sector's offering confusing rather than attractive. With our window-display guidelines, our elegant and sophisticated packaging, and compelling value for money, we have helped Italian herbalists to innovate. We've enabled many multi-brand herbalists to become single brand, and we've gradually created our own retail outlets over time.

How have you increased your turnover?

We've made our stores into little treasure troves that give customers the gift of excitement each time they step in. Figures by market-research institute Doxa show that 42% of our in-store visitors come to buy a present; we want to turn those people into lifelong customers. So we build a relationship, one sensation after another. And those are no empty words: they're the foundation for tangible action – like using satin and pompoms to seal our gift bags, or giving out 60 million free samples to help tell the story of (and sell) our cosmetics.

Sustainability is a hot topic now. What does it mean for you?

It's an important part of our ethical identity, based on dealing with our customers with total sincerity. Our entire supply chain is sustainable, in the broadest sense. We've never delocalised; our HQ is powered by a photovoltaic plant; our products are certified by the Italian antivivisection league (LAV); and our packaging is strictly sustainable. It's something we've always embraced, to the point that it almost goes without saying. Now is the time to work on communicating these values even more clearly.

L'Erbolario led the way for customer satisfaction in the consumer goods arena again in 2019, according to the German quality and finance institute (ITQF). What was the key to this achievement?

Our stores are high quality because our people care. Their role is practically to "educate" the customers, like a trusted friend who always gives good advice. That's why we call our sales staff "purchase advisors".

L'Erbolario also sells online. How important is this channel for you?

Operating over multiple channels is an essential tool for informing/building an audience, in particular with people or population segments who would otherwise be hard to reach. Online contributes to creating a "beaulodi 45°19'00" N 9°30'00" E selling solves problems weconomy 4

ty routine" that can begin at any moment, even on the sofa. <u>But</u>, for <u>us</u>, an effective digital approach must be able to steer people into the store, to generate that kind of synaesthetic, multisensory engagement that the <u>internet cannot create</u>. So we've brought our customer service operation in-house; it's now staffed by colleagues who know how the stores operate because they've worked there themselves, so they can offer the right advice.

What does your internationalisation process look like?

Besides the products, we also export the Italian lifestyle, together with our passion for service. L'Erbolario's overseas success is, once again, all down to our people. Perhaps the domestic market has spoiled us (it still provides 90% of our turnover), but it's exciting – if devilishly difficult – to engage with some very different beauty rituals and cultures. When this approach works, the results are excellent; our best partner is in Taiwan, for example. But where internationalisation opportunities conflict with our values, we know when to say no (with a flush of pride): we pulled out of China when animal experimentation became mandatory there.

What are the keys to selling, in your view?

First, respecting each individual customer's desires and expectations. Everyone is different – even from themselves, from time to time. An old Cantonese proverb says "if you can't smile, don't open a shop", and the smile must be genuine. From our observations, customers now stay longer in store (9 minutes, up from 7), although more time doesn't automatically translate into more sales: we have to create the right conditions for customers to buy. In every department, even the purchase advisors must be "sustainable", so to speak, in order for each customer to feel understood, appreciated and loved.

How do you see the future of sales, compared to the past?

I think of the old greengrocers who knew what each member of the family liked and who wouldn't let you go without giving you a particularly delicious grape to taste. It all sprang from a natural kindness, an innate culture of customer care. That is something to cherish, even though things have become more complex. Today everything is digital, but digital is not everything. Too often, tech cannibalises the human dimension, taking time away from the customer relationship instead of making it smoother. I believe we need to look beyond physical—digital integration and move to the next level: to create a symbiosis between online and offline. Philip Kotler is right when he says that technology should be invisible, sophisticated and efficient.



where salespeople are made out as barkers and touts. We believe that people who sell are part sales artist, part sales scientist.

Salespeople are increasingly burdened with tasks that have little to do with selling: data entry, customer surveys, filling in forms, updating systems....

Selling is changing and evolving. But it mustn't get bogged down in situations where salespeople are unable to fulfil their potential. But if selling is supposed to meet needs and affect how people behave, how can we set it free?

When selling gets personal.



Simone Colombo

Senior manager, Logotel

The human component of selling, i.e. what makes the relationship unique, should be preserved; it cannot become ancillary to processes and paperwork

One person really can make the difference. They can give you a reason to buy; they can convince you to come back – or not.

For years now, Doris has welcomed me to the hotel where she works in Southwark, London. Last autumn, I happened to walk in with another couple: "All my favourite guests arrived today!" she said. She always comes out from behind the reception desk to greet you with a hug and ask how you are. Then she gives you a welcome sweet and checks if a better room has become available, whereupon she upgrades you without your having to ask. Or at busy times, she sees whether the other hotel in Waterloo, just the other side of The Cut, has anything better. Doris was recently promoted to manager; she gets every weekend off with no more shift work and a pay rise. But, she confessed, she prefers people to paperwork. I returned to the hotel for New Year; it was Saturday, and she wasn't there. Without her to welcome me with her kind attentions and little questions, it all felt so impersonal, ordinary, flat.

I always look for Ornella to help me choose which clothes to buy. She works in a chain store with a few outlets in northern Italy. It's a cut above fast fashion, but not by much. She asks you what you're looking for and brings you a few things to try. She always checks the changing room before waving you in: "I'll wait for you outside, and we'll see how you get on." If she's busy with other customers when you emerge, she glances over to ask you to wait. If she thinks she can offer you something in a better colour or fit, she says to hang on while she brings it for you. If the garment will need some adjustments, she explains how. If you have a regular seamstress, she advises what to tell her; otherwise, she suggests their own service and pins a note with the alterations onto the item directly. At the check-out, she always calls the owner to see if they can offer you any extra discount or another item at a better price. Ornella is the only assistant in the shop who does that. If she isn't there, I come back another time.

I'm sure that if Doris and Ornella were given a small budget to make their customers' experience even better, they'd use it wisely. They are the ones who make the experience unique, as they are the ones who reassure you, help you, guide you, recognise you and remember you. They know how to make the experience unique even if the brands they work for have nothing unique or exclusive about them. They feel a responsibility not only not to offer you an inadequate product

or service but above all to offer you the best they have. You never think they're pushing something they've been told to shift; it's obvious how much they care about giving you what you need right then. They know how to defend the interests of the person they're serving. For them, customer care is the most important thing, so they build a loyal customer base who stick by the brand "through thick and thin".

We need freedom in sales, for it is a game between two people, an encounter based on their respective individuality

Doris got me thinking: do her bosses really

believe that handling the admin is her most valuable skill? Why don't they enable her to teach the others how she welcomes the customers? Why can Ornella not decide for herself, within parameters, what to offer you without always needing the boss's permission? The way they look after the customers and take responsibility for providing the best service to each one should be guarantee enough on its own. Why aren't they free to keep that promise every time? Sure, there's an accountability process to protect customers and staff. There are rules on the propriety, sustainability and profitability of commercial transactions. But what is to be done with those people who show they can apply those rules even more effectively to create value for the customer? We need more freedom in sales, for it is "a game" between two people, an encounter that needs to be based on their respective individuality in order to be genuine. In the process of recognising, requesting, responding and repeating that sales is always about², companies should empower their salespeople to apply a variety of strategies. Personalising and recommending, when a customer already knows what they want. Coaching behaviour, when they aren't sure or they want to be reassured, helped or guided. Responding swiftly when customers authorise the brand to get to know and remember their habits and preferences: not only online but above all in encounters between two people. This strategy needs to keep contact with reality; it needs to observe what is happening. It needs people more than chatbots or artificial intelligence; it needs to look after the "front line". Because if "80% of managers say they are developing a great customer experience, but just 8% of consumers say it even is a customer experience"3, then that gap is imperilling brands' very survival. We can mitigate this risk only by giving freedom back to the sellers who project authenticity.

Further reading

1 **Simon Sinek**Il gioco infinito, Vallardi,
2019, pp. 58-59

2 Harvard Business Review The Age of Continuos Connection, May-June 2019. pp. 66-73

3 https://twitter.com/ retailwatch_it/status/ 1211676124834603010

Things that will have to change in the electric



revolu

Interview with Gaetano Thorel

Group CEO PSA Italia

When a sector undergoes radical change, its approaches to selling must change too – in the automotive industry, the new electric vehicles must not merely be "sold better"; many established paradigms also require a fundamental rethink.

In summer 2019, people suddenly woke up to climate change. And for the first time, they began talking about the green economy as something that generates value. New needs are taking shape that salespeople will have to turn into solutions. But if we are to pursue new avenues, the traditional mechanisms are not enough: we need to change the status quo. In a "slow-moving" sector like automotive, this can yield a competitive advantage in about two years. My sector is indeed experiencing a wave of innovation after two decades of inertia. Customers can now seek a traditional vehicle or an electric car or get around with neither. To address these needs, PSA has turned itself from a product-centric business to a mobility-centric network. Each of our mobility solutions corresponds to a Group brand, with service promises to meet customers' needs and aspirations (our competitors' response has been to set up separate new companies). With Free2Move, for example, we provide mobility solutions ranging from 5-minute car sharing to 5-year hire.

There's also a factor working across the board that is demanding a wholesale revamp of the sales value chain: digitalisation. It enables brands to contact consumers directly, leaving intermediaries with a different kind of role. In the next 5 years, I expect the sales force in the field to shrink by 30% while conversions jump by 50%. That doesn't mean downsizing per se but envisaging new skills. We have high hopes for our Business Development Center (BDC), which uses data and people profiling to identify qualified leads to make the right kind of contact with. With this intelligence-driven effort, we expect to generate a purchase every other time a salesperson meets a prospect.

This transformation is affecting the roles, processes and boundaries of selling. One of the most important things to do, I think, is to train the sales force to adopt a new mindset. Salespeople who work with their own diary on their own clients will be squeezed out. Nowadays, people are influenced by brand power, so the company–salesperson partnership needs to get much closer.

And the products are changing, too. Groupe PSA is boldly grappling with the electric-car revolution. We've decided to bypass hybrids, as we see them as mere shortcuts that don't solve the real problem of CO, emissions - electric cars are the only way to eliminate the environmental impact. They are posing challenges that are changing both how vehicles are used and how customers and vendors deal with one another. For a practical example, with an electric car you don't need to stop at petrol stations. That habit was inherently, implicitly bound up with the product. But recharging (rather than filling up) an electric car affects how people behave and approach decisions. It can be disorienting. One of the radical things that we have done along these lines has been to market the new Peugeot e-208 with a monthly subscription not a list price.

This enables a new sales approach, altering the prospect's perspective to see this change as a benefit. It's up to the salespeople to explain how recharging saves owners time (while the car is parked in the garage or a suitably equipped area) and money ("filling up" costs €50/month less on average with electricity than petrol). The list price, then, is now an obsolete and totally misleading decision parameter: it's only superficially higher for electric cars, but the monthly saving is clear.

For a few years now, we've been hearing that selling is about trust and transparency. These factors bind a brand to its customers, and - in my sector - they are preferable to chasing short-term results. Let me unpack that. Electric vehicles can't be sold indiscriminately. They're a boon for some

Nowadays, people are influenced by brand power, so the company-salesperson partnership must become much closer

customers and a bane for others, as the recharging infrastructure still isn't universally available. So to drive our revolution, we must target our efforts and identify the consumers who are "electro-compatible". We can profile people accurately by analysing their habits and behaviours (assisted by the BDCs) to inform them how much an electric car could improve their lives - and safeguard the planet. For example, we need to know whether a prospect drives 15 km per day and has a garage where they can install a charging station, as they will benefit most from an electric car. But if they drive 100 km

per day and have no place to recharge, then the salesperson must be transparent and advise against buying, say, an electric Opel Corsa, even if the customer really wants one. On the other hand, it would be stupid to guilt-trip people into buying it anyway, as that would only create dissatisfaction and erode the brand reputation. And we cannot allow that to happen. We're at the start of a transition that will keep us busy for the next 10–15 years, and the process will need

Selling is about trust and transparency.
These factors bind the brand to its customers and, in my sector, they are preferable to chasing short-term results.

to be managed intelligently. From a sales management perspective, at Groupe PSA we are bringing central departments and dealerships closer together, as we believe it's vital to establish a direct connection with everyone in the area. We need to know what salespeople really think about electrification; we need them to experience an electric car; we need to find out what people think after their first dealership visit and after the first few months of using a car. By continually listening like this, we can monitor the consistency of the message we put out and make prompt adjustments.

We've gone down a new road, and as is often the case, we're receiving some signals from the field that might make us think twice. But if we turned back, it would be a short-sighted mistake at a time when an overall vision is vital if we are to thrive amid the macro-changes that we have dived into.



It's time for ethical selling.



Antonello Usai

Senior trainer, Logotel

What are our new responsibilities when selling? Embracing a long-term perspective and eschewing the manipulation that has helped to fuel the myths about salespeople.

We all sell something to someone. It might be ideas, plans, solutions or ourselves and our skills: mums are selling too when they try to persuade the kids to eat more greens. Selling implies being engaged in exchanges whose intrinsic aim is always the pursuit of a benefit.

That such a purpose exists does not mean, though, that the exchange must necessarily pit one party's interests against the other's.

Yet the sales profession is often associated with the image of someone who can sell snow to Eskimos – someone who can sell customers something they don't need.

The core principle of **ethical selling**, however, is that selling is an exchange whose real objective is to generate **shared value**.

Talk of ethical selling in the current economic climate might sound naïve. The prevailing conditions seem to favour a down-to-earth, no-frills, pragmatic approach.

But consumers are gradually showing greater interest in ethics in commercial transactions, as they now expect companies to respect and share their values.

Nevertheless, many organisations still behave improperly, which suggests that results are valued more than ethical conduct.

Why does this happen?

Because **ethical behaviour requires a broader perspective** that transcends the needs of the moment and takes account of the long-term consequences of our actions.

Unfortunately, firms that focus only on the immediate future fail to appreciate the costs and lost revenue that such short-sighted policies incur. Contrary to popular belief, the sales professionals who enjoy **lasting** suc-

contrary to popular belief, the sales professionals who enjoy **lasting** success are motivated by more than just money. Those spurred only by the pursuit of cash with an "I want it all and I want it now" attitude seldom have enduring careers.

Putting ethics at the heart of your work can mean **not selling in the short term** but achieving significant results over time through an enhanced reputation, organic word of mouth, and accumulated loyalty and trust.

Many salespeople and managers are forced to reckon with a changing profession that they have grown up in without perhaps consciously choosing it.

Customers no longer seem to welcome the selling skills that they have developed over the years, which wounds their sales veterans' pride and makes them feel ill-prepared.

On the other hand, many young graduates see sales as a not especially professional stopgap on a career path bound for other things.

But can sales become a profession with a code and a sense of ethics?

Deriving as the word does from the Greek *ethos*, ethics is about behaviour and habit – in essence, how we act. Ethical selling, then, entails giving the customer what they really need, pursuing

mutual satisfaction and trying to achieve a responsible exchange that adds value to both parties.

Sadly there is a widespread cultural belief that, to get what you want, you need to break the rules with a sly, cunning almost predatory attitude. In sales, this culture of "the wiliest wins" is all too evident – and makes it equally clear why ethics in business relationships is so necessary.

In the collective imagination, a successful seller is someone who has worked their way up and made their own luck by manipulating relationships to suit their own ends. Although many sales managers are aware of their top salespeople's "unorthodox" methods, they have tended to turn a blind eye if the sales figures merit.

Like any prejudice, this image of the salesperson has a fair grain of truth in it. Indeed, for many years, the sales profession was the way in to the working world, regardless of your CV and specific skills. So in a favourable economic climate, many salespeople grew rich on experience and theatrics, fuelling the idea that selling was an attitude rather than a proper profession. This mindset still persists virtually unalloyed albeit inevitably threatened by the market downturn.

So the sales professions have lost their prestige. Sales managers have begun asking for analyses and reports that salespeople weren't ready to provide. The sales profession was based on a house of cards, and that's when it collapsed. The time has now come to bring the sales role into line with the changing times, to rehabilitate it in the eyes of customers, employers and society, to restore it to the status of a profession with a timely injection of fresh skills.

We must adopt a **new** *value-oriented* **approach**, the natural evolution of the customer-oriented method to which we have grown accustomed. The bell tolls for us all.

Ethical behaviour requires a broader perspective that transcends the needs of the moment and takes account of the long-term consequences of our actions

Organised spontaneity in the customer A few years ago in Paris, I saw an improv theatre performance. As



Sara Pesatori

Project manager, Logotel

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A journey through the soft skills in the world of "liberated selling": creativity, spontaneity and self-organisation

each spectator walked in, the ushers handed them a coloured piece of paper for them to write words that described images, colours, situations – whatever they liked. Shortly after, as the actors opened the pieces of paper on stage, they brought the words to life in a series of sad, moving or uplifting stories. They conjured it all up with impressive agility, adapting and adding ideas of their own to string complete scenes together including a twist in the tail. But how did they manage to be so creative? Above all, how could they respond so rapidly and effectively to the audience's cues?

From stage to shop is a small hop; companies, therefore, can surely profit from employing salespeople with great gifts – and above all, techniques – for improvisation.

However you define theatre improvisation, being able to invent texts and interact with an audience on the fly is clearly a skill you develop through consistently applying a technique. This technique enables actors the world over to develop scenes and characters and also to learn to interact with others. You could say that a good improviser is someone who can find compelling responses to unexpected situations, by offering creative solutions based on listening to other people while leveraging their own experience.

Whether with an audience or a customer, a performance's success depends on the actor/seller's ability to interpret the situation and their capacity to draw on a solid set of technical and cultural notions to steer things in the right direction.

Sellers, of course, must also follow an endless (and increasingly well-defined) series of corporate policies that shape and standardise every moment of the customer interaction. Many brands structure their customer experiences tightly at every turn, from welcoming the customer in the store to going to the till, following detailed templates to be applied at outlets throughout the world. But when we add an element of spontaneity, not only are we introducing a powerful motivational lever for the seller but we are also helping to lift their relationship with the customer to another level. For an unplanned, unexpected moment can be extremely effective in building rapport. This is because we usually find it easier to trust people who seem spontaneous. "Seem", indeed, for as we have seen, even spontaneity

can be planned. The apparent oxymoron of organised spontaneity can actually be a useful addition to a salesperson's toolbox.

The idea, as with theatre improvisation, is to train, train and train again to be more spontaneous than you could have been without that preparation. The actors' ability to tackle a disparate array of situations on stage certainly depends not only on their natural talent but also on how they practise off stage. The same is true in selling. No matter how great their interpersonal talents and their mastery of their product portfolio, a salesperson won't always be able to think on their feet with a customer they have just met. They will only be able to turn the unexpected to their advantage and offer effective solutions if they have had improvisation training.

Indeed, only a salesperson with an organised-spontaneity habit can add value to a customer experience whose script, however detailed it may be, cannot anticipate every possible scenario or plot twist.

The mechanical parroting of a script, then, gives way to extemporised improvisation on a customer experience theme. Satisfaction can only grow for customer and seller alike – the former, who gets to deal with a well-prepared, receptive assistant; the latter, who can display their creativity and their ability to adapt the company guidelines to the customer's needs every time.

Making a store into a structured environment that still allows room for creativity, listening and initiative can encourage behaviours that are not forced but have that element of naturalness that cannot spring from mere planning but only from evaluating a specific situation that is as unique and unrepeatable in the sales arena as in the theatre. And if not everything has a script to follow, the seller can simply turn their customer's coloured piece of paper into a story with a happy ending.

Organized spontaneity is not an oxymoron. It is a useful technique for sales people

Sales: a "game" of sensations First of all, a thought that's close to m

First of all, a thought that's close to my heart. I believe that, in every social relationship that entails an exchange of "content", there's a brief moment when everyone is playing the same game: selling.



Lucio Golinelli

SKY Retail & Service Senior Director

A system perspective on how concepts like relating, sensation, trust and credibility impinge on brands and their communication channels

The word "selling" encapsulates myriad meanings, according to your point of view. Selling is a feeling, a sensation that unites the players in the game, and it must not be geared to the transaction alone; rather, it must be built (in the short term, which is hard) on relationships, credibility and trust. The product, i.e. the object of exchange, is merely the culmination of a process that began with that end in mind.

This situation is even more complex in the service world, as the object of the transaction is often intangible before the sale, acquiring form and substance only afterwards.

If I consider all this through the prism of the market where I am fortunate enough to work, with Sky, the need to cultivate an emotional and increasingly less transactional approach to selling becomes even clearer. From a purely economic perspective, to start with, when we offer a product that is essentially "how a TV programme makes you feel", we're working directly on the personal realm: the product aspires to enhance people's free time and quality of life while vying for their disposable income and competing with other more tangible products/services that are more obviously necessary (phone = relationships; smartphone = access to digital life; restaurant = social, etc.).

Effectively, we're eyeing up resources that people can budget on many other things. Sky aims to "sell sensations" – to sports fans, art lovers, knowledge geeks, cinema or drama buffs, and devotees of the trending shows and formats. It helps people live better, but it's not something physical you could put on a shelf. But there's another important element of differentiation here: you don't buy a sensation without experiencing it first.

Selling is a cyclical process across the various channels, the product of considerable back and forth

The mix, channels and trash selling

But some players have a totally different take on selling, one that is no less effectively but surely more oriented to short-term results. Even today, specific markets and products can still justify sacrificing much of the customer experience. Sometimes, though, we tend to judge those approaches as outputs of a sales channel, and we often fall into the trap of labelling distribution channels according to that variable. Personally, I believe every sales channel can embrace all the styles that a brand asks it to. I don't see any channel breaking those rules, partly because that would be down to an operational choice, not its go-to-market structure.

My thinking here is trying to distinguish the individual channels' role from the concept that some have termed "trash selling" (a clear if, in my

view, extreme way to put it), by separating out the responsibility for that phenomenon. The go-to-market strategy, namely the chosen distribution mix, can facilitate "trash", but I don't see it as the real cause. All the touchpoints can be measured via qualitative and quantitative KPIs, or rather a mix of both. They can all be more or less explicitly customer relations—focused. Often it's the cost-benefit equation that determines company decision-making and thus the depth of quality to assure.

Credibility spreads through the channels

In an innovative trading approach, we need to focus on building a network of relationships with the customer based on physical and digital touchpoints, where the product experience, the storytelling and the brand's power are well balanced, consistently expressed and always customer-focused. With Sky, the purchase often doesn't happen at the

Relying on brand power, storytelling rather than selling, simplifying your offering, and reducing the options for trading on price all put the content back centre stage, create trust and reduce the commercial lead time

first contact. Selling is a cyclical process across the various channels, the product of considerable back and forth. In our case, being omnichannel is absolutely key: it enables the customer to gradually get to know us in an environment with a continual exchange of stimuli. But in striving to optimise its own results, every contact channel can sometimes generate false incentives. Ancillary costs, the richness of the content and how it is presented, the tech platform options and other aspects of the offering are all factors susceptible to risk.

In an ideal sales process, the commercial relationship between salesperson and customer develops a "magic alchemy"

The more the customer relationship is based on traditional aspects, the more that risk increases. But relying on the power of your brand, storytelling rather than selling, simplifying your offering, and reducing the options for trading on price all help tip the balance, by putting the content back centre stage, creating trust in the (physical and digital) relationship, and reducing the commercial lead time.

Ensuring that the relationship reinforces the product

In an ideal sales process, the commercial relationship between salesperson and customer develops a "magic alchemy" based on the same values expressed by the product and the brand; it shares the same experiences and runs through the various stages of discovery, engagement and purchase. The customer "sees the product in the touchpoint", and the depth of feeling must not be betrayed in that moment (it would be like betraying the motivation for buying).

This is no easy task, because it requires tools, organisation and dedicated resources. At Sky, we too have a long way to go if we are to excel at this, but personally I don't believe in shortcuts. Training, education, innovative digital journeys, commercial storytelling, contact strategy, brand retail identity and an emotion-rich use of social media are all distinctive levers that need to be used consistently across all channels to get customers onside. This approach must not end with the sale: it must draw fresh impetus from that, to keep going consistently throughout the customer relationship life cycle. Thus we move from "prospect sales" to "loyalty sales".



From Trash Seller to Sales Artist.



Tristan Rigendinger

Senior Partner, Logotel

If the customer is unique, so it must be the sales people. Here it is an idea to unleash "sales artists"

Sales artists,
through their experience
and attitude, embody
the ability to build
relationship into their
sale methodology

Can selling skills be taught, or are people born with the ability? Whatever their title -- sales person, sales associate, sales assistant, sales agent, brand ambassador, sales representatives -- all sales professionals have one goal: to create relationships, or, engage in "convincing interactions". Interactions that successfully convince the customer are characterized by the sales professional's intercultural awareness, clear communication, and ability to build trust. Yes, these basic selling tenets can be taught to a sales person, but advancing to 'Sales Artist' - that person who has a natural ability to convince -- actually involves constant skill building and behavior awareness. Let's explore how to turn sales professionals into Sales Artists.

Sales as a profession has historically had a bad rap. This reputation is not without cause. The sales person is seen as manipulative (talking trash), pressuring a potential customer to buy a product or service before they have built a foundation (selling trash). Aggressive selling techniques now are recognized for their ineffectiveness, and many new selling

techniques are in use. One current method for establishing a customer relationship is the Challenger Sales Methodology. This involves sharing a surprising fact to match the customer's need in order to help the customer understand and grow, while delaying discussion of the product. While an interesting approach, it is -in my opinion- not necessarily ground-breaking: Sales Artists, through experience and continuous development, intuitively incorporate such relationship building techniques into their sales method. Focusing first on the customer is at the center of their success, while trash sellers do not listen for the voice of the customer. Sales artists have learned to listen to understand and then sell, while trash sellers talk at customers to sell.

If we wish to motivate sales professionals to challenge their own behavior, to bring their personality to the sales process, we need to

focus on individual's drivers. It is more important to understand and formulate the why rather than the what or how. No longer is training through mirroring, open-ended questions, or the magical (#) Steps to

Success approaches effective; they assume a one-size-fits-all philosophy—that sales is a precisely prescribed process. Customers are smart — they recognize sales techniques: Selling tricks need to be trashed if sales professionals are to become true Sales Artists.

Sales Artists know that selecting prospective customers and understanding their motivation is important. But, knowing one's product or service so well that one is able to comfort the customer with surprisingly clear solutions is integral to building customer trust, and establishing a relationship.

Additionally, the sales profession once considered customer relationships controllable, and assumed they could be led to purchase. But the sales profession has grown and matured, and now we know that customer experience management is key to effective selling. And, shifting from a product-centric to customer-centric sales process was not enough: Brands now see customers as individuals with different shapes and sizes. Likewise, Sales Artists come in different shapes and sizes, with unique personalities and approaches, and the successful ones even show it.

Let's remember that great customer experience is based on a good employee experience. Instead of subjecting your sales-artists-in-training to old and hackneyed sales tricks, encourage them to exchange experiences and best practices through state-of-the-art interaction communities and sharing-based learning sessions. Customized discussions ultimately drive their motivation, grow their appreciation for their profession, and benefit the company they serve:

Sales Artists who master "convincing interactions" will soon realize it's almost impossible to avoid success. ■

We have to encourage sales artists to share their experiences through communities that foster interaction and free exchanges

Sales artist



Sales representative

TVI talk primarily about products and technical details

∩ ∩ ∩ Speed is everything for me

→ I consume the customers' time

፱፻፱፻፱፻ My thinking is linear; I'm always in the "here and now"

KKKI celebrate how much I have sold

IIII like to share the numbers I make

JJJI persuade at all costs; I consider myself cunning

If my strategy works, why change it?

→ I mouth the same persuasive script every time

I There's never a wrong moment to push with a customer





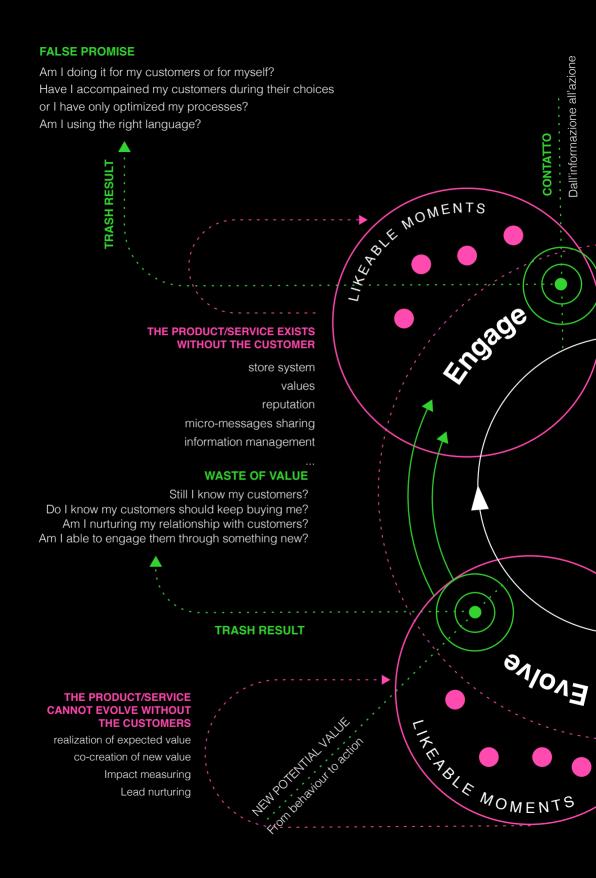


JJJJWe believe that selling is not a linear process limited to identifying leads or making people buy. Because that would mean aligning your sales targets with the aims of your selling strategy.

must comprise a **continual exchange of meaningful interactions**, to engage
and to convey a vision that is shared
between customers and brand.

Devising meaningful interactions not only enables us to measure what works; it also shows what does not. Thus we can adjust our approach and develop our relationship between customers and brand.





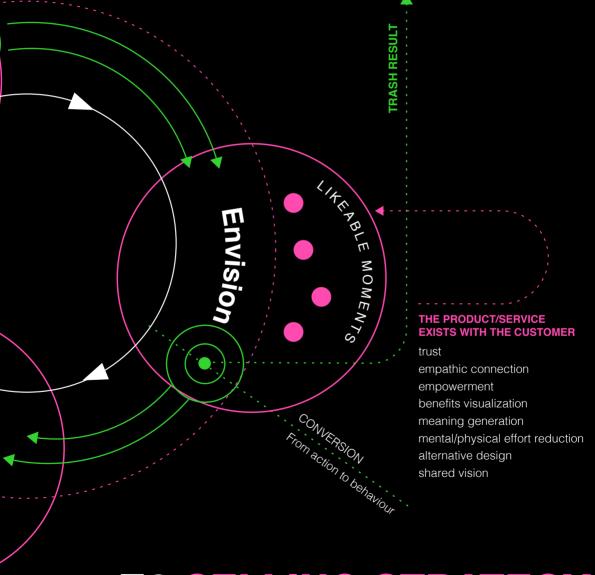
FALSE SOLUTION

After the sale, do I know what to do with my customer?

Do I know why I have lost a potential customer?

Do I know what moves away a lead from a purchase?

Have I explained the coherence between values and offering?



E3 SELLING STRATEGY

Engage Envision Evolve Before we interest often steep did text often ste

Presenting
Weconomy's idea of a
circular selling strategy
made of moments that
generate engagement
(Engage), a shared
vision (Envision) and
a growing relationship
that keeps on creating
value (Evolve).

Before we introduce our take on selling strategies, we'd like to examine a few different perspectives. For the signals are clear: in a context often steeped in *VUCA – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity* and *Ambiguity –* selling is increasingly less amenable to a linear model. The pipelines showing what to do *before, during* and *after* a product/ service is purchased risk blindsiding us to the interdependence of the variables in play and preventing us from anticipating problems and grasping opportunities.

We prefer to embrace an insight from Simon Sinek instead. In his Infinite Game, the celebrated essayist tells how contemporary challenges change even before organisations have had time to map them out. To tackle them, one possible response is to design a self-sustaining system based on an infinite mindset. The driver is what Sinek calls the just cause: an asymptotic goal that leads to continual evolution and generates new interpretations and new solutions. For us in sales, the just cause is infinite customer satisfaction. Achieving it is less trivial than it might seem, because it doesn't stop when you issue an invoice or print off a receipt.

Above all, in our system, we want to spotlight all those moments that generate the opposite of the desired effect: a "trash outcome". Too often, organisations delude themselves than customers automatically like their offering, product or service; positive performance can also deceive, as it derives from inertia, weak competition or excellent marketing campaigns. So meeting sales targets may have nothing to do with customer satisfaction.

Our system revolves around three key moments – *Engage*, *Envision* and *Evolve* – which accelerate various stages of the sale, respectively contact, conversion and potential new value.

Engage - getting customers involved

At this stage, a company's products and services exist unbeknown to the customer. The sales task is therefore to engineer their discovery. In this macro-moment, the information must all be aligned between the organisation and its sales force, because *Engage acts as an accelerated chain of transmission linking everything inside the walls of HQ with the customers. Technical information, though, is not enough. Brands and channels must build on their reputation and values.* These are the ethical elements that lay the foundations for a lasting customer–brand relationship.

Engage has something unusual about it: there's no time pressure. The customer can carry on learning about the brand or browsing the shop window. This non-decisional state can last ad infinitum. To break the deadlock, each exchange during Engage must generate an imaginary "like", an initial meaningful interaction that moves the customer on from seeking information to taking action – the action of making contact, by visiting a website, entering a shop, or booking an appointment for a B2B service.

We can then move on to the next macro-moment – or we can have our first trash outcome. That happens, for example, when the values expressed resonate only with the company, not the customers; or when the language of engagement is not aligned with the target's; or when the approach becomes too impersonal, in an attempt to reach more prospects. Basically, then, when we project false promises.

Envision - the shared vision

The sales system's task at this point is to generate a vision that customers buy into. From now on, the product/service exists *with* the customer, who begins to imagine how using it

can impact on their daily life. <u>Selling</u>, then, generates a perspective: it makes tangible all the transformations that the item they want to buy will enable. Along with, above all, the real benefits it brings. This macro-moment is useful above all when selling a *disruptive* product/ service that changes people's behaviour. Here, moreover, the selling system must be able to generate alternatives if we see that the *solution* that has taken shape is not what the customer *wants*. In a sense, it's an advanced form of *cross-selling*.

Envision is an especially delicate stage, because – if well designed – it leads to a decision to buy. Customers, then, are induced to feel a pressure to decide. Every meaningful interaction during Envision must therefore have a natural storytelling element if we are to make an emotional connection. When that happens, the energy released sparks customer trust in the brand.

Our system is based on three key moments

- Engage, Envision and Evolve – which accelerate various stages of the sale, respectively contact, conversion and potential new value

Envision is not guaranteed to generate a purchase, but it will result in a conversion. Afterwards, the brand will have acquired a qualified lead to cultivate.

As we have begun to show, each macro-moment – if poorly designed – has a side-effect. The second trash outcome, then, happens when Envision only led to a false solution. This occurs when the selling system doesn't know what to do either with the *leads* or with the customers who have already bought. Or when new solutions fail to come through when conversion rates are disappointing. Or when no one asks themselves what so far has held a potential customer back from buying.

Evolve – the relationship grows

Traditional sales strategies culminate in conversion. Or they take for granted that the satisfaction generated thus far is enough to turn customers into advocates ready to beat the drum for a brand. Or they assume that all it takes from here on in is to implement loyalty mechanisms to retain more customers.

But from our perspective, a new post-conversion project stage opens up - because those who have already bought are now using our product/service. The qualified *leads*, meanwhile, are waiting for something new to prompt them to decide, so they need to be nurtured. Broadly speaking, the system must respond to evolve. The customers may be satisfied (and want more), or they may want something better (new forms of contact). All this is simpler to visualise in the digital universe, as with the new versions of the platforms, shaped by customer feedback. In the world of physical goods, this stage corresponds to up-

selling, which doesn't just mean "selling more" but selling differently (steering towards a replacement product/service).

The customers' needs may have changed since conversion. So a sold good can no longer evolve without the customers. The Evolve stage is a remarkable opportunity to listen, to measure the impact of a brand's products/services.

Every macro-moment - if badly designed has a side-effect: a trash outcome that alienates the customer from the brand forever

This macro-moment can prompt a kind of dialogue with the other parts of the company, establishing a link between customers, sales and the wider organisation. This is all potential new value that the sales system must be able to translate back into something concrete, to feed new forms of Engage-ment, to generate a new shared vision and inject fresh energy into the circular system.

But even this third phase can lead to a trash outcome, when the sales system fails to answer two key questions: "why should a customer keep buying from me?" and "what could the customer still buy from me?". These questions are linked by a further factor: the perspective generated *together with* the customer must continue to be nourished.

In our 3Es strategy,
transactions and purchases
become a natural
consequence of the energy
generated, not the sole
goal to pursue

Leaping forward and holding back can have value, too

For simplicity, we've described the three Es in our system one by one, as if they were distinct, equidistant moments. But things can actually accelerate abruptly in our model, making a macro-moment a matter of just a few seconds. With a loyal customer of a brand with a solid reputation, for instance, *Engage* and *Envision* will be very brief, whereas *Evolve* will typically last forever – unless a trash outcome arrives to undermine the relationship, at which point the customer could drop out of the system altogether. Conversely, for a new customer, *Engage* will be much longer, with the time it takes to build all the meaningful interactions that create that "critical mass" that leads to *contact*.

Our 3Es strategy is a model where transactions and purchases become a natural consequence of the energy generated, not the sole goal to pursue. For it is this energy that generates the value that derives in turn from solutions to real customer problems, while for organisations this is an opportunity to find new ways to meet needs.

What breaks a relationship? The other



Maria Grazia Gasparoni

Education Manager, Logotel

Why it's important in selling not only to concentrate on what works but also to understand why customers don't choose us and what breaks off the relationship. It's the other side of our E3 model.

Sales is a circle, as we know. The steps proceed naturally; the intuitive clockwise motion is reassuring but doesn't stop you thinking you can turn back and make a fresh, flowing new start. But it can help to take a new perspective, to shift our focus outside the circle and look at those who haven't chosen us (yet). That's much more intriguing. We can see who is on the other side of the conversion rate—those who didn't buy in store, those who bailed out at the home page, those who gave up on the newsletter sign-up form, those who watched a nice video but didn't add a "like". It's an invisible line of people who, one way or another, have brushed by the brand and kept on going, leaving the website or shop right at the outset of a customer experience. So how can we man the escape barriers?

> The answer is different for every business – but often you already know what it is, or plans have already been made, or at least all the pieces are there ready to put together. For the hard truth staring us all in the face is that good intentions, lip service and window dressing are not enough for us customers. We demand action, action that chimes with the values that the brand has shared, with the promises that we've taken oh so seriously and that we want confirmed to us at every touchpoint. We'll no longer put up with being disappointed, disillusioned and frustrated, with conflicting messages, with not understanding, with giving our time for nothing in return. Take a brand you like, for example, and think how you relate to it. How did it all begin? What was it that interested, touched, seduced you? When, how and why did you break cover with your first virtual or physical "like"? That glossy magazine page you tore out to show a colleague; that Instagram photo of a new stylist you forwarded to a friend; that video of a new car you shared to all your Facebook friends. That was the moment when you stepped into the circle, when you projected your expectations onto that brand in a relationship based on an exchange of value.

> What do we ask in return from a brand? To be consistent at every point on the (physical and digital) sales circle, to keep working to earn our likes, our approval, our endorsement - what it takes to keep us in the flow once we've been hooked, and beyond. It's about likeability, coming across as nice, and I think this concept fits well when applied to brands too. Basically, you're not allowed to slip up (remember the Nosedive episode of Black Mirror?). Here's an example. One wet winter evening, I see on Facebook that a style-conscious friend is following a rather niche accessory brand. The name escapes me, but I've had their bags in my

We need to learn to man the escape routes too – where prospects somehow brush by the brand and keep on going in another direction

head for ages. I open the page and – wow! The shapes, the colours! My fingers race to click on "shop online", and I enter the site. The first thing that happens is a popup stops me in my tracks, obliterating the home page with a request to register in exchange for a 10-euro discount off my first purchase. My imagination implodes under the weight of a lead. While they ask me if I'm a robot, my mind has already left; they'll never know I was about to fall in love. Try again? Not likely.

For one aspect of the sales circle is precisely this. A lead, a person, can stay in the flow even without buying, if they carry on seeking and finding validation of their expectations. (Lead nurturing is aimed at precisely these people, although it's not a common practice, especially offline.) Meanwhile, there's already a ROI, because there are interaction, feedback and conversations that keep the community going. This all carries on until the magic moment - that click on "buy", that visit to the store or that firm handshake with the salesperson. And by the time the customer finally gets there, the escape routes will be well and truly manned, and the brand will always know how to stay relevant to their vision of the future. We might think it's all downhill from here, post-purchase, as we know the customer better, and the CRM can tell us a lot about them. Not so. That person is always looking for an exchange of value, and now they're keen to get a return on their investment. At last, they're part of a community based around the brand, and they want to be active participants. They've shared ideas and given feedback, and now they want to know

what kind of relationship the brand intends to have with them. Does the brand immediately email to suggest a more advanced model of what the customer has just bought, for example, courtesy of a mischievous algorithm? Or does it ask for structured feedback, making them feel like a valued partner that the brand wants to adapt to, to keep up with their needs? Anything is possible. Think for a moment about who recently delighted you with their customer care and how they listened to your feedback; and think who you would have expected to but left you disappointed. How did that affect your future shopping intentions? How many (physical or virtual) "likes" have you given in your journey with brands like that?

Our E3 model reminds us that the customer is waiting for us and assessing us at every touchpoint, and if they have no reason to give us a "like", then they can easily drop out of the flow, maybe not straight away but eventually. And the worst part when that happens is that they had the best of intentions, but no one reached out to go the last mile and make the connection. And in this scenario, the seller looks as awkward and misunderstood as the customer. What actually happened to stop them clinching a sale that has now been lost in the trash?

The four pillars of Sales Transformation.



Daniela Corsaro

Associate Professor of Sales and Marketing, Director of the Masters in International Marketing & Sales Communication, IULM

A systemic perspective highlighting four key elements for facing change in the world of sales: people, technology, integration and acceleration

Those who've experienced them say that markets have always been complex environments. Judging from the era that I've lived in, we seem to be in a particularly complex period now.

Consumers have fickle, changing, reactive needs. The purchasing function has become so sophisticated and sales cycles so protracted, with ever-growing numbers of stakeholders. With disintermediation and blurring inter-sector boundaries, companies are having to reckon with new competitors amid confusion as to who is the "specialist" in a given arena. Producers are growing increasingly close to service enterprises, and services in turn are being purchased with value-in-use approaches in mind. Technology is learning increasingly fast from our individual behaviour, thus challenging concepts like market research and top-down segmentation.

Add to that the transition from a transactional to a relational approach for managing relations with customers and other stakeholders in the inter-organisational network. Relationships are no longer a means but the primary venue for co-creating value as well as a web for accessing new forms of collective intelligence. Economic behaviours and their consequences are influenced by the social networks in which the action is couched and by the dynamics of the systems of relationships. It's important, then, to combine economic, psychological and social value to understand how the economic stakeholders in modern markets behave, including with sales in mind.

If all this happens in international and multicultural contexts, the number of variables for salespeople and marketers to consider skyrockets.

Small wonder, then, that organisations are having to rethink the sales role. The change is pervasive; it conditions salespeople's skills, customer-relations management, business organisation and the impact of sales-support technologies. But these developments are still something of a mystery. Accordingly, IULM was moved to make Sales Transformation one of its key fields of study to inform its training, research and industrial-relations agendas.

Specifically, IULM devised a model for assessing the status of the Sales Transformation based on four pillars – **People**, **Technology**,

Integration Processes and **Acceleration Processes**, each measured via a series of dimensions and sub-dimensions.

The results show that the pillar with the greatest transformative effect is **People.**

For key evidence for this, consider the transversal skills that salespeople will increasingly need to possess. Once, there were two styles: charismatic/relational vs technical/rational. Approaches are now required that span new "hybrid" value spaces. Sellers need empathy, enterprise and adaptability, with an ability to see the overall picture and make data-based decisions. Interestingly, the managers interviewed now rate themselves weak at seeing others' perspective, be they customers or their sales teammates.

With **technology**, led by digitalisation, the expectation is that selling in the future will become increasingly smart, through new forms of automation and human-machine interaction. Many companies are already using social media for sales and marketing, even if they don't see them as relationship-development tools. Similarly, 70% of managers use CRM systems, albeit without exploiting their full potential.

Relationships are no longer a means but the primary venue for co-creating value as well as a web for accessing new forms of collective intelligence

Integration, between internal and external data, is also rather weak, often leaving the omnichannel concept on the drawing board. Yet integration is not only about inside vs outside; it's also an intra-organisational issue, between sales, marketing and customer service, where a sophisticated use of CRM system should facilitate further integration. Sharing targets and KPIs could surely prove a further spur to collaboration.

Finally, **Acceleration**, with concepts like *lose fast*: in a world where company resources like time are not keeping up with the tech-driven explosion in opportunities, losing fast becomes a vital skill. How, though? By creating a sense of urgency; by being brave enough to say

no; and, recalling what we said before, by putting ourselves in customers' shoes to see the funnel through their eyes and understand the actions that prompt them to take the next step, win or lose.

Selling "in real time" is another factor that is speeding things up no end, as it ties us to the context and helps us make decisions where and when necessary. In turn, this will feed the sales process with granular, contextualised data that support a better customer experience.

The Sales Transformation is a systemic process involving several interrelated dimensions

An interesting aspect of acceleration emerging from the study is the use of visual insights and representations. Digitalisation has brought an explosion of touchpoints, so there are now many more stakeholders, often with different objectives and visions, needing to interact. The use of visual elements to support other forms of communication can help to coordinate between different ideas and thus speed up the decision-making process.

Companies have often fallen into the trap of investing in technology or people. What we have shown is that generating transformational change also requires investment in integration and acceleration processes. For starting from our initial assumption that the social and market contexts are increasingly complex, we must be ready to accept Sales Transformation as a systemic process, one that must indeed be seen as a complex system of interrelated dimensions. Otherwise, no investment will have a real transformative effect.



Communities and the virtuous circle of selling



Gabriele Buzzi

Senior Manager, Logotel

Communities are not just platforms but systems that can feed and spread energy in every organisation, from the centre (HQ) to the field (the sales force)

Quality selling requires a well-trained, well-informed sales force with the right (digital) tools.

A sales *artist's* ability to make the difference at any point in the (circular) relationship with the customer hinges on this enriched mix of skills and knowledge that in-depth digital experience enables. But there's more to it than that. Once the virtuous sales circle has been established and equipped with the right tools to keep itself going, it generates value not only for the main players – the salesperson and the customer – but also for the company behind it.

What does this mean in practice? Well, let's explore that by double-clicking on some sales-support services provided by business communities (this is my bread and butter) before concluding with a few thoughts on the by-products that companies gain from these endeavours.

A business community, in the Logotel sense, is a hub of digital tools and services to support sales and customer relations.

This isn't just a responsive virtual environment that broadcasts content (created ad hoc or borrowed from other channels) for large direct or indirect sales networks to consult the latest commercial offering and download the relevant documentation with a click or tap. It comprises an array of tools and features:

Training modules and libraries that are always available via a Netflix-like interface, designed to hone and refresh sales skills and knowledge: updates about the offering, bite-sized videos for polishing your interpersonal skills, podcasts co-produced with community users to consume on the move, infographics to print and take with you;

A package of advanced tools enabling people to work and make decisions independently while running regional marketing campaigns, promoting an incentive or inducting a new resource, but always in line with company objectives;

Background material, a press centre 2.0 to orient users through a selection of "must-read" and "nice-to-read" news plus a basket of in-depth updates on hot topics (the circular economy, InsurTech, 5G, etc.) in different formats with different consumption times.

In short, numerous services are available in desktop or (increasingly) mobile modes, all with a well-designed system of engagement to keep users interested and motivated every day.

It relies on an ability to make the useful entertaining - and vice

A community makes the useful entertaining – and vice versa – and can find the right engagement levers to spur people to learn and train and to seek new stimuli and goals

versa – and to find the right engagement levers to spur people to gain skills and knowledge and to seek new stimuli and challenging yet attainable goals (without therefore becoming discouraged).

And it's all works on several communication levels.

The first, top-down, allows the company to communicate quickly to its salesforce in the field. It provides clear, unambiguous, well-packaged information (thanks to a dedicated editorial team / content curator) to all who use it every day to interact with customers and to turn that contact into a conversion or, at least, a chance to share values, a vision and an approach. Thus, the company provides a daily energy boost across the board for all its commercial stakeholders: salespeople, customers and the community.

The curated peer-to-peer communication enables a horizontal exchange of information among participants, with best practices, suggestions, commercial info and success stories. When everything is up and running smoothly, when everyone sees the benefits and any social anxieties have evaporated, the community becomes self-sustaining with its own new emerging content.

Finally, there's **bottom-up communication**, from the field to the centre. This isn't just about user-generated content: the sales network, in particular, is involved in the companies' (strategic) decision-making, providing instant feedback and different perspectives on newly marketed products and services. These dynamics sometimes entail a practice of continual listening by the network about the commercial offering (and how it is communicated). The ongoing adjustments, enhancements and repositioning in the go-to market complete another virtuous circle!

None of this alters the fact that selling, like business communities, is about people – people at the heart of a project who, given the opportunity to share their needs and aspirations, transcend their job description and show their innovative colours.

There are various corollaries. The communities become a tool for companies to consolidate and manage their sales network and, indirectly, their brand awareness and reputation. More than that, they are a source of precious information for those responsible, like marketing departments, for devising new products, services and solutions and bringing them to market.

The power of data v. Company is a core activity in and its fulfilment. Selling, memorial. And now it can These ongoing changes, due



Alessio Semoli

Ceo PranaVentures

"Exponential technologies" offer opportunities that can be seized when Sales departments are no longer seen as silos but communicate openly with the entire organisation.

Businesses today
can now base the
solutions they create
on hard data:
they can work on
real solutions for
real needs

Sclling is a core activity in business, for it represents the link between a need and its fulfilment. Selling, then, has been part of human life since time immemorial. And now it can benefit from the latest advances in today's world. These ongoing changes, due above all to the exponential growth of new technologies, are equipping businesses with innovative, interesting tools offering hitherto unheard-of opportunities. I believe that training in this area is vital for any company to keep its finger on the pulse and to pinpoint the potential that the new technologies and the digital arena are bringing.

To take just one example, businesses today can now base the solutions they create on hard data. In other words, they can work on real solutions for the actual needs that are driving demand. In the new digital world, needs can emerge clearly and stand out distinctly above the noise of the marketplace. By digitalising information and processes, the internet offers a wealth of data, i.e. information, on users and what they like and need. Data shows us how a user behaves when choosing what to buy – and much more, like what influences them and what they specifically want (because they search for it online). Besides pure sales figures, companies can also get a handle on future trends and devise real solutions to meet real needs.

Marketing, the nerve centre where analysis feeds the decisions that underpin strategies and solutions, shouldn't be the only field that exploits the new enterprise technologies. Marketing is closely linked to sales; here, in a very concrete sense, is where supply meets demand and trade happens. If these two business areas would lower their guard, they would see the potential benefits available to them both. The old lament drones on: marketing

doesn't create the solutions that the market wants, and sales is no good at selling. I contend that this kind of approach is now outdated. We should increasingly be thinking of the various business departments - marketing and sales in particular - as a single entity driven by the same goal: to fulfil the company mission by giving its target market what it wants. The different parts of company can innovate together, creating solutions that meet tangible needs. And from a green standpoint, it's important to realise that we shall increasingly be needing solutions that are sensitive to contingent needs, to avoid overproduction and surpluses that will prove hard to dispose of or absorb. A shrewd, innovative business approach allied to high-tech innovation will bring products and services to market that are closely aligned with demand – personalised, green but above all useful. Together, marketing and sales have a new responsibility to exploit the digital world (both data

With A/B testing, you can test out different versions of a piece of content to see which performs best

and tools) to better understand what consumers really want and to fulfil their needs. These two areas should be primarily focused on customer satisfaction. A consumer who feels welcomed, listened to, understood and satisfied is someone you can build a lasting relationship of trust with – and that is the key to creating the loyal hard core of customers that every business needs.

Today there are technologies that can help: marketing automation, for instance. This approach combines marketing and sales to offer the right content as part of a coherent process. Besides automation, new artificial-intelligence (AI) systems are boosting efforts to listen to the market and interpret data in a marketing perspective while also supporting sales through chatbots and other developments. AI's innovative contribution is clear: it lets us predict and understand consumer tastes and preferences, and it will become increasingly accurate and reliable as the technology evolves. It will be a tried-and-trusted, data-driven resource that companies rely on and tap into to ever greater effect.

An interesting tool that has heralded a new era in sales and marketing is the A/B test. This is an excellent way to test out different versions of your content at the same time to see which performs best (e.g. at converting users into customers). By analysing the test data, you can establish which words, colours, messages, images, music, etc. play best with the target audience. That is certainly a great opportunity for marketing and sales people to gear up their websites, messages and social-media posts to have the best chance of success. We could go as far as to say in this case that the strategy is crucial, al-

beit not set in stone. Analysis can enrich and strengthen its effect, to achieve its aim more consistently and efficiently, creating a real, constructive rapport with the target group.

Data analysis even allows you to clarify your thinking about the demand. For whereas the offering and the content, both devised by marketing, used to revolve around simulations of the mooted target, now demand has a face with tastes and ideas of its own. With our permission, companies can pick up the trails we leave as we browse websites and use apps. This enables them to understand how typical users operate, how they interact and what they like. Thus, enterprises can create micro-targets to serve and satisfy, by following in the footsteps of their data. The target group is no longer built on avatars with a few human traits; rather, it comes to life like an HD photo with edges and colours.

As I've said from the outset, the pivotal point here and the new key to interpreting the role of sales (and its big brother, marketing) is data. This information is fundamental to the process of listening to the market and above all in creating novel and genuinely useful solutions. With data, I also think the approach should be broader than just the pursuit of short-term profit. After all, satisfying a consumer is the prelude to creating a lasting relationship based on attentive support and fulfilled expectations, as part of a long-term marketing and sales strategy for a prosperous future and an enduringly successful business.

Aproactive system of needs and If non-trash selling is a virtuous circular system, then every moment of truth along the way - Engage, Envision and Evolve - fulfils a duty to the



Matteo Buccarini

Education project manager, Logotel

Investigating the new frontiers of customer satisfaction enables us to drive forward the concept of value, from a short-term idea to a long-term perspective truth along the way - Engage, Envision and Evolve - fulfils a duty to the system in the round and each component therein: the duty to conserve the energy produced at each step and pass it on intact to the next one. Every baton carrier has the same duty to their team, the next person in the chain and, not least, the fans.

This duty is both a necessity and a responsibility. A necessity because it enables the system to survive; for if the energy is frittered away in disparate directions, then the cycle loses vigour. And a responsibility because the three macro-moments are each the response to a promise, to a pact of mutual interdependence that binds each project's success to its predecessor's. Like the way a business card reflects how an organisation operates, an increasingly determining factor in customers' transition from receiving information to taking action; or like the quality of a solution or the reliability of an organisation and its people in servicing a need, elements that accelerate the process of conversion; or like the assurance of permanent, shared, long-term value that puts the customer–brand bond on a solid enough footing for the cycle to begin again.

This responsibility forces organisations, departments and salespeople to face up to some awkward questions. For if they don't, they risk falling

out of the virtuous circle and going off on a trash tangent in an energy-dissipating valueless sale. Has the identity that my brand outwardly promotes really been taken to heart? Does this promotional campaign, sharp as it may be, really reflect the usefulness of the product or service I offer? Is this the benefit I envisaged when I sold that product to that customer? If not, what else can I offer instead?

This perspective also alters the concept of *customer satisfaction*, the traditional aim and focal point of all sales efforts. Since products and services don't move forward without a customer, neither can organisations grow or improve without the customer on board,

We must learn to face up to some awkward questions. For if we don't, we risk falling out of the virtuous circle and going off on a trash tangent in an energy-dissipating valueless sale

without getting in step with them and taking their feedback on the chin. In this context, it becomes harder to define a *customer satisfaction* that is totally separate and independent from the no less tangible *brand satisfaction*.

For consider the burgeoning debate on the concept of *customer success*, which (in its promoters' eyes) seeks to reinterpret and augment the traditional idea of *customer support* or *service*. Originally developed in the software market to address changing customer-acquisition and -loyalty processes, the *customer success* idea has spread to other sectors, as dedicated consultancy services and titles like *Customer Success Officer* have become established.

cant value from their investment."

Nevertheless, a robust, agreed definition of customer success remains elusive. Ian Robson, who was at *Salesforce* when the concept emerged and now consults in this area, describes it as "an entire library of best practices, case studies, experience and knowledge that can be applied to every customer to help them move as quickly as possible to a point where they're releasing signifi-

Although it co-exists with *customer support*, *customer success* differs in many ways: it's proactive not reactive; it explores the usefulness of a product or service when the customer is using it; <u>it aims to bring out the value of a product/service after purchase</u>, rather than waiting for customers to ask for help; and it looks to the long not the short term.

Formalising a customer success strategy is just one of the many areas where organisations are having to rethink how they interact with customers at the critical stage of closing the circle. That's when the sales system must inject the energies generated by using a product/service back into the flow, so the entire cycle keeps going ever stronger. For this is how the circle feeds itself and strengthens, leveraging the energy produced at every spin.

Permanent shared value reinforces the brand-customer relationship. So the sales cycle can begin again

The self-drive salesman.



Thomas Bialas

Futurist

Extreme automation and hyperpersonalisation feed a vision that makes flesh-and-bone humans an increasingly cuttingedge commodity Remember Arthur Miller's 1949 play *Death of a salesman*? The title character is a figure who is used by society but not appreciated. (He kills himself.) Not much has changed since, for selling still stinks. This widely denigrated and derided profession is the only job at the mercy of the bean-counters' targets, where the bacon must be brought home – unlike the much-vaunted start-ups (witness the failures of unicorns with what turned out to be faulty horns, like giant co-working space WeWork, broken by debt and bankruptcy sales), which sell stories to lure venture capitalists prospecting for fun and glamour that only amount to a mirage. And now maybe selling can even do without human sellers.

Driverless commerce

Like a driverless car? Sure. If cars can, then why not marketing, shops, delivering, content, customer service and anything else that springs to mind. It's taken at least ten years to digest digitalisation, and now it's time to swallow automation too. There's a bit of everything. Automated warehouses, predictive deliveries, deep-learning retail applications, digital assistants and apps supporting the user-consumer. When non only companies but also consumers externalise, or rather delegate, their behaviours, decisions and choices to machines, who is the seller and who is the buyer? Maybe we should now be talking not of e-commerce but of automated commerce — of the transition from e-com-

After pigging out on digitalisation, it's time to make things human again; people (and relationships) should come first

merce to a-commerce. Call all this not "artificial intelligence" (that's misleading) but "machine intelligence", radical automation. Like the TheMobyMart Project's self-driving store with hologram assistants or the various staffless stores (AmazonGo, DeepMagic, Bingo Box, Tao Cafe by Alibaba, etc.), which are fully automated and powered by super apps like WeChat. You've had the disintermediation of the physical store; now you've got the disintermediation of the physical human body. The human, in customer form, might almost like automation where it simplifies every step of the shopping experience: "Find me the right product, negotiate the best price, book my next appointment deliver when I'm at home,

manage my money, anticipate and personalise my every desire, ...". For if you know the customer better than they know themselves (thank you, deep learning), then you can dive into deep commerce: delivering sanitary towels, as Freda does, right when the customer is on her cycle; or turning the old vending machines into "automated retail for autonomous sales", as PopCom does, all based on remote control and data analysis. There's a lot more to say, but there's more to life than commerce.

Not forgetting we're flesh-and-blood people who like other flesh-and-blood people

Driverless marketing

When the machines drive the strategy? Sure. Marketing, which is inherently arti-

ficial already (in its narrative), is about to become artificial to full effect: devised, implemented and delivered (to the user) by mechanical - obviously intelligent - minds. From Cogito to Persado via Picasso Labs, we're bombarded with picturesque acronyms, start-ups, tech and consultancy mega-corps, things like the Marketing AI Institute and absolute proclamations like "Artificial intelligence is the most powerful technology of the 21st century", according to the famous Rise of AI Conference, held each May in Berlin. They all promise automated purchasing, research, insights, creativity, content, copywriting, account management, channels, portals, media, traceability, profiling, personalisation, customer relations, call centres, prices ("dynamic pricing"), consumption, customer service and – of course - sales. Driverless marketing is speeding towards a glorious future where everyone is being spied on through the keyhole. The motto being "the customer who has not been identified – body and soul – is a thing of the past". The hyper-promise is hyper-personalisation, the key to real loyalty built on deep, lasting relationships. Clearly, if you can eat and digest mountains of detailed data in real time and responsively (with predictive analytics), then the much sought-after "offer for your eyes only" is within reach. It's fast, then, but that's not all. To know everything, you must spy on everyone. The papers rightly dedicate a lot of space to the "so we're all under surveillance" game. The usual suspects, Google and Facebook, and now smaller firms too are using the new marketing to map our every action to predict our every presumed desire (note the presumed). By anticipating it. All sound too

future stories

complicated? Perhaps, but one thing is clear: automation is changing things even faster than digitalisation has.

Driverless selling

Like a machine that guides the human salesperson? Sure. Now we can inform and steer them in the live environment on how to behave with customer, courtesy of the monitoring (spy) capability in apps like cogitocorp.com and their "real-time conversational guidance". And there's more. The human salesperson can even be dispensed with altogether. For what ultimately is the Amazon Echo smart speaker, supported by the Alexa voice assistant, if not an autonomous guided salesperson. "Alexa, I want to go on holiday to the Maldives; what do you suggest?". "How about an Amazon's Choice, the simple way to order and get what you need?". Be advised by an algorithm or even

The salesperson will be like a broker steering the customer whenever things get complex

a computer-generated fashion-blogging influencer (like Lil Miquela, created by Trevor McFedries and Sara DeCou). And when the customer's bot begins to talk to the retailer's bot, the interaction automation will be complete; the circle, closed. Or maybe not, as Amazon has more in store for us in the future. For Amazon, the future point of sale is the mind of sale. Amazon wants our brain to become a shop. A thinking place that wants experiences delivered directly to the brain, as synthetic immersive consumption. Dreaming, learning, travelling, loving, playing in a kind of synthetic trip where the drug is simply the technology that enables these experiences, maybe even with a sensory component (like virtually tasting a food). The mental, digital and real merge in a new dimension where every act of consumption is reconfigured to our desires. Perhaps we're witnessing the birth of a quantum consumer entanglement, a kind of labyrinthine su-

perposition of acts of consumption that happen simultaneously as an aggregating experience without any human intermediation. Crazy talk? Yes, but plausible.

Selling with a new driver

Like a car that takes a real salesperson out for a ride? Sure. With all this souped-up automation, we need to focus on souped-up relationships too. After pigging out on digitalisation, it's time to make things

weconomy

human again. People (and relationships) should come first. Not forgetting we're flesh-and-blood people who like other flesh-and-blood people. Beyond technology, there's the relationship between people, a rare commodity indeed in the future. Delivering services and consultancy with a human touch, amid all these computers and chatbots, will make the difference for the new salesperson. Their future lies not amid the din of the consumption economy but in the smoother waters of the knowledge economy. Their role will be more as a broker steering the customer in their name and on their behalf wherever things get particularly complex and personalised solutions are de rigueur. Ultimately, automating activities, processes, requests and all those manual tasks that take so much time (from handling customers to front- and backend work) could free up sellers to be more "holistic". This would reduce the monotony and leave them more time to be creative and strategic in solving the really important problems.

But, to return to the Journal's theme, watch out for trash. Once, salespeople were expected to spew a bellyful of lies and recite a script (the good ones could sell yellow snow to Eskimos), but that doesn't work any more. The product/service must be meaningful, and so must the salesperson. The best are no longer prepared to sell trash, only real solutions. And rightly so.

"I am a salesman"...



Giuliano Favini

CEO, Manager of Sales, Logotel

When was the last time a salesperson introduced themselves like that? How often have you received a business card with "salesman" written on it? As a matter of fact, "salesperson" is any country's most prevalent occupation, if you count all the jobs that involve selling. Shopkeepers, sales agents, baristas, drug company reps, financial advisers, insurance brokers, ... the list goes on. Twenty-odd years ago, when Logotel was already running interesting, original new kinds of courses on selling, I came across fourteen different job titles for salespeople in just a few months. It was almost as if, out of embarrassment, they felt the need to aggrandise an occupation that many looked down on. Dismantling this stereotype is one of the purposes I have pursued with particular vigour in my career.

We are all salespeople; there's no hiding from it.

In everything we do in the world of work, we continually find ourselves advancing and putting forward some idea of ours, encouraging a colleague on a project, motivating and persuading someone to contribute and support some effort or initiative. That's selling; it's not just about when money changes hands.

Many years back, managing a business was about issuing instructions (what to do). But managers realised a while ago that it's good to involve their staff and colleagues and to offer motivation (why do it). So if someone I'm talking to at work gives me reasons why I should do something, they're acting as a salesperson with me, as they are aiming to persuade me. Wouldn't you say?

What underpins what a salesperson does?

As a customer, I may have my own goals – about a product/service to buy or a budget to stick to – and my (normally instinctive) behaviour may betray or alter them. The salesperson is often in a hurry and doesn't ask questions to uncover these expectations of mine. So really they are just distributing, not selling. What if they tried to put themselves in my shoes, by engaging me with some straightforward questions? That's how a sale begins. If I already know the salesperson and have maybe found them helpful, then the prospects are good, hopefully to both parties' advantage. If the seller has managed to establish a positive rapport, even if it's still only incipient, then a process begins that develops along certain lines. This interpersonal relationship is a crucial stage, I feel. We mustn't neglect it, even if the ephemeral nature of the sales process means that it's not always achievable. As organisations, we should pay special heed when the purchasing transaction doesn't involve a human seller. I believe that, even when selling becomes

virtual, digital, orchestrated with powerful algorithms, there must always be a human element to the process – involving new forms and new means of interacting – that can capture the attention and earn the buy-in of its likely prospects.

A role that has rolled with the times

Those who know me will know that I feel fortunate to have been one of the successful salespeople at IBM in the 1970s. Way back when, indeed! Fifty years ago, the company was computerising the world. It was the dawn of the third industrial revo-

lution, and computers looked like replacing humans in repetitive tasks to boost productivity (like today). IBM had a virtual monopoly on IT, and you might think their solutions sold themselves. Not so. The challenge, you see, wasn't just about hardware and software (like today). Business customers needed hand-holding through a transformation process that we'd now describe as disruptive, with major implications for their people. And in this vast unexplored territory, sellers were key. When you spoke with a customer's people, what you were talking about was often completely new and alien to them. You forged relationships with them; everything you proposed had to be framed in win-win terms. Obviously it was a special kind of selling; it could take time. But when you did close a deal (they didn't always come off, of course), the buzz was huge, a real fillip for your self-esteem that motivated you to keep pushing ahead. Not all your colleagues were on that path, but yours was the more satisfying in the long run.

Now we're in the throes of another industrial revolution, the fourth. The technology has changed, and the tools are more powerful and sophisticated. But there are many underlying parallels with that world I knew, as salespeople were and will remain pivotal for their ability to elicit people's needs and to guide them through complex situations.

Researchers and futurologists say that sales is the occupation that will lose fewest jobs as a result of artificial intelligence. I believe them: improvising, adapting to the context and reacting to unexpected stimuli are hard skills to automate. Yet salespeople will have to evolve too. I expect that companies will increasingly need to train their salespeople and expand their horizons. We can't pretend that tools will be enough: CRMs, sales force automation tools, complete the seller's armoury only as part of a wider change that isn't just about technology.

Even when orchestrated with powerful algorithms involving new forms and means of interacting, selling must always have a human element

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Towards a fresh challenge

For some years now, the market scenario has been increasingly oriented towards a factor that will only grow in importance: sustainability. This is not an option but a necessity. As an interested observer, I'm seeing more and more communication from different kinds of organisations, institutions and (finally!) businesses, to convey their commitment to increasingly eco-friendly and socially responsible operations.

In support of these developments, albeit a tad belatedly, studies and analyses are showing that individual customers are willing to buy sustainably made products or services and to favour companies that are making real, demonstrable progress on that front. Even if it costs more.

We should train and inspire our salespeople in a new challenge: sustainability

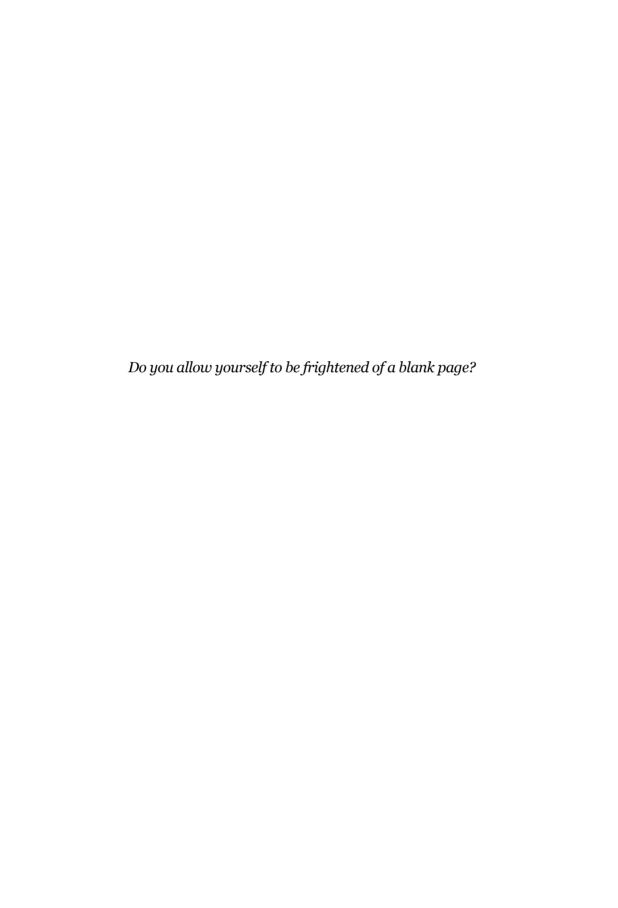
As the people dealing directly with customers, salespeople should surely be able to present themselves and their company's products/services effectively and transparently as possessing specific new features that are socially important if relatively complex and costly.

Now over 3/4 of people acknowledge a responsibility toward future generations, and there are many other motives spurring them to more enlightened choices. In my view, the businesses working in this direction – and the many others that want to survive – should also invest in training and inspiring their salespeople (and indeed all their staff) about this new challenge. Companies have a responsibility to turn their people into local cham-

pions of this great cause. We need to question our habits and instinctive behaviours, as many of them are no longer sustainable. This is profound change for our consumer society. It is a test on a scale that is unprecedented in human history.

I am a salesman, and now I have an additional goal. Ciao trash. Ciao.





For Logotel, a blank page is always the starting point for building original and sustainable answers, in collaboration with our clients.

We are a Service Design Company

Our job is to accompany organizations and companies, to make a difference today and have a positive impact on their own future and that of their clients. We create and foster projects through innovation, with a People and Design-Driven approach, in order to manage transformation through projects that give concrete and demonstrable results.

We bring change to real life, from strategy to implementation

For 25 years, we have been creating services that blend the tangible and the digital, that motivate and empower people to act, learn and collaborate on a daily basis. We design, produce and accompany the development of ideas, processes, content and tools that are capable of interpreting the real needs of companies and people and that give shape to effective answers.

We believe in a "making together" approach

We believe that real collaboration is the first catalyst for change, and for that reason we promote encounters between people both inside and outside organizations, and between different cultures, skills and disciplines. More than 200 people from 11 different countries collaborate in Logotel's branches in Milan. Paris and Madrid.

Weconomy. Our collaborative research platform

We created Weconomy 10 years ago to meet the demands of the transformations and get to grips with new challenges. Weconomy is an open, shared, multidisciplinary project aimed at encouraging debate between ourselves and our business community. It boasts an international network of 200 authors who include managers, entrepreneurs, designers and researchers. Together, we explore the forefront of change, in order to improve the vision of our designs.









