



# BEYOND SOLUTION SELLING

SALES PROFESSIONALS ACROSS THE GLOBE HAVE SOUNDED A HUGE SIGH OF RELIEF. BUSINESSES SURVIVING THE GFC HAVE BEGUN TO OPEN THEIR CHEQUE BOOKS ONCE AGAIN, AND THE DAYS OF STALLED PIPELINES AND DEFERRED PROJECTS, A SIGNATURE OF THE GFC, MAY WELL BE FORGOTTEN – WELL AT LEAST FOR SOME. BY **RICHARD HODGE AND LOU SCHACHTER**. CONTRIBUTOR: **BRYN HUGHES**.

Chief Executives have not yet put the experiences of the GFC to bed, and are seen to be interrogating the sophistication and effectiveness of their sales engine like never before. Bryn Hughes, Director of Optimising the Sales Force Australia, says, “In simple terms, CEOs are now looking to their sales people to be business professionals, not just sales people, and they now want them measured on effectiveness not just sales results. Today’s sales engine needs to enable the sales force to be 100 per cent aligned to the customer; in sales conversations, via a customer aligned sales (buying) process, in the submission of forecasts, in the management of sale opportunities, and CEO’s are looking for their sales people

to help their customers achieve business results, not just solve operational problems. It is a shift, that’s for sure, but if your sales team operates in a competitive landscape, it’s a journey that needs to start today and one that should start with a conversation with your customer about what they perceive value to be. Let’s not forget who is demanding this change. It is of course your customer.”

One aspect of any organisation’s sales transformation relates specifically to how the sales force sells, probably considered as the most significant differentiator in today’s highly competitive market. Lou Schachter, Managing Director of global sales transformation specialist, BTS, highlights in the remainder of this article

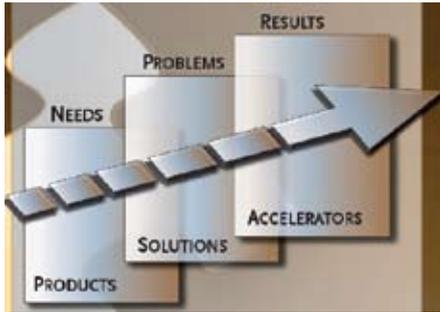
the shift in the evolution of selling. Solution selling, the leading business-to-business sales model for the last twenty years, is finding itself eclipsed. The notion of selling integrated solutions—rather than point products—has been so widely adopted that it no longer serves as a differentiator. What really matters to business leaders today is not solutions but results. In response, a cadre of top global sales forces has adopted a new approach. Top companies like UPS, Toyota, and Nokia are increasingly organising their selling efforts around the acceleration of their customers’ business results.

## THE EVOLUTION IN SELLING

Over time, selling has shifted. For a long time, the emphasis was on offering products that met customers’ needs. In the last twenty years, the focus has been on offering a suite of solutions to solve all the problems associated with implementing a product purchase. Today’s sales leaders are increasingly focused on accelerators that speed their customer’s achievement of desired business results.

Of course the selling of solutions continues to be essential, just as selling products and building strong relationships continues to be essential. However, solution selling itself is no longer a winning strategy on its own.

The idea behind solution selling has been that a buying company almost always



needs more than a solitary product or service.

It may need to finance the purchase; it may need customised specifications or features; it may need assistance with implementation or integration with existing systems; it may need ongoing training, support, and service. Providing these enhancements has not only been useful to the buyer; these extra services have added handsomely to top-line growth for sellers. Offering all these enhancements still makes sense because customers now expect and demand them. But they are no longer sufficient to support an enhanced value proposition.

**WHAT CUSTOMERS REALLY WANT**

Interviews with over 100 executive-level buyers in global companies reveal how the world of buying—and therefore, selling—is changing. In today’s increasingly competitive global markets, each purchase has to meaningfully improve the buying company’s business and provide a return on investment. It has to accelerate the purchasing company’s success in achieving its goals. The purchase, the strategy, and the decision maker all have to prove themselves in twenty-four months or less.

Is the notion of accelerating your customers’ business results just spirited flag-waving or does it suggest genuine strategy? Research with UPS, Toyota, and Nokia suggests the latter. These organisations have integrated the notion of accelerating customer business results into the operation of their sales forces. Building business acumen is more than a buzz word. At Toyota and Lexus, for example, salespeople call on the individual dealerships that purchase vehicles from the manufacturer. Historically, these salespeople were product experts. They knew more than anybody about each car’s features and specifications. Over time, they too became solution sellers, by offering assistance with advertising, merchandising, and financing vehicles. Today these salespeople are changing the

face of the auto industry by becoming experts in each specific dealer’s individual business. That means understanding each dealer’s personal and business goals, the nature of their business cycle, their unique market and key competitors, their financials, operating challenges, and strategies. What the salesperson brings to the dealer are those ideas, techniques, and best practices proven to work elsewhere and relevant to this dealer’s specific situation, and in a way that is tailored to them. This approach is accelerating the adoption of successful strategies throughout the Toyota and Lexus dealer networks.

**WHAT LEADERS CAN DO**

Truly accelerating a customer’s business results is not a simple task. However, there is a silver lining for those sales forces that pursue it: the complexity involved makes it harder for competitors to adopt similar approaches. Pursuing a change of this magnitude requires initiative, diligence, and perseverance from the leader of the sales organisation. It must be modeled, supported, and of course demanded. Effective initiatives that we have seen include the following components.

1. Genuine passion for customers’ success. Customer-focus is not an outcome of this new approach; it’s an entry ticket. A company that wants to adopt this new way of selling must already be primarily focused on its customers rather than itself or its product. But it also must now go a step further. The sales force must become passionate not simply about meeting each customer’s needs but about helping each customer reach its own strategic goals. Salespeople in this new world closely monitor and celebrate their customers’ quarterly earning reports.
2. Business acumen Product knowledge and sales execution skills are no longer sufficient. Salespeople in today’s leading sales organisations must be trained to understand their customers’ businesses at a deep level. That means being able to read financial statements, have conversations with CFOs, identify key business challenges, and speak like a consultant. World-class sales forces are increasingly making the development of business acumen a priority in the training of new hires. They understand the increasing importance of grooming business professionals’ first and sales experts second.

3. Focus on business challenges. Where the rubber hits the road, accelerating customers’ business results is about helping them overcome the challenges that lie between them and their goals. Helping customers achieve results faster is accomplished by removing or reducing the impact of obstacles in their paths. Leading companies are training salespeople to articulate how their products, services, and solutions address the unique business challenges each of their customers face. Sales professionals at companies like UPS and Nokia increasingly have the business sophistication to describe how their services and products genuinely maximise cash flow, improve customer satisfaction, and foster operational excellence.

Sadly, we frequently encounter sales leaders who believe the way to improve their numbers is to make their salespeople more efficient: find more leads, make more sales calls, tender more presentations, and spend more time with customers. But those leaders who invest instead in making their sales forces more effective—that is, better at achieving the results that matter most to their customers—yield better results and position their organisation more strategically for the future. ■

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Lou Schachter, will be one of 20 International, regional and local industry leaders speaking at Optimising the Sales Force Australia, 2010 held on 9 and 10 August 2010. OSF2010 is where executives with results share data-driven insights, and this year’s event will focus on the new, post GFC world, and will determine what makes up the world of “Sales Transformation”. OSF2010 will ask the straight questions – what is sales transformation? And will endeavour to define the symptoms that will necessitate you and your organisation to travel this journey, the journey that will enable you to stay ahead of your competitors, and the market forces that continually challenge the successful execution of your sales strategy. OSF2010, will delve into the minds of Australian, regional and global experts, and will collaborate with its delegates to explore why, how and where to invest in Sales Transformation. If you need to rethink your sales force, OSF2010 will provide deep insights in how to execute on it.