Seven Sales Force Development Trends
It’s (still) all about revenue

CSO Insights Trend Report, 2012 (survey of sales executives): Respondents were asked about the top three goals they have for their sales organizations for the next 12 months.

**Increasing revenues tops the priority list.**

Another theme in the report was increasing sales effectiveness. In the early 2000s, sales organizations were focused mainly on efficiency — installing CRM/SFA systems, reducing paperwork, and making more calls.

**Now, sales executives are realizing that efficiency is not enough; it’s about not just making more calls, but making great calls.**
To grow revenue and increase effectiveness, sales organizations are focusing on several key strategies:

**Capture new accounts.** For the past three years, in a tough economy, sales organizations have turned to their existing customer base as a source of stability. Now, however, many are focused again on growing their customer base.

**Improve team selling.** “Coordinating the selling efforts across sales teams was mentioned as a key objective by some firms. One of their primary goals is to work more effectively at engaging all of the individuals involved in selling to or servicing an account and to recognize and leverage the work of everyone on the team.”

**Improve cross-selling/up-selling.** Sales representatives “need to have the training and support to get outside of their comfort zones and sell new products they may not have sold in the past to new stakeholders they may not have engaged before.”

**Protect against competitors.** With today’s shorter product development cycles, salespeople need to guard against competitors coming into their accounts, showing a new and different solution or technology, and taking away the business.

**Improve margin.** Companies realize that capturing market share is not the end goal; having more profitable customers is. This means salespeople must know how to sell the value of their solutions and reduce reliance on discounting.
What to do?

Seek to improve sales effectiveness, not just efficiency. Consider focusing your sales learning and development initiatives on the five areas previously outlined.
Sales is going social

**Internally**

Sales organizations are becoming social enterprises, using social media technology to connect sales representatives with each other and with all relevant departments that support sales. Example: The SFDC Chatter tool.

**Externally**

Salespeople need to leverage these tools to find and nurture leads, develop viable new prospects, and maintain and build customer relationships. Social media has changed how sales reps connect with customers.

**Big Data**

Companies are using customer analytics to generate customer insight, and sales analytics to better manage sales force performance and effectiveness. All the conversations — every tweet, chat, comment, and post — collected on social media platforms are ripe for analysis.
What to do?

Provide clear guidelines and training for how salespeople should be leveraging social media. Make it clear that effective use of these tools is not just marketing’s job, but everyone’s job.
Three ways a “sales portal” can become “sales enablement”

Sales portal

the idea is knowledge delivery: give sales representatives exactly the info they need, just when they need it, and in the form they can use it most effectively.

For a few years now, “sales portals” have been a hot topic. But, that term is becoming outdated, as it suggests a mere a gateway to various data sources and depends on the sales representatives actively seeking information.

Sales enablement

an integrated ability to push the right information, tools, and guidance to sales representatives based on where they are in a selling or account situation.

One way to think about how this trend is evolving is to think of a continuum of sales portals, with “a big file cabinet” on the left and “sales enablement” on the right. Sales technology vendors fall at various places on this continuum.
Don’t limit yourself to “file-cabinet” thinking. Instead, create a blueprint — an architecture that integrates the essential elements of your sales organization — and use that as the basis for your sales portal.

Establish a governance model as you would for any other key business process, with decision-making authority, guiding principles, and continuous improvement.

And, work with a vendor that’s farther to the right on the continuum.
Move over, solution selling

Is solution selling really dead, or even dying?
No — but it’s no longer anywhere near the cutting edge.

Buyers are becoming more sophisticated and savvy, which requires sellers to adapt to keep pace.

Sales organizations that rely on solution selling or consultative selling alone will find themselves falling behind.

Terms for the new approach include thought-leadership selling, insight selling, and point-of-view selling (Forum’s term, and the name of our program). It’s not right for every salesperson or every customer, but it’s what the star salespeople are doing.
“Because [senior] leaders are primarily concerned with identifying and prioritizing which problems need solving and with assigning people and resources to tackle them, a consultative selling approach — probing for problems and offering possible solutions — will not interest them.

Since these executives continually scan the horizon for new opportunities and looming threats, what does get their attention is showing them something significant they had not seen, or could not see clearly, and helping them determine whether it is worth their time to more fully investigate.

The key to accessing and engaging senior-level decision makers is educating them about new, and sometimes provocative, ideas for capturing significant business value or managing serious risk.”

“High-performing sales reps have a new strategy — they’re selling insights and coaching customers on how to buy.”

“The End of Solution Sales”
Conduct a Sales Organization Maturity Assessment to see where your sales organization and customers are today and what types of selling approaches and training investments will pay off.

Tailor your sales effectiveness initiatives accordingly.
Five

What to do about the fact that inside sales groups are growing in size and influence

The number of inside sales departments is projected to grow from 800,000 in 2009, to more than 2 million in 2013.

IDC’s Sales Advisory Service research indicates a >10 percent increase in inside sales headcount from 2010 to 2011, and more than half of companies surveyed intended to increase inside sales in 2012; however, respondents said much work is still needed to increase those sales representatives’ productivity.

CSO Insights Telemarketing Report
Consider bolstering alternate channels, such as an inside sales team, as a cost-efficient component of your sales and marketing strategy.
The game’s half over before you’re called in to play – for five minutes

On average, 57 percent of a purchase decision is complete before a customer contacts a supplier.

At this point, needs are scoped, solutions have been compared, the purchase is funded, and price is often being benchmarked.

The idea that “executives don’t go online” is a myth.

Research indicates that most executives — even CEOs — are spending plenty of time online seeking out suppliers, partners, and new ideas that can help their business.

Customers aren’t new to the solutions purchase game any longer.

They’ve put in place purchasing processes, infrastructure, and consultants, professionalizing their approach and providing a strong internal team on which they rely.
Customers don’t need a salesperson to educate them about your company and its products and services. They can get the official line from your website, use social media to find out what everyone else is saying about you, and have their purchasing group write up a detailed comparison of potential vendors — all in a matter of days. Then — if you’re lucky — they’ll call you.
Be clear with the sales force that consultative selling skills are more necessary than ever — but that the days of exercising those skills during the course of three or four leisurely customer meetings are gone. They must be prepared to move at the customer’s accelerated pace and to add unmistakable value from the very first minute of the very first call.

What to do?
Seven

Why “No Decision” is becoming everyone’s biggest competitor, and what you can do about it

When prospects buy, they are taking longer to make their final vendor selection — the result of intense scrutiny of all purchasing decisions.

The volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity environment is a factor in nearly all organizations, creating high levels of uncertainty for buyers and sellers alike.

The Corporate Executive Board reports that globally, half of employees expect a major change in six months.

Given this volatility, buyers may often find the safest decision to be no decision.
Articulate and quantify the value to customers of your products and services. Teach salespeople how to make a clear business case — to explain not the vague “benefits” of a solution, but the specific, financial, mission-critical results it will produce.
Further Resources:

Go to www.forum.com/business-challenges/invigorate-your-salesforce.aspx, you can download The Strategic Selling Kit:
- Research: Navigating the Sales Funnel
- White Paper: SAM: Move Upstream to Eliminate Competition
- White Paper: Cold Calling is Stone Cold Dead
- Webinar Replay: Fifth Third Bancorp: How to Execute a Customer Focused Sales Strategy
- Brochure: The World's Top Sales Organizations Turn to Forum to Stay Ahead of Their Competition

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