

entelegenTM

BUSINESS BEYOND

The Importance of Process in Effective Selling

A Whitepaper from Entelegen

Reseller partner for:



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Introduction

Any successful business understands the importance of process. Take a look at any company that enjoys continued success and one can expect to see systems in place to manage cash flow, stock levels, customer service et cetera -- you would not rate the chances of survival of any organisation that did NOT have such systems in place. Well defined processes underpin all good businesses, ensuring that established Best Practices are followed every time to keep the business running effectively.

But you do not always see such regimen deployed in winning new customers and repeat business through a systematic approach to sales.

So why are the sales teams of most organisations, which supply the oxygen -- an income stream -- that keeps the business alive, the *last* part of the company to adopt a process driven approach to ensure repeatable success?

Art versus science

Whereas running most departments can be likened to science in terms of the process applied, sales teams often purvey the image of being artisans, enjoying special skills and an innate ability to sell that few others share.

Every role needs someone with the right skills to do the job, be the role that of a brain surgeon, a teacher, an accounts clerk or a customer services assistant. Any individual has attributes that suit them to a particular job and sales people are no different.

So what makes some individuals consistently better sales people than others?

The answer is process.

The *best* sales people are consistently successful -- they strike gold time and time again. Anyone can sell -- we all do it all the time, be it our cars when we come to replace them or our own selves in job interviews. But career sales people understand what makes people buy, the processes they follow and the actions needed to ensure the purchase is made from them. They understand the buying process, and the selling process; and every time they engage with a customer, they trace that opportunity through an established process that increases their chances of ultimate success.

Some successful sales people have been self-taught, developing their own practices from experience; others have been "classically trained" in sales process by companies with their own established methodologies, such as Solution Selling, Hut Waite, Miller Heiman or Customer Centric Systems; and others have received sales coaching from highly experienced sales professionals, fully conversant in effective selling. Regardless of how the skills have been gained, success comes from knowing how the buying/selling process works and repeating it each time to ensure the repetition of positive results.

What makes up a process?

Successful processes are designed and applied to each aspect of a business to ensure the repetition of Best Practice. Often it may follow already established procedures that have been developed by the most successful sales people; it may include feedback from all customer-facing staff.

Seven steps to build your own sales process

- Identify the differences involved in the things you sell***, e.g. do you need to follow a different process for product sales than for services sales? Is there a substantially different sales cycle for lower value items than there is for large projects? If so, then you may wish to map out several different processes and apply them appropriately;
- Can you bypass aspects of the sales process with repeat customers?*** When selling to a repeat customer, you may be able to skip over some of the early stage qualification and credibility building, because they already know you and you know them. For this, you can either build two processes, one shorter than the other; or allow a hop to the later stages of the process for those customers you are selling to again;

- ❑ **Identify the key stages in the sale.** These will be key proof or decision points in the customers buying cycle, plus key action points for your sales staff, e.g. shortlist to be decided, proposal to be presented, acceptance of proposal etc. These should make up the key stages in each process and prove that progress is being made with the customer;
- ❑ **Attach expected timeline for each stage.** If you have a good idea of the stages in a sale, you should also know how long each stage normally takes. Any sales that run over the normal time of completion for each stage probably have something going wrong with them and need attention;
- ❑ **Allow for different results at each stage.** Don't assume once a stage is completed that the sale will then move on to the next logical stage -- if an opportunity needs re-qualification, because the customer's goals have not been understood or because the project has grown in size, you will need to move back to a previous key stage to re-qualify before moving forward again. There could be any point at which backward or sideways steps are needed to keep on track;
- ❑ **Include the post-sale stages you need to ensure you can collect payment.** Many sales cycles/processes focus only on the stages up to winning an order. But a sale is not complete until the customer is satisfied and makes payment. Ensure that the final stages of the sale, such as implementation/delivery and a customer follow-up call, are included. This will ensure the sales person re-engages the customer, gathers feedback and allows them to start add on or follow up sales processes;
- ❑ **Use a Sales Force Automation system that allows the sales process to be mapped in.** This will help to ensure that your Best Practice processes are reinforced and used verbatim by your sales staff to see continued and repeatable success.

Tools to ensure repeatable success

With a sales team that understands an effective selling process, it is critical that the systems they use to drive their customer contact -- and report to their managers -- supports those winning processes. All too frequently a company will employ a successful sales person, or take its sales team through expensive methodology and process training, only to give them nothing more than the most basic business systems to try to put into practice what they have been taught. Unless the systems reinforce learned knowledge, the business can find itself unwittingly undoing the process driven approach, obstructing the successful flow of the sales process and causing sales people to get distracted with activities outside of the key events they need to follow to see success. Within no time, top performers can get rusty and pick up bad habits, compromising their performance.

A good example of this may be a sales person having nothing more than a basic contact management system for logging their customers; and prospects and Excel for producing forecasts and weekly reports on activity. These systems are not assisting the sales staff in managing their processes; just collecting stale data and producing management reports -- and neither of these directly contributes to that sales person's success.

The key to ensuring that successful sales people can repeat their processes effectively to see repeatable success is a system that is not only capable of reinforcing process, but enables sales people to monitor their own progress through a customer's buying/selling processes. Managers should be able to access reports directly, view information dashboards and manage exceptions directly, without the need to distract the sales staff with administrative tasks.

Sales force automation systems are nothing new, with the most sophisticated now also encompassing advanced Customer Relationship Management (CRM) capabilities. The problem is, most solutions of this sort only acknowledge that there are STAGES in selling, not PROCESSES.

Choosing effective sales software

Any sales software solution should take what the greatest assets of a sales person are -- knowledge of the buying/selling process and ability to repeat Best Practice process effectively -- and enable those assets to be used most effectively.

Many sales software solutions, including sales force automation and CRM systems, seem to be rich with features, but focus on the "wrong" things, from a sales effectiveness perspective at least: they

collect meaningless data on customers, that the sales team wastes time maintaining; and do not move with the sales people through established processes. As such, these systems often take too much time to keep up-to-date and offer no information on how a sales person got to where they are in the sales process with a customer, or where it goes next. Without this information, how can sales people be sure of their aims when they speak to customers? And without knowing what the aims of the call are, how can they -- or their sales managers -- be sure they have made progress?

The software systems that drive the greatest levels of sales effectiveness are those that allow the processes that have been learned to be mapped into the software itself. With this, the system not only becomes a "second skin" to the sales person, working as they do, but it ensures that all of the information retained is directly relevant to the performance of the sales person. Effective sales systems also help coach members of the sales team who may not have all the skills or experience of your best sales people, allowing those staff to follow the same processes in order to increase their chances of success.

Further, such use of a system of this sort by sales people to manage the progression of processes with customers means that the systems are always current, with much more information stored which is directly relevant to the opportunities being worked -- and all this is readily accessible through management reports. This means that forecasting information can be more accurate and up-to-date activity reports can be produced automatically. The instant availability of this information avoids time spent completing separate reports, returning hours each week back to the sales team to spend selling rather than performing administration.

Other things to consider for such systems are their ability for information to be easily shared: web-based systems are useful for allowing information to be updated across a distributed sales team, centrally stored and visible to management as well as the sales staff, but if your sales team is mobile and likely to be using the system away from the office (on customer site or between meetings) then they need an alternative to online access. Your sales staff will also need the system to work with Outlook, if they send and receive customer e-mails or synchronise their mobile phones or PDAs with Outlook to keep their address book up to date.

And finally, the system will need to be intuitive and provide direct value for the sales team. Good sales people do not do more than they need to win a sale -- this includes spending time learning new systems or updating information for other people's use. Any sales system should work as the sales people work, including supporting their processes, or they will soon become redundant.

Top 10 tips to choose an effective sales system

- ❑ **Allows PROCESSES to be followed, not just STAGES.** Systems supporting only Stages have the user simply stating where they *think* they are in the sales cycle; process based systems will guide your sales team through each sale, ensuring that each stage is completed fully before passing them on to the next relevant stage;
- ❑ **Enables your own sales process to be mapped.** Any system should allow your own sales processes to be mapped and not force you to use generic processes which may not be applicable and don't assist your sales staff;
- ❑ **Can be easily customised.** The solution should allow you to add your own fields to capture key information through qualification and progression of opportunities. It should also allow you to remove data fields that would only add to the administrative burden on sales staff;
- ❑ **Provides adequate access to data off-line.** Many solutions are web-based, but you won't want to restrict your sales team to benefiting from the system only when they are internet connected. Ensuring the system has an off-line version will mean your sales people can use the software when away from the office or home without the need for internet access;
- ❑ **Captures e-mail communication.** In many companies, e-mail accounts for as much as 70% of customer correspondence during the sales cycle, so it is vital this is logged against the contacts and opportunities for each sale. Better still is a solution that captures correspondence from existing e-mail systems, such as Microsoft Outlook, rather than needing your sales team to use a proprietary e-mail system;

- ❑ **Allows associated files and documents to be attached.** Complex sales can involve many documents, produced by customers and your sales team. It is important these can be stored with all other records relating to the sale and accessible by anyone with customer record access;
- ❑ **Presents a simple to read dashboard view of opportunities.** With a large amount of relevant data in the system, it is vitally important that high level information can be easily accessed, giving a summary of opportunities, pipeline and performance, allowing managers to focus most effectively;
- ❑ **Intuitive and “familiar” for the sales people to use.** Good sales people do not do more than they need to win a sale -- this includes learning complex systems which do not aid their success. Ensure any system works with or works like systems they already understand;
- ❑ **Produces forecast and activity information without any administrative overhead on sales people.** With the sales team using the system to manage their sales effectively, all the information a manager needs to produce accurate forecasts should exist within an easy to view report. This “real world” view should need no further administrative work by the sales team, which should be focused on selling!
- ❑ **Help is easily to hand.** A systematic approach to selling causes you to rely on your computer systems for selling as much as you do for invoicing or stock control. So make sure that expert assistance is easily available in case of difficulty, both in configuration and operation.

Summary

Repeatable process, following established Best Practice, is a key factor in developing successful sales staff. Some sales people develop their own winning formulas, others learn it from established methodology practitioners or through sales training or coaching -- but once a business has sales people who understand buying/selling processes and the process they need to follow to make customers purchase, success can be repeated every time.

It is important that any organisation supports sales staff in the development and use of Best Practices process with effective sales systems, however. The company's systems should ensure that those processes can be accurately mapped into the software, such that it works exactly as the successful sales people do -- it should not present obstacles to them which mean they deviate from what has been proven to achieve the greatest results.

With an understanding of why customers buy and a systematic approach to winning their business, underpinned by software systems that reinforce those processes, any business can see a significant increase in sales and reduction in sales times.

About the author

Ian Hendry is a director and co-founder of Entelegen. Ian has 20 years experience in the enterprise software industry and uses it to great effect advising clients on market entry and growth strategies. His record of success in European business expansion has been established through sales and channel development positions in specialist software companies covering markets such as P2P networking, host/legacy access, data replication, business intelligence, secure messaging and application security.

Entelegen is Ian's second start-up: his first company was ultimately acquired by a US-based e-business security software company during 2000 in order to strengthen its European presence. Ian was European Managing Director for the company until leaving to dedicate his time to Entelegen.

About Entelegen

En-tele-gen *noun*

***The generation of a force which moves an organism to its final state of being
[Latin en-, in; + Greek telos, progress; + suffix -gen, producer, from Greek -genes, born.]***

Entelegen is Europe's leading provider of outsourced sales and market acceleration solutions to technology companies establishing or re-establishing an international market presence.

Entelegen partners with emerging or established companies to enable reduced risk entry to new markets or management of existing markets, expediting growth in revenues within a managed cost structure. Through its outsourcing services Entelegen provides instant access to teams of highly experienced and operationally strong sales, business development, marketing and technical staff, as well as prestigious offices and a business infrastructure -- all focused towards achieving revenue growth from Day One.

Entelegen's founders are recognised leaders in the software, service, datacoms and telecoms industries and share in excess of 40 years of vendor experience, having held senior positions with a number of North American and European hardware and software companies, including Avaya, Lucent, Eicon and Entegriy Solutions. They have a proven track record in establishing new businesses and have assisted many organisations to penetrate and achieve successful sales growth throughout Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Their knowledge and leadership is supported by a team of highly experienced and equally professional individuals, all of whom have worked together successfully for many years and each of which has at least five years of experience in the IT industry; from sales and business development through to project management.

Entelegen lists as clients BlueTie, Eloqua, EMC, ESRI UK, Samsung SDS, Thales, Tripwire and VIA net.works, as well as several leading specialist software companies. Entelegen is also proud to be the first European partner, Premier UK Partner and Gold Partner for Salesnet, the leading provider of on-demand CRM for driving sales effectiveness from RightNow Technologies; and the first European reseller for ScoreSight Sales Pursuit software.

For more information, visit www.entelegen.com.