

SALES MYTHS **debunked**

1 DON'T WAIT BY THE PHONE

THE MYTH: Increased regulations on telemarketing will end phone-based sales.

THE TRUE CHALLENGE: Leveraging a variety of electronic communications, in combination with traditional telemarketing, to reach customers and increase sales.

THE FIX/OPPORTUNITY: Sales professionals will become more comfortable with technology. Websites, email marketing, and social media are natural avenues to build customer relationships. In fact, a major driver for the growth of inside sales is the dramatically lower costs than field sales. Each contact with an inside sales person might cost \$25 to \$30 compared with \$300 to \$500 for a field staff person because of the travel expenses, explains Michael Moorman, a managing principal in the Chicago office of ZS Associates. Both inside and outside sales teams are increasingly using digital-based technology, which does not require face-to-face meetings at the customers site, to develop accounts and conduct negotiations. In a previous era, these activities would have been conducted exclusively via face-to-face meetings.

2 INTERNET INVASION

THE MYTH: The Internet will eliminate the need for sales professionals by giving customers easy access to online information.

THE TRUE CHALLENGE: Keeping up with the growing demand for sales professionals, which the Internet has actually accelerated. These individuals must be prepared to thrive in today's demanding environment, which requires a different, more extensive skill set.

THE FIX/OPPORTUNITY: Knowledgeable customers are now looking for more than just a traditional sale. Effective sales professionals learn their customers' needs, configure tailored solutions, and provide continued service beyond the initial sale. Today's customers often learn about products and services online, but they need sales professionals to provide concise, easy-to-implement solutions to address their specific needs. In short, sales professionals are still essential to close the sale and provide ongoing support. According to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, there were over 13.5 million sales professionals in the workforce in the year 2000, (about 10.4%), versus 13.6 million (10.6%) in 2012.

3 SEEING IS BELIEVING

THE MYTH: Corporate video-conferencing is replacing individual face-to-face meetings.

THE TRUE CHALLENGE: Maintaining an emphasis on direct, individual one-on-one sales meetings (which customers demand, and which continue to be the most effective), even while cutting expenses.

THE FIX/OPPORTUNITY: While cost-saving, corporate video-conferencing is actually declining, successful sales professionals understand that their customers expect individualized attention. All important one-on-one face time is easier to achieve than ever before. New technologies, such as Skype, Oovoo, and other Web-based tools, are enabling something equivalent to a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting, which many prefer over traditional video-conferencing calls. Savvy sales professionals are using technology to enable visual communication with customers while reducing expenses for their organization.

4 DROWNING IN DATA

THE MYTH: Detailed CRM creates data overload and doesn't increase sales.

THE TRUE CHALLENGE: Ensuring that CRM includes the right details, and sales managers are using data effectively.

THE FIX/OPPORTUNITY: Simply populating CRM with as much information as possible can lead to data micromanagement, while having little impact on sales. Recent research revealed that only 8% of metrics reported in CRM are directly related to sales activity. Effective sales managers can focus on these data that are critical to the overall success of their sales force, making CRM much more efficient and effective. By training managers and salespeople to target the most meaningful data, organizations can harness the full potential of CRM to reach their sales goals. ▲

KEEP IN MIND that your local university sales program may offer sales research to help you debunk your own sales myths.

* Information compiled from academic and industry research. Sources include Jason Jordan (Vantage Point Performance), Howard Stevens (Chally), Geoffrey James (author and journalist), U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, Michael Moorman (ZS Associates), and International Data Corporation (IDC).