

Is Your Inside Sales Team Ready to Capture Large, Complex Deals?

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Hiring for inside salespeople has been growing 15 times faster than for outside sales reps. In fact, in 2019, inside sales reps accounted for slightly less than half of all sales reps.

Since COVID-19 and the necessity to move in many cases to a remote sales force, the scales have probably tipped permanently on the side of inside sales. Stature in the sales hierarchy, however, hasn't been as equitable. While inside sales reps have handled the small deals, qualified leads and nurtured prospects, they have, for the most part, continued to turn the most significant opportunities over to field sales.

But now may be the time to rethink your sales strategy. Customers' expectations are high, and your inside sales reps may have just the skills necessary to pursue

and close large, complex deals.

Skills for Today's Sales Environment

In 2013, the Harvard Business Review estimated that using an inside sales team to acquire new customers could save as much as 90% over traditional field sales strategies. But cost-effective is only the beginning. The inside sales function has proven to be efficient, too. These reps can generate leads, qualify and nurture prospects, boost customer retention rates and build strong relationships ... all without leaving the office.

Gone are the days of lavish expense accounts, unlimited travel and wining and dining the big fish. Budgets are lean. Time is a premium. And accountability is mandatory.

If anything, customers expect more from their vendors than ever before. But it's an experience that inside sales reps with a tech stack at the ready are prepared to fulfill. They have the tools to:

- Connect with more prospects in a day—via phone, email and social media—than the traditional road warrior could reach in a week.
- Better manage and support their client and prospect relationships.
- Respond more quickly to inbound requests, which can significantly increase the chances of connecting with a prospect.
- Build and automate sales campaigns and follow-up sequences that generate more revenue from lower priority accounts that outside sales might be apt to ignore.
- Track and analyze both their own sales strategies and customer responses to build and refine best practices.
- Provide customers and prospects with product information, relevant content and even access to in-house product specialists when necessary.
- Finally, with more time spent talking with buyers, nurturing leads and building relationships, inside sales reps are in the ideal position to understand customer

needs and pain points.

Customer Expectations in 2020

During the past few years, your customers have changed, too. Where once large B2B customers expected their account executive or outside sales rep to make regular sales calls, today they prefer not to be interrupted. Seventy-five percent of buyers would prefer not to meet face-to-face, which is why in recent years field sales reps have been spending almost half their time selling remotely. And this was before COVID-19.

In truth, B2B purchasing isn't all that different from consumer buying. When people are comfortable buying a car, a boat online—even a house—with nothing more than a virtual tour, they're ready to make business purchases remotely.

They're comfortable doing the majority of their research online. All they really demand is a good customer experience and the reassurance that they can reach a knowledgeable salesperson when they need help, advice or deeper insights.

It may be time for your inside sales reps to handle big deals.

How to Get More Out of Inside Sales

- **Restructure Your Sales Teams:**

If you are used to the assembly line approach with marketing handling lead generation, inside sales focused on qualifying and nurturing leads and then passing opportunities along to your field force, start by rethinking your sales process. Inside sales reps have many skills to succeed in virtual sales with large buyers. It's time you put them on an even footing with field sales.

- **Create Hybrid Sales Teams**

Your inside sales reps may have the skills for remote selling, but your outside reps have more experience closing large deals. For best results, team an inside and field salesperson to enable them to learn from one another. Ultimately, you can develop a sales force that includes inside sales reps with insight into the finer points for

catching the big fish and field reps who can make the most of today's virtual sales tools.

- **Refocus Inside Sales Incentives**

If you've reserved quotas and sales incentives for outside reps, you might want to consider extending them to inside sales reps. Even if you already have sales goals for inside salespeople, you may need to restructure their incentives away from the smaller transactional sales to reflect the longer sales cycles and greater complexity involved in closing a more substantial deal.

- **Refocus Selling Strategies on Customer Results**

Big deals require a different sales focus. It's not enough to uncover pain points and talk knowledgeably about benefits. To close significant sales, inside reps may need to develop a more consultative sales technique and learn the art of inspiring buyers with a vision of results.

- **Encourage Referrals**

Inside sales reps typically have not focused on getting referrals. And yet, referral leads are precious: Not only do referrals have a better sales conversion rate than marketing leads and a higher retention rate, but they also have a 16% higher customer lifetime value.

- **Invest in Remote Selling Tools**

While qualifying and nurturing leads and closing smaller sales may not require face-to-face communication, larger sales benefit from a visual connection. Give your inside sales reps access to video conferencing, screen sharing, webinar and other tools that facilitate closing deals while selling remotely.

So, an answer to our initial question, yes, the inside sales function is ready for the big leagues. Putting reps to work on your prime opportunities will give them the responsibility they've earned. Plus, it will boost your return on investment in sales technology and inside sales reps.

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