

Customer Centric Selling: The #1 B2B Sales and Marketing Trend in 2017

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Businesses Struggle to Deliver

Despite all the talk about putting customers first, a Gallup report revealed 71% of B2B are either indifferent towards their vendors or actively disengaged. Translation? The vast majority of B2B companies' customers could easily stray from the fold at any moment, which suggests that many have not fully realized the goal of customer centricity.

While it's easy to say "We want to be customer-centric," it's harder to realize the vision. How do you make it happen?

How to Build Your Understanding of Customers

Making customers the center of your universe and how you sell to them starts with talking to them to gain a better understanding of their needs, desires and expectations. There are a few ways to gather data to help in building your customer knowledge. These include:

- **Buyer Personas**

First, you need to develop buyer personas. While B2B buyer persona research touches on demographics, or more precisely, firmographics, it needs to go further. What's most important is to understand the problems customers face and how they go about solving them. What is the buying process? Who do they talk to and what information do they seek out? Within their organization, who are the influencers and decision makers? What do they consider when making the final buying decision?

Buyer personas are not a once and done thing. Markets change. Technologies change. How people buy changes. And there's always more to learn. So make buyer persona research part of your ongoing feedback system, just like customer satisfaction studies. This will enable you to learn continuously, create rich profiles and be on the forefront of market changes.

- **Win/Loss Analyses**

Another good source of data is win/loss sales analyses. Look through your database to find customers you recently lost and prospects who either decided not to buy or defected to the competition. Also, find some deals you've just landed. Interview them to discover why they came aboard or chose another

direction.

Don't cut corners and rely on salespeople for this information. When they're focused on winning a sale, it's easy for them to lose sight of potential flaws in the sales process. You need to understand what blocked a sale and the ingredients that moved another across the finish line.

To gain such insights, you need an external researcher to interview your customers and prospects. They're more likely to put your customers at ease than a professional they dealt with in the buying process. Also, because they don't have an emotional investment in the sale, they're more inclined to ask the right questions and extract the *real* story.

- **Marketing and Sales Technology**

Top off qualitative research with insights about customers from your CRM and marketing automation technology.

This research and data mining effort will inform you about what customers value most, where you excel and what you need to improve. You're likely to discover that buyers expect to have a partnership with you as their vendor. They value business partners who work with them in a consultative way, helping them to solve their problems. That means being involved from the beginning, before they've even fully defined their issue and helping them to structure a solution. It also means staying with them once they become a customer and remaining vested in their success.

Use your findings to develop a customer-centric strategy that enables you to move on a path to continuous improvement, deepen your relationships and consistently raise the quality of your customers' experiences.

Call us at +1 718-709-0900 (US) or +39 06 978446 60 (EMEA), or contact us online to learn how we can help you build stronger relationships with your customers.

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