

**Five Ways B-2-B Salespersons Can Increase
Sales through Social Networking Actions and
Seven Ways B-2-B Marketers Can Help Them
through Social Media Marketing Actions**



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Less than 60 years ago, people stood outside appliance stores looking at small boxes that showed newscasters announcing the beginning of the Korean conflict. Since radio advertising response rates were dwindling, sales and marketing professionals wondered how they could use this new technology to generate leads and sales.

Prior to 1982, salespeople could make cold telephone calls and actually talk to prospective buyers in order to evaluate them as leads. Then voicemail was invented; then caller ID. The era of easy access to customers was ending. B-2-B sales and marketing teams began looking for a better way to connect.

15 years later, they found the answer: electronic mail or, as it is now called, e-mail. At first, e-mail generated very high open and response rates, and it was considered the golden child of the electronic era. It was not long, however, before SPAM filters and the delete button started negatively effecting e-mail responses. Nevertheless, email remains an effective tool.

Sales and marketing professionals' adoption of these new technologies took several years to implement. All are still in use, although they have less effect than they did when they were new.

In the 1970s, the concept of the "consultative sale" became popular. Salespersons were told to stop selling the product and start selling the solution. Those who employed the technique were successful, especially since it was growing harder and harder to connect with prospects and gain their interest. Consultative selling spawned an era of "customer education," and large and small companies alike began holding seminars, creating customer-training tapes, and arming sales people with value-added materials. Unfortunately, many of these programs became victims of recessions and budget cuts.

Cut to 2009!

Just six years ago, the idea of online social networking became popular when MySpace and LinkedIn were launched. In 2004, a college student created Facebook for other college students. In 2006, the site was opened to all types of users. During the month of June in 2008, 117 million people were active on MySpace, 137 million were active on Facebook, and – most importantly for B-2-B sales and marketing professionals – LinkedIn boasted more than 35 million members. Now, thousands of general and niche social networks exist.

It is clear that people are flocking to social-network sites and that their interest in using social-networking sites even affects how much time they spend watching television. As sales and marketing professionals, you need to be where the people are, and the people are networking on the Internet.



Five Ways B-2-B Salespersons Can Increase Sales through Social Networking

1- Join Facebook and utilize your friends and family to help you spread the word.

Facebook has changed over the last few years; you would be surprised to learn who uses this social network. Your present and past contacts can help you make connections with new prospects. As with all social networks, you need to participate in order to benefit from the site as much as possible. Join Facebook groups and become fans of other business that you think your prospects might patronize. Create and comment on discussion boards and make sure that people know what you do for a living. Do not overdo the “selling” because that can irritate and deter potential customers.

I did not include MySpace in these suggested actions because that site is generally not useful for business-to-business sales. Nevertheless, you might work for a business that could potentially benefit from a profile on MySpace. Check it out and determine whether it is appropriate for you. Two industries that could benefit from MySpace are music and fashion.

2- Join LinkedIn and connect with your prospects, business associates, and previous clients.

LinkedIn is definitely your best online networking tool. Approximately 35 million members belong to LinkedIn, and many are high-level executives or mid-level decision makers.

It is important to create a detailed profile that presents the details of your current position. List all relevant previous work experiences. LinkedIn endeavors to match you with others who may have worked at the same company, and these people could be valuable contacts.

Join groups that you think your prospects may also join. LinkedIn offers a large number of groups that cover a vast variety of industries. Actively participate in your groups by posting discussion topics and commenting on discussions started by others.

LinkedIn includes a vibrant “answers” section where members can post questions and receive helpful answers. Participating in this area of LinkedIn is profitable because it creates exposure with other members.



3- *Participate in the blogs and forums that your prospects visit.*

Another great way to create digital footprints and to build intellectual capital is participating in blogs and forums on various sites. Determine which blogs and forums your prospects visit and then leave comments on those sites. Be sure to include your name and company in your comments. Even if you do not gain immediate contacts, your posts will advertise your personal and company brand. Many of these posts will also be uncovered when prospects search for solutions through Google and other search engines.

4- *Create profiles on other business-related social networks.*

Numerous professional social networks exist, such as Plaxo's Pulse, Fast Pitch, and Hoovers. Although you cannot be 100% active on all of these networks, you can devote a couple of hours to creating a detailed profile on each site. The information on many of these networks is picked up by search engines such as Google; when someone searches for your name, this information is displayed. If you want to be found, then it pays to lay down as many digital footprints as you can.

5- *Invest the time.*

Some people believe that it takes too much time to use online social networks to generate leads. The truth, however, is that you can accomplish all of the above actions in only 15 minutes a day or less. You do not even need a computer to access many of these sites. You can use an iPhone, Blackberry, or another smart phone.

A special note:

"What happens on the Internet stays on the Internet . . . for everyone to see."

Be appropriate!

Seven Ways B-2-B Marketers Can Help the Sales Force through Social Media Marketing

1- *Create a Facebook page for your company.*

Facebook makes it easy to create a business page; in fact, it is encouraged, unlike on many other social-network sites. Encourage your employees to connect to the company's page ("become a fan") and ask them to spread the word to their friends and family members, many of whom could be your business's target. The information you provide must be valuable, interesting, and relevant to your fans.



2- Create a LinkedIn corporate profile and teach your sales and marketing staff how to use LinkedIn.

LinkedIn now has approximately 35 million members, and it is a fantastic source of information. Recently, the site added a company profile section. Create a profile and link to other company employees who use the site. This feature is new, but its popularity is rapidly increasing. I believe that it will become a fantastic source for members who are looking for specific products or expertise.

Another great tool is LinkedIn groups. You can create a group for your company, product, or service. Groups are a fantastic way to provide value-added information and to gather market intelligence. Another great marketing intelligence tool is the polling feature. You can create a poll on any subject and thereby obtain feedback from your connections. This feature is only available for personal profiles, so it is useful to create a personal company profile by using a real person's name.

Training your sales and marketing staff about how to use LinkedIn is also a smart idea. You may want to provide some guidelines about what information should be revealed in their profiles and what customer-education information is available for them to use.

3- Create customer-education materials such as white papers and reports.

Social-network marketing is about being part of a community. This means that the information you provide must be interesting, relevant, and valuable. Customer education is a tried and true marketing tactic, and accomplishing it through social networks is easier and less expensive than more traditional methods.

White papers, reports, studies, and other customer-education materials can be distributed in electronic form. They can be also be used by sales forces for email blasts and blog posts.

4- Consider starting a company blog.

Every company possesses a wealth of information that would be valuable to clients and prospects. A blog is a useful way to make that information available in a timely manner.

Blogs can also be linked to profiles on LinkedIn and other social networks. You can ask employees who use LinkedIn to add a link to the company's blog to their profiles.

5- Investigate Twitter and niche social networks to determine whether using them would be profitable.

The Internet contains thousands of social network sites, both general and niche. Hence, it is quite likely that one or more is relevant to your industry. Search for and



evaluate them to determine whether it would be wise to create profiles and join their communities.

Twitter (www.twitter.com) is a rather new phenomenon that seems to be attracting many businesses. The site allows you to gain a number of followers and to post as often as you like. A 140-character limit is imposed on all messages. Twitter may not be appropriate for your business, but it is worth investigating.

6- Create company profiles on business-oriented social-network sites and directory sites. Create digital footprints.

It amazes me that so few business-to-business companies have ignored the social-network phenomenon and refrained from creating more digital footprints on the Web. As the general rates of advertising effectiveness decrease, the importance of creating a powerful Internet presence escalates.

This relates not only to your company's Web site but also to the footprints you make when you participate in niche business-oriented social networks, comment on blogs, create blog entries, contribute to forums, post white papers, or add comments about your company on other blogs. The Internet is a vast arena, and your company should make its presence known in many places simultaneously. The latest statistics on Web usage state that more than 70% of purchasers research a product or company on the Internet before they contact the provider.

Digital footprints help you:

- Generate and influence leads
- Influence prospects' opinions
- Build relationships
- Create a universal targeted-prospect list

Digital footprints help your sales and marketing staff:

- Sell the appointment
- Sell the company
- Sell the proposal

It doesn't take a lot of time to set up your company profiles and they help when people search for you online.

7- Monitor your company's digital footprints and observe what people say about your company on the Internet.

The Internet has significantly changed the world of information. People whom you never thought could be target influencers for your product or service are now more important than traditional communication providers. No longer possessed by only a few, information now flows freely and through many people. A customer in Woodstock, Georgia, has as much Internet power as a customer in New York City.



Never has word-of-mouth advertising been more important to your organization's revenues and your personal success.

It pays to monitor what people write about your company online. By knowing and acting on this information, you can influence customer relations, identify prospects, increase branding, improve customer education, learn more about competitors, target advertising more accurately, and build better relationships with employees.

Various free and pay-for-service monitoring tools are available. Paid services typically provide better information. One paid service that we like is Radian6 (www.radian6.com).

A wealth of additional information is provided on our Web site (www.octanecorp.com/whitepapers) that elaborates on this white paper's points.

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Two new services from Octane:

Social Media Advocate

There are many reasons your company should take part in social media marketing. With internal resources being stretched thin, you may not have the time to participate. That is why Octane has created our Social Media Marketing Advocate service. We do the work for you. Here's what we do.

Research and identify your social media influencers

Develop effective messaging to be used

Advocate on influencer blogs, forums and social networks.

Manage contextual and social network advertising

Social Media Mentoring

Social media marketing can be confusing. Blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, Youtube, Flickr, Twitter, Plurk, and a thousand other social network sites make it hard to decide which is best for you. It helps to have some guidance in making the decision as to which sites will be most productive. Octane can provide that guidance by offering you our Social Network Mentoring. Here's what we do.

Identify best social networks and media for your business

Help you set up your profiles on the selected networks



Provide guidance on how to work the networks for the best results

Provide training to your sales and marketing staff

Be there when you have questions and need advice

Contact me for me information

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