



The Elusive Decision Maker



Many sales methodologies and selling tactics still focus around locating and selling to the decision maker. We've all heard it - sell high, go to the source. And indeed, why not? If you can find that one person in the organization who can say "yes", why bother wasting time with anyone else? Just find out what they want, present a compelling offer, and close the business. If only life was that simple!

This style of selling is firmly rooted in the 1980's and before. For those of us who remember the 80's, you may recall that you could hardly open a business magazine or attend a business keynote address without hearing about networked organizations, empowered employees, or self-directed work teams. This whole movement evangelized the philosophy of softening corporate autocracy in favor of moving the decision-making ability down in the organization and breaking down vertical silos in favor of cross-functional teams. Ever wonder what happened to all those articles and speeches? We're living them - it has actually become the way we work today. And while many organizations may not fully embrace all aspects of the movement, most of today's companies are far more networked, utilize many more cross-functional processes and teams and have pushed significant parts of the decision making process across and down in the organization.

In today's corporations there is rarely a single major decision maker, but rather a series of mini-decision makers that are all involved in most purchase cycles. There may well be a needs-analysis team, a procurement group, along with a competitive analysis process in place - all of which provide advice in a committee format when major purchases are being considered. While the final funding may need to be approved by a single person, perhaps the CEO, that person is rarely the lone decision maker. In most cases, they are the caretakers of the overall process - but not the single decision maker in the traditional sense of the word.



Now one would think that along with this evolution of the purchasing process, a parallel evolution of the selling process must have also occurred. Right? Anyone? Not sure? Well if it had, I'd probably be in a different line of work and you wouldn't be reading this. At best we can say that there are many indications that the selling process has not kept pace with the purchasing process. And who we spend our time selling to, is one of those indications.

When we are selling to today's organizations, we must make the commitment and take the time to fully understand this network of decision makers. We need to know who is likely to be involved in the evaluation and investment process. It's a fool's game to try and short-cut this process and attempts to do so will usually backfire and cause delays in the sales cycle. It is not difficult to imagine a CEO when presented with a proposal for perhaps a new software application or new shop-floor equipment. They are very likely to say such things as, "Is John in Manufacturing on side with this, what did Mary in Production say, how about Peter in HR, and Pat in Finance?" If any of these people who have a vested interest in the purchase have not been involved and have not been advised and helped with their part of the decision, your sales efforts are guaranteed to be stalled - at best and, at worst, probably finished.

When selling today, lose the notion of the mythical single decision maker – odds are there isn't one - and understand the network of mini-decision makers. They would probably like to talk to you.

From Martyn Lewis' upcoming book "Sales Wise - an anthology of selling stories, follies, and fables", each with a *relevant* and *timely* sales message. If you wish to be notified of publication date please email us at saleswise@market-partners.com