

InBoxing: Selling into the Healthcare Market – Out with the old and in with the new?



“The organizations that continue to embrace the sales machine model are watching margins fall as their solutions are commoditized and their best sales professionals seek different environments. As knowledge-work leaders know, the key to success, in the simplest terms, is to hire the best employees, create an empowering environment, provide the necessary tools and guidance, and then get out of the way.” - Brent Adamson | Principal Executive Advisor at CEB and author of [The Challenger Customer](#) and [The Challenger Sale](#).

About a year ago, my good friend Todd Shannon sent me an article from the Harvard Business Review titled “[Dismantling the Sales Machine](#).” Expertly written by Brent Adamson, Matthew Dixon, and Nicholas Toman, this piece really affected me. Having been in the healthcare sales arena since 2005, I

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had felt for several years that a new era of ‘sales’ had begun – yet the majority of companies and individuals participating in this enterprise had not recognized it. Despite the original publication of this article in November of 2013, I feel that the content and ultimate message about the “Sales Machine” are as relevant today. Rather than simply authoring my personal feelings on this matter, I reached out to a number of sales professionals that I know to be top performers for their interpretations and reactions.

Steve Yeatts, Jason Lewallen, and Todd Shannon have shared their perspectives, and I thank them for their time and intuition.



Steve Yeatts: The “old school” days of a rather linear sales process from the front desk directly through the various layers of protocol to the decision maker have fallen by the wayside. The new world order is more about connection, collaboration, and communication by any (reasonable) means necessary to get to the key decision influencers who can get you to the key decision makers. It’s the Gladwellian principle: it is less important who I know directly than it is who I can get in front of through the contacts of others. It is the connector concept, a six degrees of Kevin Bacon type of approach to improve the timing of your sales cycle and the depth of your networks going forward. A wise sales person in this era will take the time to do their due diligence to connect the dots in as few moves as possible to get to decision makers.

For those who will separate themselves from the pack of competitors fighting for the same space, they need to realize that the H2H model (human to human) is also a key differentiator. Despite our

increased technological connections via social media and the continuous loop of information swirling around us, humans are perhaps less emotionally connected than ever before. A savvy sales leader will recognize that that the “no emotion = no sale” axiom is still hugely important, whether we are face-to-face, ear-to-ear or click-to-click. At the end of the day, customers want the sales people who call on them to be consultative, emotionally connected, genuinely grateful to serve them, and to bring expert-level value with a high degree of positive energy.

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Todd Shannon: My personal belief on modern day selling is that sales should be thought of as simply a ‘convening’ arm for the business, whose primary job is to go out and find customers in the marketplace that can utilize the value that your products and services provide over an extended period of time. It’s not about grabbing as many customers and as much revenue as you can; it’s about finding the ‘right customers’ to partner with, who have similarly aligned goals and priorities so that you can both be successful and effective long-term.

It’s been my personal experience that when sales professionals think about ‘finding the right customers’ and the ‘long-term value of the partnership’, they take into consideration many new factors before bringing on a new client. For example:

- What is this customer really trying to accomplish?
- What is their culture like and can we work together?
- How far up/down the learning curve are they and what supporting tools and resources could help improve the odds of a great outcome?
- Are they ready and willing to lead through good/bad times?
- If/when we're successful, to what scale can this grow?
- (Maybe most importantly) Is this partnership a good use of our company's resources and time?

"...it's about finding the 'right customers' to partner with, who have similarly aligned goals and priorities so that you can both be successful and effective long-term." - Shannon

This mode of thinking and long-term sales philosophy then often creates a synergy between your customers and the organization; where your customers then turn into some of your best sales people. It is what [Ken Blanchard & Sheldon Bowles](#) call "raving fans". In my opinion, this becomes the [holy grail](#) for any company that I want to work for and I think it should be the goal for sales professionals and leaders as well.



Jason Lewallen: Selling has changed. Back in 2001, a statistic was released claiming that 70% of all sales were made to solve a problem. Fifteen years have passed and I still see the statistic sited on websites and presentations, as though it is still relevant. The current reality is that we have a well-informed client base. They have experience with products that at least attempt to provide the advantages that we do. That can be a bad thing for a sales representative who will close at any cost, but for most of

us,
that creates a buyer who has an idea of what they want.

That is where insight selling really comes into play. From what we know about our prospect's process, and by what we've learned from working in and with that industry, we are able to present solutions to problems they don't even realize there is a solution for. How it differs from the classic *solution selling* is that one size doesn't fit every problem. An enhancement that our team develops may change the way you approach a situation and lead to increased top line revenue. It doesn't mean that our clients have just one problem that we can solve. It means that when they spend time with us, they

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leave feeling like we provided them with information of value, even if they aren't in the position to buy.

The interesting thing in the "Dismantling the Sales Machine" article that really hit home with me was the idea that sales professionals are happier in an insight selling roll. That is right on so many levels! I have only met a handful of people in this entire industry that don't care whether their clients succeed. There is a huge emotional payoff for selling into a market where what you offer is needed...where you are able to help your clients become more successful. A great salesperson will embrace the positive change they can offer. It doesn't matter if you sell software or circular saws; the sense of purpose a sales professional gets from delivering great service and helping their clients achieve their goals is what makes them a valuable asset to any team.

Editorial Conclusion: Regardless of the tactics employed in this new selling model, a new strategy must be employed by sales leaders and professionals to truly be successful in today's commoditized environment. Healthcare providers are not purchasing their first EMR solution, nor signing their first DME agreement. These are veteran purchasers of technology and services - and most have the scars of broken promises and ROI hyperbole. That is why trying to leverage your company's value proposition better have slam-dunk empirical data that can be verified by your customer base. Said another way, unless your organization has the best product/solution/service, then a fresh and disruptive approach is required in order to hit that number. Whether it be Steve's three C's (just making sure you were paying attention), Todd's business version of eHarmony.com, or Jason's Insight Selling – get your sales professionals thinking and behaving differently than before. That Sales Machine is already obsolete, you just don't know it yet.

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The logo for Curaport, featuring the word "curaport" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The "c" is red, "u" is yellow, "r" is red, "a" is red, "p" is red, "o" is red, and "r" is red. The text is enclosed in a thin red rectangular border.