

2021 SALES SKILLS

With a major switch to selling online in 2020, management, sales and marketing need to adapt accordingly. Dorinda Gibbons offers guidance on how to survive and prosper in the world of e-commerce



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For many in the printing industry 2020 was the most difficult year. Huge areas of business dramatically reduced their requirements. 2021 is a year to rebuild, but for a very different world, and how you sell probably has to change.

What changes do you need to make to the skills of your sales team in order for your company to survive and prosper in this new online selling world? The question is relevant if you are a printer, PSP or supplier; meaningful if you are selling print, omni-channel services, consumables, inks, components, software or even expensive hardware.

PIVOTING TO ONLINE SALES

With travel discouraged in your local area, country or internationally for obvious reasons, the major switch to selling online has already started. This is not a minor change, and for some printers and companies it is a massive change in direction and therefore skill requirements or management, as well as sales and marketing urgently need to change.

Although face-to-face selling will still happen, the norm and majority of sales will start through online contacts, presentations, demonstrations and some will be completed this way. Even for £1m digital presses, although this is obviously more difficult than selling web-to-print software online, or print itself. Many companies have already found that producing videos that show their value are well received.

NEW SKILLS

Changing the skills of existing sales teams, the way they sell, and giving them new skills does not happen quickly and for many companies the sales team changes need to be made almost overnight. Also, the mindset of the management must change first, if the selling strategy, methods and practices are to work.

Three examples and ideas that could be useful for 2021 are: 'Millennials/Centennials

"Sales management skills and capabilities have to be far more open, empathetic and far less micro-managing"

team selling; EFI/OEM model and inkjet press manufacturer. In all three models, particularly as part or all of the team could be remote or working from home, the skills and capabilities of the sales management have to be much higher than in the past – far more open, empathetic and far less micro managing. Many of the best sales team people are very creative.

MULTILINGUAL TEAMS

All of the previous examples need a sales manager who is very experienced at managing remote teams, maybe across different countries and continents. Languages, and a first-hand experience of getting the best from different cultures are vital. As this role is far more important than yesterday's sales management – many of whom are just process chasers and micro managers – this requires an individual who instinctively coaches and mentors in a very subtle manner.

The need for sales professionals who are multilingual is more important than ever. We are blessed in the UK and USA that everyone can speak English but if you have languages in your team you are ahead of the competition, you can offer your clients the choice to speak in their own language, which can really add value.

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There are a few options: recruit home-based sales professionals based in Europe, particularly in Central Europe/Benelux, where speaking three languages is very common.

Or grow your own multilingual team, hiring graduates from colleges or salespeople with a few years' experience; intelligent IT-literate excellent communicators, driven to succeed. Hire people who speak two or more languages, both written and spoken.

MILLENNIALS AND CENTENNIALS

Millennials/Centennials team selling for 2021 could be the ideal new model, but perhaps the most difficult to achieve. Having been through many technology waves in print, these often require a completely new sales team or where the majority are new.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the management of many of the sales workshops that we held asked us to assess their sales

people and their ability to change or sell new products to new markets and sectors. Although we had to tread carefully when assessing and answering these requests, as a rule most of the people who attended our sales workshops would not have been employed by us if we were the sales managers.

These new groups should be teams of individuals that are used to collaboration, and by definition this probably means Centennials or Millennials. They could be marketers who know how to sell, and they may be unconventional, but highly effective. They could be described as learners, collaborators, tech and social media savvy, and curious as hell. They should quickly become 'sales astronauts'.

The roles or positions that I anticipate will be needed, or are already needed and used by many are:

- **Finder:** Not dissimilar to the "old telephone" sales roles, but using all the technology and social media knowledge and skills that a Gen Z/Centennial or Millennials/Gen Y have to find and communicate with potential prospects. LinkedIn success, knowledge and capabilities are vital, but not just them.
- **Builder:** From the list of potential leads build a profile of each prospect.
- **Challenger:** Possibly the first person from the team to talk directly with the prospect; someone that is skilled and practised in challenging prospects to make sure they really are going to purchase and are not going to waste time.
- **Definer:** Define in detail the different possible pitches.



Profile Recruitment operates across the UK, Europe and USA

- **Closer:** Practise the potential close with the team before going back to the customer with an offer.
- **Deliverer:** Pulls together all the contacts, social media, phone, Zoom etc. so that a complete picture of the customer's exact expectations are known before delivery. Any anomalies should be discussed with the customer prior to delivery.

Centennials and Millennials have inbuilt inherent skillsets that most of the rest of us have had to learn or relearn many times. As an industry we have to make 17 to 30-year-olds aware of the opportunities and be more proactive in enticing them into the printing business.

EFI'S METHOD

Many in the industry think of the company EFI from a technology angle. What was obvious to those who joined was that the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) relationships were just as important as the technology. In the early and mid 90s, EFI hired a team of sales people mainly in their 20s with relatively little industry knowledge or selling skills, and a small number of more experienced individuals, of which I was one. The collaboration between these teams within countries, across Europe and the US made it very difficult to out-manoeuvre and out-sell them. In less than a decade, and for the first decade they achieved a highly profitable \$600m revenue stream for EFI with 600 people.

ADVISING AN INKJET MANUFACTURER

Two and half years ago, one of the consultancy projects I worked on was for an inkjet press manufacturer. They asked me to advise them on hiring, motivating, sustaining and leading a new digital sales team. Although this was in 2018, they were already thinking along the right guidelines, as they had concluded that they needed a small global sales force of about 12 people.

The world has changed. Get your best people together and decide how you need to adapt to the change, and maybe even include someone who has business and print experience but no direct involvement in your company to advise. ■

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