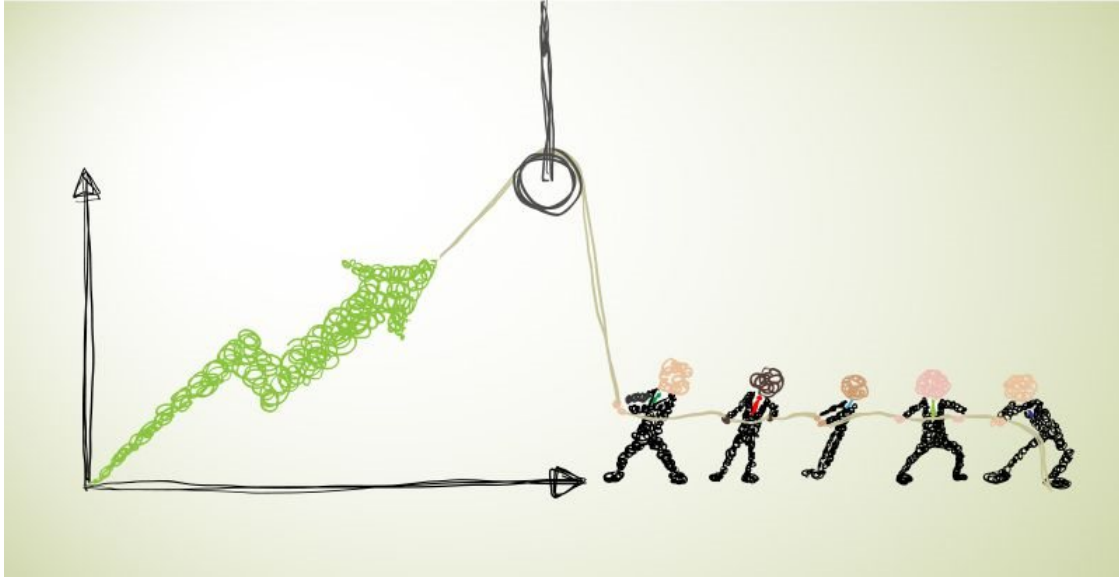


Sales is everyone's business

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Is sales a job title or the result of an engaged workplace culture? With the right strategy and support, is it possible to turn every employee into a member of your sales team? That depends...



Every business needs sales to grow but do they need more sales people or new sales channels to achieve that goal? What if they spent less money on new sales channels and more time engaging an existing one, its employees.

Sales numbers or brand value?

Maybe a better place to start is how we define sales. Is it the number of products and services you sell or is it the brand value being sold to your customers and future employees? The distinction is important. If we think of sales in its most basic form – the total value of products and services sold – then we're likely to view who and how we sell it in an equally narrow light. Sales and marketing. Done. But if we view sales as any action that adds value to the brand in the eyes of the market, its customers, and future employees, then we'll naturally value and nurture the one area of the business that can have a positive impact on all three – your employees.

Here's a quick example. A few years back there was a story about a Trader Joe employee that went viral on Reddit. As media legend had it, an employee of the popular American supermarket chain went above-and-beyond the call of duty by delivering one of their orders to an elderly WWII vet who was snowed in. The store doesn't do home deliveries but clearly they do train or empower their employees to take initiative, think on their feet and maybe even just care about their customers a little. Or at least that's the idea the story was selling to its readers. And that has value – brand, social and cultural. It all adds up to a brand that people want to buy from and work for.

Your employees are already influencing your brand value

Employees are a brand's best marketers, salespeople and customer relationship managers. Even if they're not selling your products, they are selling your brand, to their friends and your customers. Each one can be your best salesperson. Or your worst. The difference lies not in what role they play in your business, or even what role you think they play in the sales process, but in their level of engagement with your brand.

With the rise of social media, the lines between sales, marketing and influence are increasingly blurred. Customers are

employees are customers are employees. Surveys have shown that when employees share a brand's social media posts, they have much greater reach and land with more authenticity than the same posts shared by the company's pages. Hard sales happen in office hours and can be controlled and accounted for. Soft sales, in the form of brand influencing, happens 24/7, and mostly outside the workplace, where business has no control. What you can control is how you engage your employees at work to ensure that the story they are selling about your brand is positive, consistent and of benefit to your bottom line.

Five ways to bring your employees into the broader sales process

1. Give credit where credit is due

Be honest with your employees about the potential influence and impact they have on your brand. Use your internal communications channels to help them understand that they are an integral part of the brand story and how it gets told and sold externally. And then make sure they feel rewarded for this role. Because, let's face it, people will always recognise what's rewarded. When companies only incentivise sales, they miss out on a huge opportunity to turn every employee into a brand salesperson. So, consider creating ambassadorship rewards for employees who go above and beyond their expected duties. It will go a long way to building pride, ownership and responsibility among employees.

2. Create channels for feedback

Your employees have their ear to the ground. They know what their friends, your customers and social media are saying about your brand. This is valuable information. And make no mistake, if they're not sharing it with you, they are sharing it with someone out there that you can't engage with. So why not be proactive and use your internal comms team to create a safe platform for employees to share feedback on a regular basis, and in a way that makes them feel valued and rewarded for their effort. And please, make sure you have a mechanism in place to integrate that feedback back into the business.

3. Empower social media advocacy

Your employees are active on social media. So instead of wondering what they're saying or sharing about your brand, create a social media policy that brings them into the process. This policy should give them a clear understanding of your company's goals and how to interact with both positive and negative feedback about your brand. Provide a list of dos and don'ts, and make sure the guidelines are clear. You could start small; with a select group of employees your internal comms team has identified as active social media users with a good range of influence. But do take it companywide at some point and also consider introducing a social media advocacy platform to enable this. It's less about creating influencers and more about growing a brand salesperson mentality throughout the entire company.

4. Influence the message

Once you acknowledge that your employees are talking about your brand, you can get down to the real business of "influencing" the message. Or rather, making it easier for employees who want to "sell" your brand to offer up a consistent and positive message the next time they get stuck in an elevator with a stranger. Yes, you know that "elevator pitch" you usually reserve for new business and clients, it's time to refine and repurpose it for your employees. The message is clear: help your employees help your brand.

5. Give them something to talk about

Here's a novel idea – make your business and workplace culture worth talking about. Want your passionate employees to attract more passionate employees and customers? Then give them a reason to. Want your employees to buy your products and encourage their friends to do the same, make sure your products are worth buying. Be bold. Be authentic. Stand up for good causes and out for good reasons. Like TED, make your ideas and brand worth sharing.

Changing your workforce into a sales force will take time, and a combination of educational support and rewards

programmes, all built into and around a strong internal communications strategy. Start small but think big, because every employee you engage and activate has the potential to add value to your brand and bottom line. And that's invaluable.

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