LinkedIn

LINKEDIN'S DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO

SELLING TO MULTIPLE DECISION-MAKERS

INTRODUCTION

I've had the opportunity to talk to a number of business leaders — ranging from small businesses to global enterprise companies to subject matter experts — using social media to effectively grow their businesses. Throughout my conversations with them, one worrying theme has emerged: They vastly overestimate how well-connected their sales teams are with their client organizations. Not just by a little, but by a lot — and this puts them at risk of revenue loss.

This gap between perception and reality should worry sales leaders deeply. Think about what would happen if your most successful salesperson left your organization, or your most vocal sponsor at your biggest client changed roles or left the company. How would that change your relationship with that client, and how would it affect your business?

How well-connected you are with your clients will have a direct impact on your ability to hit your targets. Relying on one connection puts your business at risk of losing revenue if anything happens to that connection.

There's good news: This risk can be avoided if you take a new approach to making connections, one focused on forming multiple relationships at each client company to create a strong network of ties to the organization.

In this guide, you'll learn everything you need to know about selling into multiple lines of businesses. After reading it, you'll have a much deeper understanding of what it is, why your business needs it, and how to develop your own matrixed sales approach for driving real results.

Let's get started, shall we?

Alex Hisaka
Head of Global Content
LinkedIn Sales Solutions

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

CHAPTER 1:
MORE COMPLEXITY, MORE CHURN 4

ASK THE EXPERT 8
Kae Kronthaler-Williams, Qvidian
Fady Daher, American Express
Morgan Jones, Televerde Europe

CHAPTER 2:
BREAKING FREE OF THE ONE-RELATIONSHIP HABIT 11

ASK THE EXPERT 15
Robert Knop, Assist You Today
Fabian Au, IBM Digital Group
Paul Lewis, Pitney Bowes

CHAPTER 3:
USING LINKEDIN TO CONNECT WITH MULTIPLE DECISION-MAKERS 18

ASK THE EXPERT 22
Gabe Villamizar, Lucid Software Inc.
Wendy (McEwan) Hogan, Oracle
Xavier Monty, Talentsoft

CASE STUDIES 25
HCL Technologies
NewVoiceMedia
PGi

CONCLUSION 29

MORE COMPLEXITY, MORE CHURN

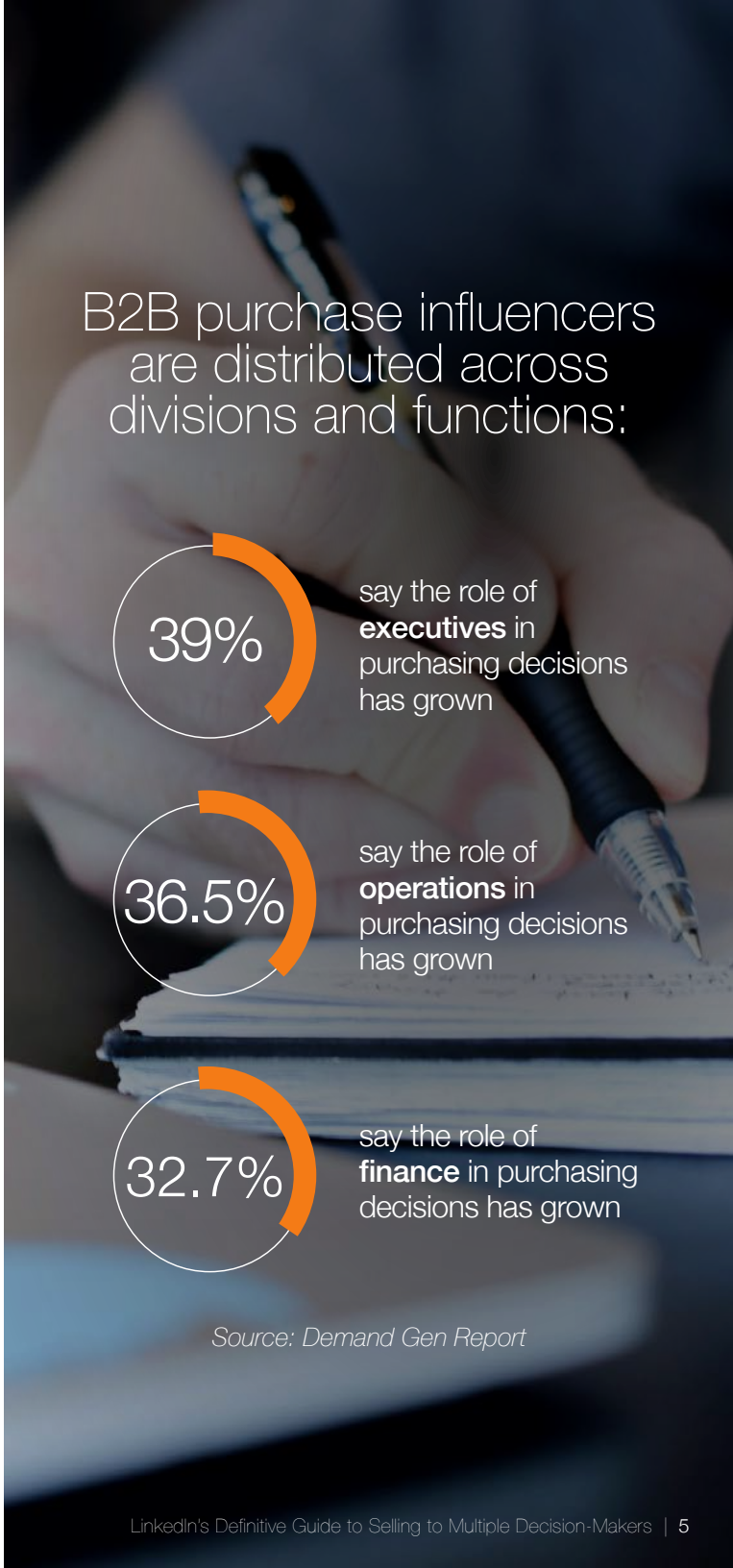
MORE COMPLEXITY, MORE CHURN

It's natural for a salesperson to gravitate toward a single contact person at a client company as the sales process progresses. You've spent a great deal of time together, and the conversations have probably included a few anecdotes about the people you know and where you went to school. Over time, you discover that you have several things in common and develop a personal relationship.

However, there are several people of influence involved in a typical B2B purchase. In fact, **there is an average of 6.8 people involved in each B2B purchase decision,** according to CEB — up from 5.4 in its previous research. That growth trend is reinforced by the *2016 B2B Buyer's Survey Report* from Demand Gen Report, which found that more than one-third (39%) of B2B buyers say the number of team members involved in the purchase process increased in the past year; 6% say it increased significantly. In addition, the bigger the sale, the more people have input. **Purchases of $500,000 and up typically involve five or more buying centers and six to 10 colleagues** — sometimes more, according to SiriusDecisions' *2015 B-to-B Buying Study.*

Purchasing Decisions Are Cross-Functional

Not only are there more decision-makers than ever before; they're also more diverse. Driven by a decentralization of organizational structures, the people who influence a purchase are likely to be distributed across divisions, functional areas and even regions of the world. For example, C-level executives, line of business owners and business managers all often play a role. In Demand Gen Report's *2016 B2B Buyer's Survey Report,* **nearly 40% of buyers say the role of executives in purchasing decisions has increased,** more than one-third (37%) say the role of operations has increased, and nearly one-third (33%) say the role of finance has increased.



MORE COMPLEXITY, MORE CHURN

Don't Underestimate the Role of Influencers

In addition to the actual decision-makers, there are hidden "influencers" on purchasing whose interests and goals may be less than transparent to sales reps — that is, if reps even know who they are. "There is a shadow of decision influencers behind the decision-maker. Those in the shadows always impact whether a large deal will be awarded to you or a competitor — or whether the status quo will be kept in place. They are not decision-makers. They can't say 'Yes.' [But they] have the power to resist or delay your proposal," writes TOPO analyst Tom Searcy in *Sales Management Digest.* Failing to build strong ties to even one of these decision-makers or influencers could result in the collapse of important deals and, ultimately, in revenue loss for your organization.

Turnover Is Accelerating for Decision-Makers

Turnover is another factor in the growing complexity and urgency of the sales process. The length of time an individual typically spends in a role is shrinking across industries. According to LinkedIn data, **1 in 5 decision-makers (defined as those in "director-level-and-above" roles) turns over every year,** and average tenure for the executive-level team members is two-and-a-half years. When your organization is selling multiyear relationships and the sales cycle is 12 months, 18 months or longer, the risk that a crucial contact will move on before you can close the sale is very real.

B2B Sales Cycles Are Expanding

At the same time that individual tenure is shrinking, the B2B sales cycle is lengthening as companies spend more time debating purchasing decisions. Smaller budgets, increased scrutiny by senior-level executives and the need to justify spending make proving ROI more important than ever. According to Demand Gen Report's *2016 B2B Buyer's Survey*, **more than 6 in 10 B2B buyers say they have started conducting more detailed ROI analyses before making a purchase.** Eighty percent say they spend more time researching purchases than they did the previous year, and 73% say they use more sources to conduct research and evaluate their options.

Client Churn Threatens Business Relationships

Even after the sale is closed, what happens if your key contact in the client company leaves or moves to another position in the organization? His or her replacement may have relationships with your competitors, or seek change for its own sake. In SiriusDecision's research, **more than 4 in 10 (42%) of B2B customers say they're unsure about renewing with current vendors.** No matter how long-standing your relationship, if you no longer have a contact at the client company willing to advocate for your business, the account could be in jeopardy — and you could find yourself rapidly writing down your next forecast amid risk of revenue loss.

And that's just the churn on the client side.

MORE COMPLEXITY, MORE CHURN

Turnover for sales reps is nearly 1 in 4 per year, according to CSO Insights' *2015 Sales Productivity Optimization Study*, and turnover rates are on a growth trajectory, rising by 35% since 2014. In the *Inside Sales for SaaS* report by Bridge Group, **12% of B2B companies report that sales rep turnover is an astounding 55% annually.** The smaller your organization's sales team, the greater impact this type of turnover has on your ability to close sales. For a small company, with a modest-sized or even one-person sales team, your full sales function could turn over in the course of 12 months. If losing a sales rep costs you his or her contacts at client companies, your organization could face major revenue loss.

Current Sales Strategies Demand Matrixed Relationships

As account-based marketing takes hold at many organizations — **80% currently have a strategy or plan to develop one in the next 18 months,** according to Demand Gen Report's *2016 ABM Benchmark Survey Report* — forming multiple relationships at a client company becomes more valuable. "Simply focusing on accounts, rather than the people and the roles they serve as part of the account, runs the risk of being generic with your message," writes Carlos Hidalgos, CEO of Annuitas in his "Shiny Objects, Demand Generation and ABM" blog post. Connecting with more than one person allows you to tailor your approach not just to the account, but also to each individual.

Yet the vast majority of sales teams are lagging behind when it comes to developing multiple relationships with customers. For instance, **in North America, just 9% of sales reps' relationships are matrixed, and 65% of customer relationships rely solely on one contact,** according to LinkedIn data.

Added together, **these factors could lead to revenue loss of up to 40% for your company.** As B2B sales become increasingly complex, and churn among both sales and client teams grows, companies who might have once relied on the one-to-one relationship between their salesperson and a specific contact at a client organization are rapidly discovering that their strategy is no longer viable. It's time for organizations of all sizes to adopt a new way of thinking about their client relationships.

ASK THE EXPERT:

KAE KRONTHALER-WILLIAMS

Vice President, Marketing | Qvidian

LI: With more people involved in the buying process than ever before, what challenges have emerged for Qvidian's sales teams with this increased complexity?

KK-W: As more departments are now involved in the buying process, keeping track of relevant contacts and proactively finding new ones to engage with has become more complex. By opening the lines of communication and knowing the right questions to ask, the Qvidian team is able to cope and thrive despite this added complexity.

Qvidian uses the "challenger methodology" to engage with prospects during the buying process — meaning Qvidian sales representatives are extremely knowledgeable about the prospect's business and industry. It's important to have the right information at hand when dealing with prospective new clients to understand their pain points and how Qvidian is best able to assist.

Social media channels, specifically LinkedIn, are also important in locating the right people within departments that might not necessarily be present during initial conversations. With the use of LinkedIn's Sales Navigator tool, it is easy to search for potential new contacts and take initial discussions to the next level.

LI: How do changes in internal and client roles impact the way Qvidian finds and engages with target buyers and influencers?

KK-W: Turnover within a client organization can be a major obstacle. To combat this, it's important to be proactive and identify a group of key decision-makers early on in the buying process. Building a strong relationship with one decision-maker is important, but knowing additional staff that contribute to the process is important should the original contact leave.

LI: How have your processes changed as a result of these trends?

KK-W: In the past, the Qvidian team would be in touch with one or two contacts at the client organization throughout the buying process. Now it is vital to communicate with multiple individuals at the organization.

Qvidian attended the LinkedIn Sales Connect [conference] in NY … which reinforced the benefits of "multithreading" within a prospect account. The LinkedIn Sales Navigator tool enables the Qvidian team to find the right contacts at an organization, while also staying informed about company and organizational changes.

LI: Are there any other trends that have influenced your strategies?

KK-W: Account-based marketing and advocacy marketing have really been around for a long time. The change is in the automation of marketing and what data insights it offers. Now, sales and marketing organizations have greater information on the buying behavior of their clients and prospects. Sales and marketing teams work together to build very targeted account plans that result in deeper relationships with the customers and expansion opportunities within the account.

ASK THE EXPERT:

FADY DAHER

Vice President, Global Commercial Payments | American Express

LI: What are the business trends you have seen surface in Australia that have created a more complex selling process?

FD: There is definitely an increasing amount of cross-border trade and international trade transactions occurring. In the B2B space, we're seeing an increasing requirement for lending and cash flow, and opportunities to improve cash flow, which is different to the traditional corporate payment environment.

You now have to deal with the traditional and the emerging trends, which also means different contacts within an organization. Historically, we may have dealt only with procurement. Now we deal with procurement, treasury and finance teams, so you're dealing with various aspects of an organization.

As the needs multiply, it means you can't have a one standard or one-size-fits-all approach. You need to start to improve your customization.

LI: How have new marketing strategies contributed to the complexity in your business as it relates to the sales team?

FD: We're leveraging data to better understand our clients, and to better understand the patterns that are occurring, so that when we feed information through to the customer, it is increasingly relevant, and not just customers, but also prospects. If we're feeding information to a prospect, it's not just this standard mail that goes out to everybody, hoping that we get a 1% response rate. It is now a lot more specific and targeted and relevant, so that our response rates go from 1% to 10%.

LI: Which tools and processes have you implemented?

FD: We have one consistent CRM that's used across all teams: Salesforce. We're capturing the customer-related data consistently, and we're very specific about what fields need to be updated.

LinkedIn Sales Navigator is our primary preference. We've made an effort to ensure not only do each of the functions within our business in Australia have it, but also globally. You've got cross-border relationships, and so, if we know that in Singapore or in Hong Kong or in London we have a relationship with someone who's quite important to making a decision, we know that we can go through our…colleague internally to help open a door and start a conversation.

The importance of building relationships, the importance of building trust is evident and will always be there. When you build multiple relationships…it allows you to build trust quicker and ensures that everyone's on the same page.

ASK THE EXPERT:

MORGAN JONES

General Manager | Televerde Europe

LI: How has the implementation of new marketing strategies heightened the need to engage beyond a single relationship? Have you embraced these tactics within your company and, if so, how has it impacted engagement and relationships?

MJ: We have been using a strategic account-based marketing approach with some of our clients. We've recently implemented ABM globally, leveraging our account reps across time zones and adjusting to the unique needs and positioning of the European marketplace.

Social selling is another strategy we've been using to engage with prospects globally. By utilizing a platform like LinkedIn, we're able to quickly identify target accounts in specific industries with specific titles and functions, and establish a common connection to foster conversations.

LI: Are there any implications of stricter data privacy regulations in Europe, such as a greater need for building relationships beyond email, or retaining multiple and deeper account relationships?

MJ: The stricter data privacy regulations have had the biggest impact on our go-to-market plans and campaigns, which are dependent upon both inbound and outbound outreach. We utilize social channels and events to reach targeted prospects in countries with highly regulated email and phone restrictions. Securing opt-ins across all touch points is a key strategy.

LI: How have shifts in the economy in certain EMEA geographies impacted business and your sales approach? How have these shifts influenced or guided the way you and your team build and manage relationships with prospects and clients?

MJ: Digging into the nuances of each country and understanding each market and their economies is the key. We use segmentation tactics to focus on the industries specific to each country to help home in on potential [prospects]. The largest economies in Europe (Germany, UK and France) are forecast to grow at a rate of 1% to 2%. Ireland, Poland, Romania and Slovakia are forecast to grow at a rate above 3%, and the others are in the middle. We use this type of data to help understand how we should staff our team appropriately, as well as prioritize our market opportunities.

LI: Are there any other trends specific to your region that pose risks and impact revenue results?

MJ: Brexit remains an unknown. Its greatest risk is stalling growth plans in the UK because of economic uncertainties. Political changes in the US and how Europe will work with the new administration creates more uncertainty. Attracting multinationals and multilingual talent is very important to Televerde, so we are watching Brexit closely.

LI: What processes have you implemented to assure your direct and inside sales teams adapt to these changes in their day-to-day activities?

MJ: We train our teams using our proprietary Global Campaign Excellence model and our Call Performance Mastery program. The Global Campaign Excellence model combines 20 years of knowledge and experience generating demand and accelerating sales for our clients, along with industry best practices. Our Call Performance Mastery program ensures every agent receives weeks of training and development, along with certification levels — unprecedented for the industry. We are continually modifying campaign and data intelligence-gathering processes to ensure we are in compliance.

BREAKING FREE OF THE ONE-RELATIONSHIP HABIT

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Today's salespeople must develop strategies to ensure that they are interacting with everyone in the client organization who has a stake in the purchase. So how can you go from point-to-point to more matrixed relationships?

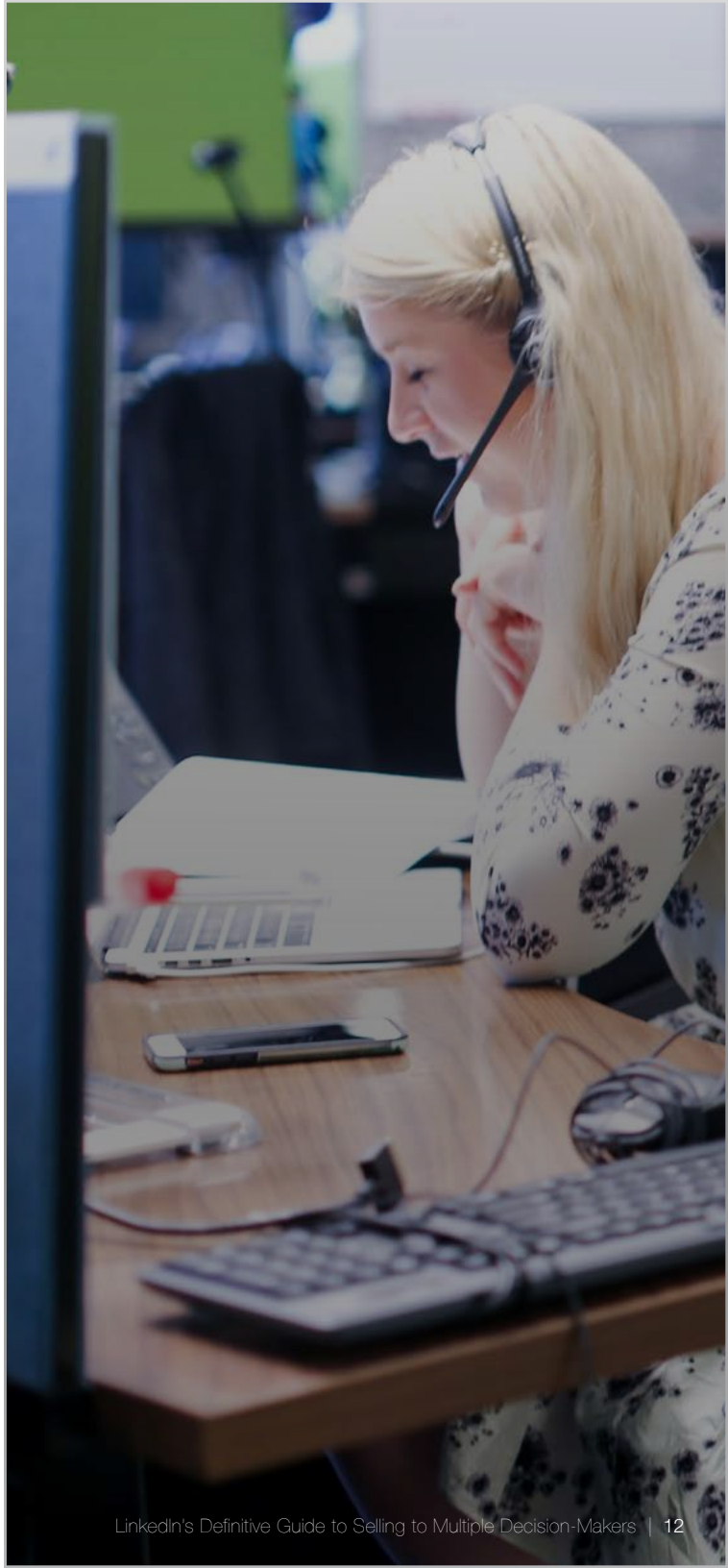
Start by instilling in your sales team the mindset that for each and every relationship managed by sales, you must establish multiple connections at a target company. This approach is critical to ensure that the deal progresses even if one contact leaves the client organization or changes roles.

Then, take these four steps:

Step 1: Use social media to identify decision-makers and influencers

According to the *2016 ABM Benchmark Survey Report*, **94% of companies using account-based marketing would like to identify target roles and titles at client companies,** 89% want to add richer information on existing contacts, and 87% seek to add intelligence and insights on key contacts. Social media can help you deepen connections in order to accomplish many of these goals. Developing a web of connections at a company gives you a fuller picture of the client's needs and makes it easier to deliver personalized, targeted content.

The more connections you make at a company, and the more you interact with them on social media, the more fully you'll understand how the various decision-makers and influencers work together. "[Sellers] need to go beyond just understanding how customers interact with them, to gaining a thorough understanding of how they work, what is important to them and how they interact with each other," notes Brent Adamson of CEB. Building relationships through social media helps you learn who the managers are within an organization, who can say "yes" and who can say "no." You'll also discover who can help make the deal bigger by advocating for your business within the organization.



Step 2: Help customers cut through the noise

As buyers turn to social networks to exchange information, seek counsel and provide advice, social media has become a major influence on B2B sales. In a 2015 Blanc & Otus and G2 Crowd survey of B2B technology buyers, social networks, **blogs and text messaging accounted for 75% of how those buyers share information.**

However, the sheer volume of content available online can overwhelm buyers and paralyze decision-making. Sorting through all the data takes time: **In a survey conducted by CEB, 84% of respondents said their buying cycle** was longer than projected in their initial estimates. In fact, the average purchase took almost *twice as long* as originally expected.

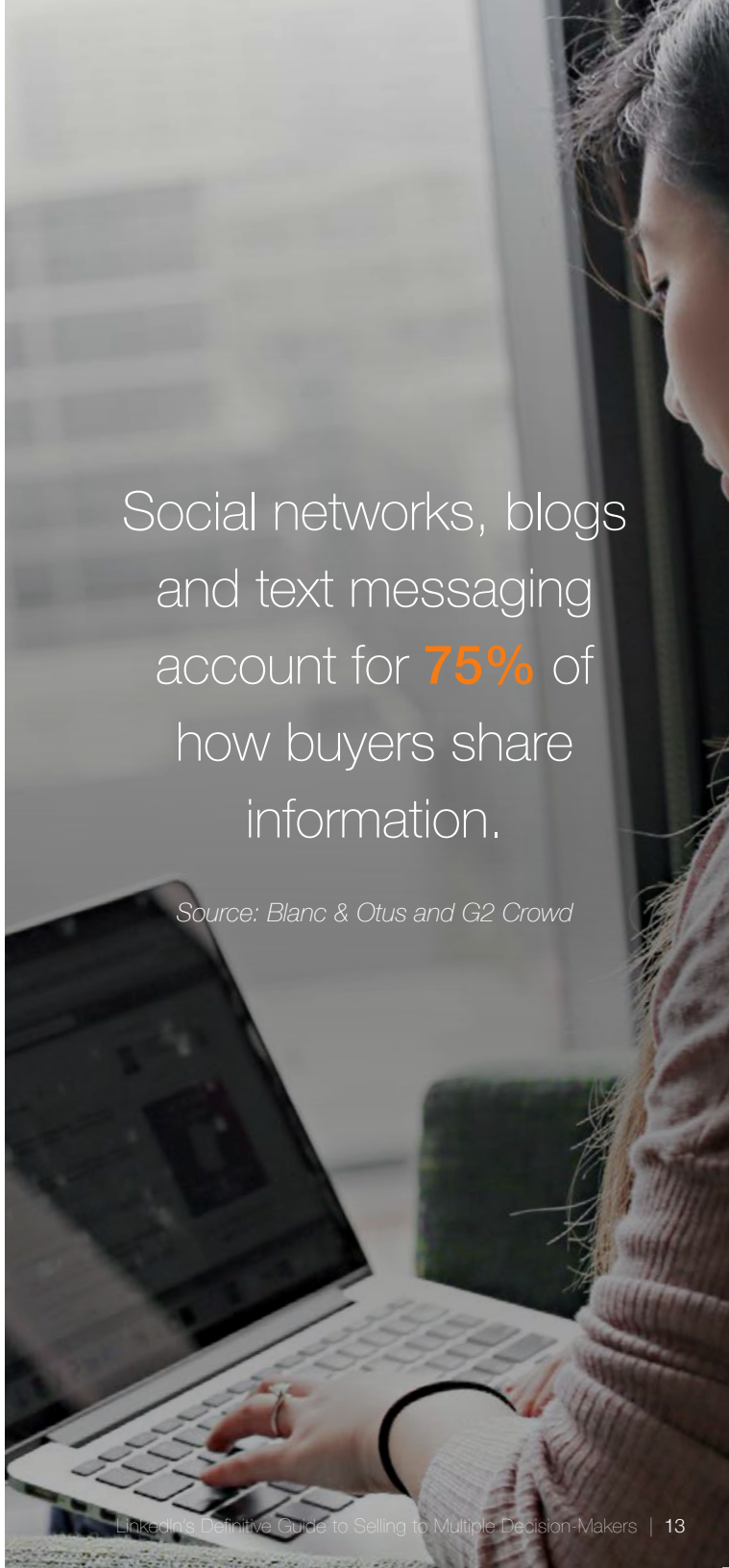
Speed the sale along by helping buyers cut through the noise. Go beyond the value your product or service offers; add value during the research stage by providing information tailored to the needs of your matrixed connections. Getting the right information to the right person at the right time is critical to moving the sale along the pipeline. A recent Demand Gen Report survey found that **nearly two-thirds (65%) of buyers say the winning vendor's choices about how and when to contact them influence the buying decision.**

By keeping you abreast of multiple contacts' interests, concerns or questions, social media can alert you when the time is right to reach out to prospects with useful content, jump on a call to answer questions or suggest a face-to-face meeting.

Step 3: Help buying teams build consensus

Even when B2B buyers *want* to buy from you, it's not always easy for them to do so. With a growing number of stakeholders involved in purchasing, internal disconnects between individuals, departments and functions often delay the purchasing process or derail it entirely. Don't count on one contact to make it work: CEB reports that **51% of customers who might be willing to buy from a supplier aren't willing to advocate for the supplier internally to help get the deal done.**

If they can't reach consensus, frustrated buyers may choose the path of least resistance — either sticking with their current vendor or buying the lowest-cost (read: lowest-risk) solution available — not necessarily the best one. Even if they purchase from you, buying a less-than-ideal solution could backfire: Customers who end up regretting a purchase are 53% more likely to advocate against that supplier in the future, CEB research shows.



BREAKING FREE OF THE ONE-RELATIONSHIP HABIT

By developing relationships with multiple decision-makers, you can provide the information each person needs to help the group reach an agreement. “The most successful sales organizations work to identify and overcome the points of disconnect among those stakeholders, connecting these stakeholders to one another and driving them toward consensus,” according to CEB. When you help buying teams reach consensus, you make it easier for customers to buy from you — and CEB data shows **organizations that make buying easier are 62% more likely to convert high-quality sales.**

Step 4: Add value — for the customer and for your business

Building matrixed relationships isn’t just a way to defend against risk of revenue loss. It can also be a hugely powerful tool for business growth and revenue enhancements. The more contacts you have at a company, the more chances you have to spot new ways you can add value to the organization. When any of your contacts move to new roles, departments or regions within the organization, seize the opportunity to explore additional ways your business can serve them.

As you cross-sell and upsell that customer, you exponentially increase the customer lifetime value. It’s a cost-effective, resource-lite approach to boosting sales.

What about when your contact leaves a company and moves to a new role at a new company? If you’ve successfully cultivated a web of relationships at the client company, you don’t have to worry about losing contact with the organization. Instead, you gain a potential new client as you and your colleagues reach out to find additional connections at your contact’s new organization and build on the original relationship.

For a company with 50 clients and five key relationships within each of those organizations, using a matrixed approach could result in up to another 50 new prospect targets each year, just by mapping existing and potential connections, and establishing the right relationships.

ASK THE EXPERT:

ROBERT KNOP

CEO | Assist You Today

LI: What are the risks of relying on relationships with one executive within target accounts?

RK: I've seen risks on both sides. From the corporate perspective, say you have a great relationship with one sales rep at a vendor. He/she gives you a steep discount because [of your relationship]. It comes time to sign a new deal, and if that contact is no longer [there], your chances of getting that same discount decrease. Let that vendor take you out to lunch once in a while, and make sure he/she brings their boss or another colleague. Connect with them on LinkedIn as well.

From the vendor side, the risks … are even greater. If that executive is your only point of contact, and he/she leaves, you are in danger of losing a client. You can also lose a lot of time [by] only talking to one person. Early in my career, I ran an [ad] agency. I had been talking with a marketing director about outsourcing certain roles and responsibilities to my company. After six months of conversations and lunches, she set up time to meet with her CMO. I spent hours with my team prepping.

The day of the meeting, we started our pitch. Fifteen minutes in, the CMO stopped us and said, "I apologize, but I didn't know what this meeting was about. We can't do any of what you are saying. We don't have budget."

[We] wasted time and money that could have been [better] spent on another potential client. We would have known better if we had done more research and had more contacts [there].

LI: What steps do you advise people to take in order to assure they continually forge relationships with multiple stakeholders?

RK: LinkedIn is the main way I connect with additional team members at an organization. Building the relationship is all about adding value by … providing helpful information, sharing smart content and pinging them once in a while with an article that touches on something you have spoken about previously. You can also stay top-of-mind by congratulating them on a promotion or a new role, and engaging with their content.

If you have multiple relationships at each company, it dramatically increases your network, which will allow you to request more warm introductions. The more stakeholders you have a strong relationship with, the lower the chance of you being supplanted if one of them leaves.

ASK THE EXPERT:

FABIAN AU

Sales Specialist, Watson Analytics & Social Media Analytics | IBM Digital Group

LI: What trends or disruptions encouraged IBM to transition from relying on single relationships to larger networks of target buyers and influencers?

FA: The change in persona from traditional IT buyers to line of business (LOB) buyers has disrupted how IBM used to work. LOB buyers now have more decision-making and purchasing power as the budget comes from them. Other demand includes SMEs and new start-ups increasingly adopting technology. These are the people that IBM usually did not have relationships and contact with.

LI: How did relying on single relationships impact acquisition, retention and revenue growth?

FA: Limiting our relationship to just a single relationship jeopardized us from selling into different lines of business within the same organization. This means that we might be losing a lot of opportunities for acquisition and growth as buyers from different LOBs perceive value differently. LOBs are the end users and are people we need to work with.

LI: Have any specific trends changed the way you see and build these relationships?

FA: Yes, definitely. IT buyers think very differently from LOB buyers. Their purchasing behavior, such as how they like to be engaged and what value means to them, is very different from traditional buyers. The shift of buying power from IT to business also means that there are more people to engage within a sales cycle, and each of these people are looking for their own value. This complicates the sales cycle and thus affects the way we need to build relationships. The good news is that with prior information about your prospect, such as what matters to him or what he does, you can help reduce some of the complexity.

LI: What tools and tactics have you implemented to encourage executives to expand their networks and establish more profitable relationships?

FA: The first thing to do is build up your own professional profile on your social network, so that people will know who you are and what you do at a glance. Next, I've also started posting and sharing content for two reasons: first, for people to notice me, and next, to know who are the people interested in my content. Dropping a note to potential prospects is another good way of creating new relationships. I've shared [with my team] the ways I structure my InMails, short-list prospects, and tools such as HootSuite that I use in managing content.

ASK THE EXPERT:

PAUL LEWIS

Global Social Marketing Manager & Social Selling Lead, Software Solutions | Pitney Bowes

LI: What challenges did Pitney Bowes face when sales reps primarily relied on single customer relationships?

PL: In 2014, the average tenure of an employee was 4.7 years. That number today has fallen to 4.3 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. There was a time when you'd form a professional relationship with one individual at an organization and liaise directly with them. With people changing roles and companies more frequently, sales opportunities are now at risk.

At Pitney Bowes we've seen just that. It's fundamental to form relationships with multiple stakeholders in a variety of different functions, [including] marketing, operations, IT, finance and customer service. One stakeholder may be focused specifically on price; another may be the end user of a solution. A one-size-fits-all sales approach doesn't work.

LI: What developments encouraged Pitney Bowes to make a change?

PL: It's now a case of ensuring we adopt a multithreaded approach to all our sales activities. We want to be sure that we're having the right conversations with the right people across the roles and disciplines that matter. We need to ensure we engage with [these individuals] from the very beginning.

LI: Have any specific trends, such as account-based marketing and customer lifecycle marketing, changed the way you build these relationships?

PL: From an ABM perspective, adopting a multi-threaded approach has opened up cross-selling opportunities. We may have an opportunity for our Personalized Interactive Video solution within the marketing organization of an insurance company. Identifying and engaging with the right individuals whose roles span across business units could lead to an additional opportunity to market the same solution within [another] area of the business.

LI: What tactics and best practices have you implemented internally to encourage sales to expand networks?

PL: Research individuals and companies in detail. We also check to see if there is anyone within Pitney Bowes that is connected to the individual. Spend a few minutes each morning looking at Sales Navigator to see what's happening within the organizations (or people) you're targeting. Create a Google Alert on a particular subject, topic or company.

Additional tactics:

- After meeting a new business contact, always follow up on LinkedIn.
- Connect with people who comment and like your LinkedIn posts.
- Connect with those who view your profile.
- Publish articles to help raise your profile.
- Check out the "people you may know" box for possible connections.
- Engage with members of a LinkedIn Group.
- Attending a conference? Connect … with attendees, and try to set up an informal on-site meeting.

USING LINKEDIN TO CONNECT WITH MULTIPLE DECISION-MAKERS

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At LinkedIn, we have access to unique data on the relationships between professionals and organizations. One of the areas in which we're increasingly supporting clients is helping them identify the most relevant companies to do business with, and map out the appropriate decision-makers within those organizations.

This makes LinkedIn a valuable tool for going beyond one-on-one relationships within your customer organization and developing matrixed relationships that support your sales goals.

Take advantage of LinkedIn's capabilities in these three ways:

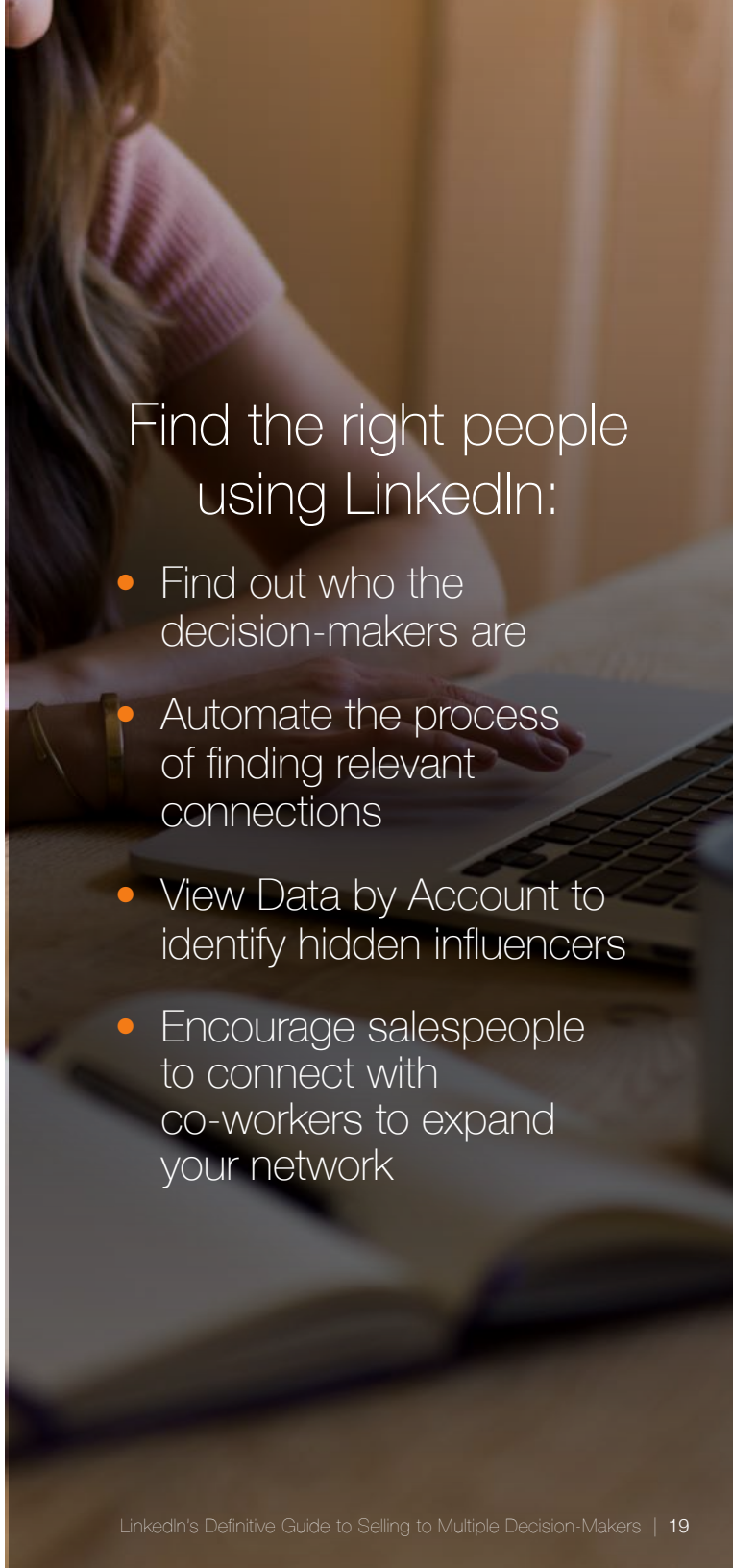
Step 1: Find the right people using LinkedIn

Find out who the decision-makers are. You can use LinkedIn's **Advanced Search** to discover people with specific job titles within the organization. Sales Navigator's advanced search filter lets you search by seniority, function, relationships to your connections and more.

Automate the process of finding relevant connections by using Sales Navigator to save the account, then save leads within the account. Once the platform knows the types of connection you're looking for, Sales Navigator will make relevant lead recommendations, showing you decision-makers and influencers at the account that you might have missed, and flagging buyers who are sending out buying signals. The more active you are in Sales Navigator, the more relevant your results will be: The tool learns from your past searches and automatically combs LinkedIn for lead recommendations that are relevant to your search criteria.

View Data by Account to identify hidden influencers. Examine a new prospect's profile, connections, posts and groups to glean key information about priorities and pain points.

Encourage salespeople to connect with each other and other co-workers to expand your network. Then use the **TeamLink** feature in Sales Navigator to see how team members in your organization are connected with the client company and what areas they're focused on. Identify colleagues in your organization who have worked with the decision-makers you find, and ask them to provide insight into the decision-makers' interests and needs. Sales Navigator is especially useful for uncovering links with C-level stakeholders who might otherwise be difficult to connect with, and determining how best to reach out to them. The more connections you have, the easier it is to expand your network within a company.



Step 2: Determine your best path for connecting

Once you find the right people to contact, be strategic about making a connection. According to a LinkedIn survey, **over half of buyers will reject a cold connection outright.** If you can leverage your network to broker an introduction, your communication is more likely to be welcomed. In fact, buyers are **five times more likely to engage** with salespeople who come through LinkedIn warm introductions.

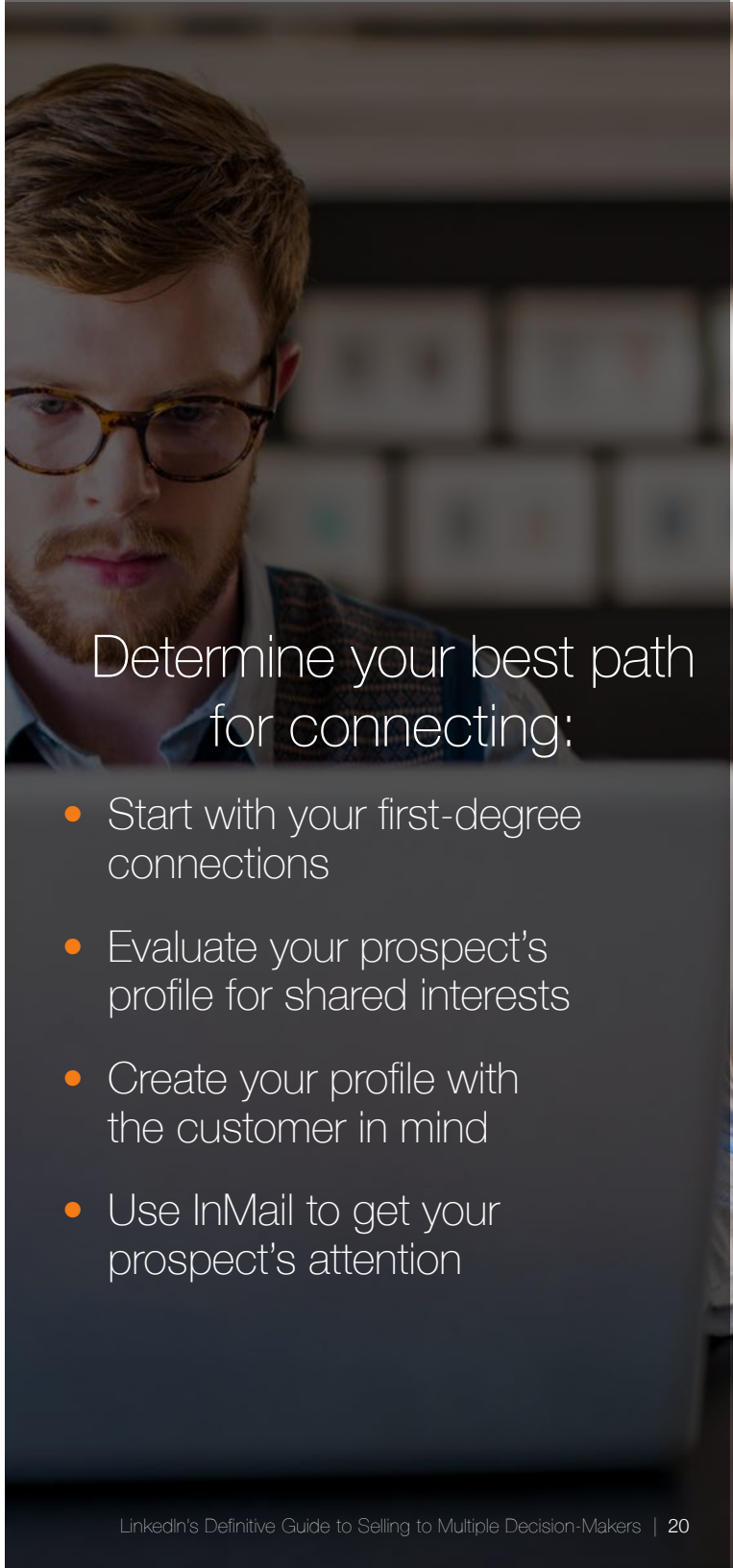
Start with your first-degree connections. If someone at the account is already in your network, see if your contact is willing to introduce you. If not, use LinkedIn's **"How You're Connected"** feature to see who else in your network can provide that introduction. Sales Navigator's **TeamLink** feature can show you if anyone in your company is connected with a prospect. TeamLink is a powerful tool for getting warm introductions beyond your personal network. You can also use Sales Navigator's **CRM Widget** to integrate with your CRM system so you can build relationships using pre-existing CRM contacts.

Evaluate your prospect's profile for shared interests. Scan the prospect's profile for shared interests, hobbies or any other commonalities you can use in your outreach. You can see what you have in common with a prospect by using the In Common panel of the Profile and viewing their Following, Groups and Volunteer Experience & Causes. Use this information to build rapport by identifying shared interests and experiences. Or establish a common bond through your activity on **LinkedIn Groups.** Join groups that your prospects belong to so you can see what their concerns are.

To home in on the connections with the most potential, look at Endorsements in the Skills & Experience section to get co-workers' opinions on the prospect. Identify colleagues who have worked with the buyer and reach out to them too.

Create your profile with the customer in mind. Before reaching out to make the connection, complete your LinkedIn profile by adding a professional picture. Optimize your profile with buyers, not employers, in mind. Consider upgrading to a Premium Profile — it offers even more options for personalization.

Use InMail to get your prospect's attention. When you're trying to connect with someone who gets hundreds of emails a day, **InMail** can give you a real advantage. **The average click-through rate for email campaigns is 2.69%, while the average click-through rate of InMails is 14.69%,** according to MailChimp. InMail messages are optimized for viewing on all devices, so your message comes through loud and clear whether the prospect is at their desk or on a smartphone. Send a personalized InMail to break the ice — and be sure to mention a shared contact, interest or experience. According to LinkedIn data, **sales professionals who have at least one commonality with the prospect enjoy a 46% lift in InMail acceptance rates compared to those with no commonalities.**



Step 3: Cater to individual needs and motivations

Each member of the executive staff has their own stakes, goals and priorities to address. You stand a better chance of proving your relevance if you can tailor your approach to each person's job title and duties. LinkedIn can help you cater to both groups of buyers and individual decision-makers.

Monitor your prospect's social media activity. Start by listening. Pay attention to the content your contacts like, share or create, as well as their interactions with others on LinkedIn. You'll get a wealth of insights into what they're thinking about, what they're interested in and what their pain points are. Ask yourself: What's happening at the contact's company? What are their biggest concerns and problems? Who else are they interacting with, both inside and outside of their organization?

Monitor your new connections for "trigger events" that give you a reason to connect, such as:

- Company expansion
- New product launch
- New job or promotion
- Getting married, having a baby, buying a house

Engage in discussions where your connections are. Establish trust with your new contacts by regularly engaging with their LinkedIn feeds. Like, share and comment on their content. You'll make them look good and, as a result, they'll remember you. **LinkedIn Pulse** curates content based on your interests and the companies and people you follow. Demonstrate your insights by sharing and commenting on these articles.

Position yourself as a valuable resource. Participate in **LinkedIn Groups** that your new contacts belong to, especially Groups that include multiple contacts at the client organization. Start conversations and offer thoughtful responses to questions. This helps establish credibility among your contacts' networks.

Use relevant information to make a customer-specific value proposition. Once you've established relationships with your new contacts, reach out with information based on their interests. According to the Demand Gen Report's *2016 B2B Buyer's Survey Report*, **64% of B2B buyers say the fact that a vendor "demonstrated a strong knowledge of [our] company and its needs" is a very important reason they chose that vendor.** Thanks to your inside knowledge of each contact's needs, you'll be ready to add value with information that complements and extends the pre-purchase research they're already doing.

Share helpful resources. You can use **InMail** campaigns or **Sponsored Updates** to send your prospects industry insights. Sales Navigator can help tailor your interactions by providing targeted content for each individual buyer's needs, questions and interests.

Getting to know the entire buying committee — not just one person in the group — ensures you have a relationship with the key decision-makers who will ultimately move the sale forward. It also allows for a multipronged sales approach, so if one contact leaves the firm or takes on a new role, you won't have to start the sales process back at square one.

With a little time and effort, you can find the right people to connect with, broker warm introductions and customize your approach to prove your value to each member of the committee. A good relationship with the buying committee is a great start to winning the sale.

ASK THE EXPERT:

GABE VILLAMIZAR

Head of B2B Marketing | Lucid Software Inc.

LI: What encouraged Lucid Software to transition from relying on single relationships to larger networks of targets?

GV: One of my sales mottos is that "Data Will Always Trump Intuition." The buyer's journey in the B2B space has changed and will continue to do so. We've taken this B2B buyer data and applied it to the way our sales reps identify and connect with multiple buyers across the B2B enterprise level. As I train and coach our sales teams on social selling on LinkedIn and Twitter, I emphasize the advantage and power that comes from connecting in a personalized manner with four to seven decision-makers per company to increase contact and account penetration.

LI: What tools and processes are you using to establish multiple relationships between your company and your customer organization?

GV: One of my favorite sales cadences that our business development reps or account executives do when prospecting an account goes as follows:

- Find seven decision-makers or people that influence those decision-makers.
- Save the decision-makers as "Leads" in LinkedIn Sales Navigator.
- Find and follow those buyers/influencers on Twitter and their company handle.
- On Twitter and LinkedIn, listen and learn everything that there is to know about your buyer's pains, problems and motivations.
- Begin engaging with your buyers via LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Identify two to three articles that will add value to your buyers and share [them].
- Build a relationship of trust and determine if you should work the account or move on.

LI: How do you measure whether your team has succeeded in establishing and maintaining multiple relationships within accounts?

GV: One of the best ways to measure this is by tracking certain data points from both LinkedIn Sales Navigator and our CRM, which is Salesforce. These data points include how many leads were saved per account in LinkedIn Sales Navigator, and then measuring in Salesforce how many online and offline touch points were done. You'll be able to measure on an account-by-account basis whether the deal was won or lost, how many touch points were involved and what was the outcome. Once you coach and train your sales reps on updating each activity they do within each of the leads they work with (manually or semi-automatically), you'll be able to create a unique sales benchmark for your team/company and a predictive social selling model.

ASK THE EXPERT:

WENDY (MCEWAN) HOGAN

Marketing Transformation & Strategy Director | Oracle

LI: What trends or disruptions encouraged you to transition from relying on single relationships to larger networks of target buyers and influencers?

WMH: Asia is a diverse mix of markets in different stages of economic development and digital sophistication. Add to that, our customers' teams are typically located across disparate geographies and time zones. It's imperative then that we develop relationships and communications with people who influence buying decisions, as well as the budget holders themselves. This has meant mapping the organization charts of our customers and prospects across multiple countries and languages.

LI: What tools and processes are you and your teams using to establish multiple relationships between Oracle and your prospect and client organizations?

WMH: Education is key in markets where modern business is still evolving and access to the Internet, on average, still sits below 50% of the population. Face-to-face communications are still very important in this region, so we engage through a mix of peer-to-peer insights sessions and ongoing content distribution of thought leadership and educational materials. We use a mix of our own marketing automation tools, as well as content marketing through social platforms such as LinkedIn.

LI: How do social tools such as LinkedIn Sales Navigator help your sales teams maintain and deepen prospect and customer relationships?

WMH: A lot of the markets in this region are in high-growth mode, which makes finding and retaining talent an incredible challenge. Using a professional social network as comprehensive as LinkedIn enables us to keep tabs on how our customer teams are changing and growing (such as adding a Head of Digital or Head of Customer Experience), and who works where (for example, when a CMO moves from one company to another or a digital strategist changes media agencies). It also allows us to retain IP and continuity around our customer base when our own team members change. We also keep tabs on news about our customers and prospects, as well as their company announcements. Given the size of Oracle, it's also a great tool for us to identify connections between our own broader internal network and leverage their relationships with prospects.

LI: Have there been any key lessons learned or best practices you've acquired during this process that you can share?

WMH: It's not natural for non-digital natives to use social and digital tools to canvas their customers and understand their prospects' businesses, so we host training sessions … on the tools. We also share best practices internally and celebrate successes with metrics and outcomes that demonstrate the value to folks who are still learning how to best utilize [social] platforms.

ASK THE EXPERT:

XAVIER MONTY

Corporate Communications Senior Manager | Talentsoft

LI: What trends or disruptions encouraged you to transition from relying on single relationships to larger networks of target buyers and influencers?

XM: In Europe, most organizations are decentralized models spread over several regions and countries. The capacity to serve decentralized organizations starts with establishing strong relationships, understanding decentralized business challenges and making it clear that you are a partner of trust.

The second trend ... is all about the digital transformation. Thanks to the great amount of information available on social media, B2B buyers have all the capacity to search for information online. This creates a new paradigm in the decision-making process that is now spread across more influencers with various backgrounds.

LI: What tools and processes are you and your team using to establish multiple relationships between your company and your prospect or customer organizations?

XM: LinkedIn Sales Navigator is the No. 1 tool to create and maintain meaningful relationships. The amount of real-time insights in the platform allows [it] to behave in a much more accurate way that translates more often into business. A social advocacy platform is a key enabler to push great and differentiated content to customers. Mixed with insights coming from LinkedIn Sales Navigator, the positive amplification effect is multiplied. LinkedIn Sales Navigator coupled with CRM and social advocacy is the perfect mix.

LI: How do social tools, such as LinkedIn Sales Navigator, help your team maintain and deepen prospect and customer relationships?

XM: At Talentsoft, we strive to be different by putting relationships with our team first. LinkedIn Sales Navigator is at the heart of our meaningful sales approach. Not only does it give us the opportunity to get real-time insights on our commercial relationships, but it allows us to be perfectly tuned to our customers' needs.

LI: How do you measure whether your team has succeeded in establishing and maintaining multiple relationships within an account?

XM: The first level of measurement is the number and frequency of interactions between the team and the customers' accounts. The second level of measurement is about the relationship quality. Frequent interactions that create value for both people can result in deeper connections and enhance a contact's professional credibility. The third level of measurement is the business generated out of the relationships.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study: **HCL Technologies**

USING MATRIXED CONNECTIONS TO FORM ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS

HCL Technologies, a global technology consulting and IT outsourcing company with more than 100,000 employees across dozens of countries, has built its brand on a philosophy of championing the "Relationship Beyond the Contract."

But how can a huge, multinational company achieve that kind of authentic connection with each customer? Sales reps at HCL start by getting to know each decision-maker involved in a purchase before the first engagement. LinkedIn's Sales Navigator makes this a simple task. "When you first meet a customer, it can be difficult to earn their trust," Sivasubramaniam notes. Using TeamLink, however, sales professionals are able to reveal existing connections with prospects and begin to forge strong relationships at a customer company. "Once you're linked by a personal connection, there's instantly a greater sense of trust," he says.

Sales reps save leads and accounts in Sales Navigator so they can follow prospects, get relevant alerts and gain insights into contacts' concerns, priorities and work environments. This knowledge helps reps expand their networks of connections at a client company so they don't have to rely on just one contact.

"No one wants to build a strong bond with someone who's only trying to sell to them. You want to be heard and understood. That's why we put an emphasis on listening to their challenges first," Sivasubramaniam explains. Sales reps then engage by sharing content relevant to the concerns of each individual decision-maker or influencer.

To ensure sales reps get the most value from LinkedIn, HCL provides detailed on-boarding training. They also track and encourage sales teams using LinkedIn's Social Selling Index (SSI) as one of their primary KPIs.
An in-house monthly newsletter focused on Sales Navigator includes success stories and an internal leaderboard, so everyone can see where they stand. "That allows us to inspire each other and learn from our collective experiences," says Sivasubramaniam, who notes that Sales Navigator helps build relationships internally as well as externally.

The HCL marketing team uses Sales Navigator to research targeted accounts and create relevant content, giving the sales team effective tools to generate meaningful rapport with multiple people at the client company. With Sales Navigator, HCL Technologies drove more than 7,000 new connections with decision-makers in six months.

Using Sales Navigator to discover and nurture multiple contacts has helped HCL reach more prospects, share ideas and create added value. The lasting relationships forged from multiple LinkedIn connections help HCL live its brand promise to uphold the "relationship beyond the contract."

Case Study: **NewVoiceMedia**

DRIVING BOTTOM-LINE RETURN THROUGH MATRIXED RELATIONSHIPS

In October 2014, Doug Ruth, then Account Executive at NewVoiceMedia, a global provider of cloud call center and inside sales solutions, had just opened a sales opportunity with a medium-sized Internet company.

Two months later, Ruth's key contact at the account left the company, and the account went dark. With 1 in 5 decision-makers leaving their positions within a year, according to LinkedIn data, this situation is all too familiar to sales professionals. At best, the loss of a key contact forces a sales rep to start all over again; at worst, it can sabotage a sale altogether.

Ruth wasn't going to let that happen. Instead, he began using LinkedIn Sales Navigator to track down relevant decision-makers at the prospect company and build a bigger network. Using the Advanced Search filter, he was able to search by seniority, function and years at the company. Leveraging both his personal and professional LinkedIn network, he arranged warm introductions to all of the decision-makers he'd discovered and added them to his network.

Next, Ruth started following those decision-makers on LinkedIn to receive updates on their activities, such as any job changes they made. Building on these new contacts, he engaged with the relevant people at the client company, using LinkedIn to better understand their needs. By developing relationships with all of the decision-makers, he was able to work with the group to gain internal consensus. Within a month, he had closed the sale.

Connecting with multiple decision-makers on the buying team reduced the risk that NewVoiceMedia could lose a sale if one contact left the organization. But the benefits of matrixed relationships don't end there. After Ruth made the initial deal in 2015, seven of his contacts at that account left the company. Using SalesNavigator, Ruth was alerted when they changed jobs so he could keep following them in their new roles. As a result of maintaining these contacts, NewVoiceMedia was able to land a new account almost immediately.

NewVoiceMedia has since integrated Sales Navigator with its CRM so that sales reps can view LinkedIn information and Sales Navigator insights from within the CRM. By helping to personalize NewVoiceMedia's value proposition for each contact's needs and concerns, Sales Navigator makes it easy for reps to reach out to multiple contacts with relevant information. The result: lasting relationships with multiple decision-makers, bigger sales and more revenue.

Since NewVoiceMedia implemented its matrixed approach using Sales Navigator, win rates are up 80% and deals are 30% larger. Reps who use Sales Navigator see a 1.3x higher win rate and close 1.7x more revenue than reps who don't use it. Overall, 73% of NewVoiceMedia's won revenue from new business was closed using Sales Navigator.

Case Study: **PGi**

UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF MATRIXED SELLING

In 2012, PGi EMEA was faced with a dilemma familiar to many companies: how to drive better and warmer leads to its sales team. Traditional lead routes had proved outdated, and salespeople were spending too much time researching leads.

Sales teams were also working harder but closing smaller deals. Making matters even more complex, PGi was entering new markets with new products, prompting salespeople to research and profile customers they weren't previously familiar with.

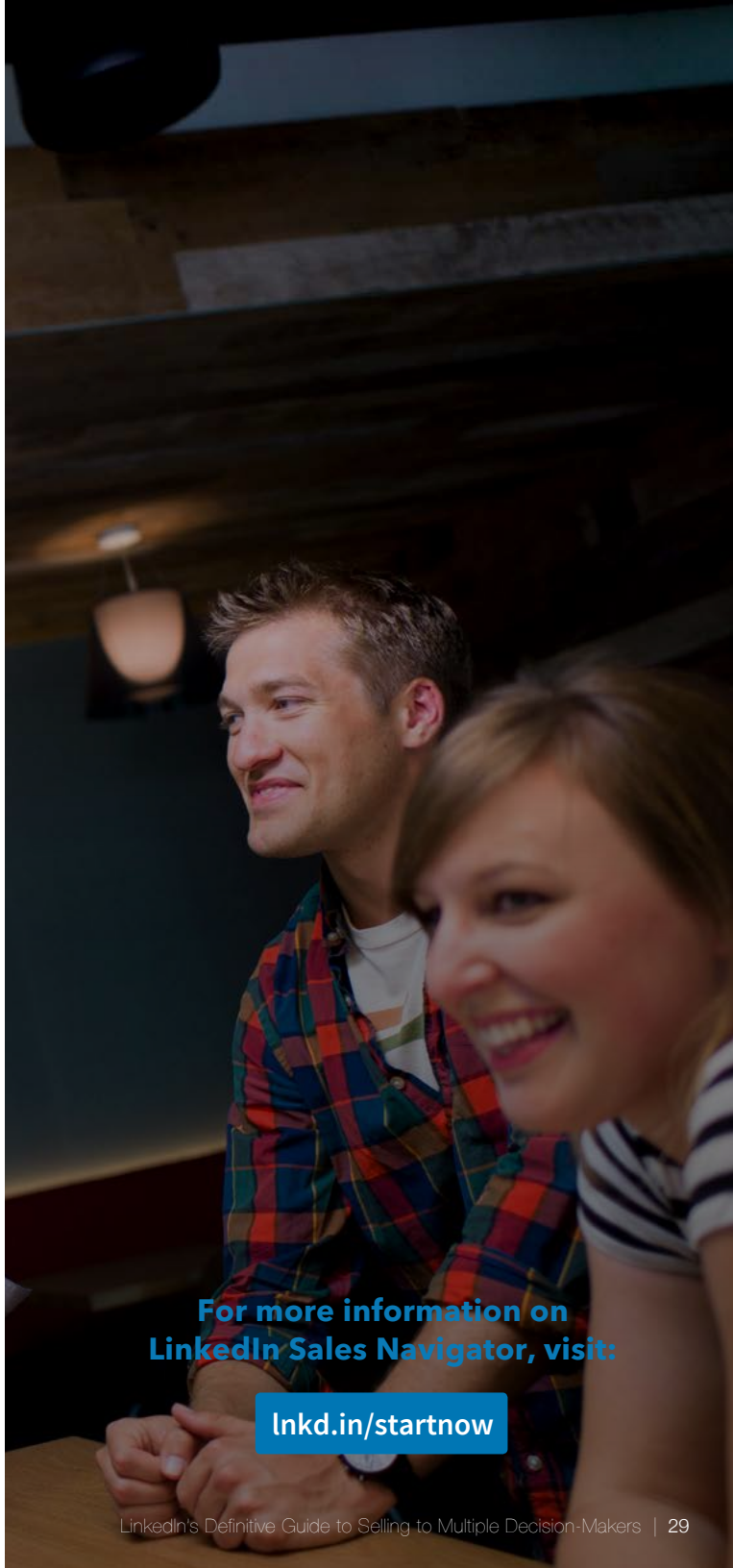
After two PGi sales managers successfully used LinkedIn to build leads, research contacts and enter new market segments, PGi expanded its number of licenses, and it didn't take long to feel the impact. After adding even more licenses, ROI increased tenfold. Sales reps using LinkedIn were winning bigger deals and closing deals quickly by sharing relevant content, joining groups strategically, following their prospects and listening to their social activity. This enabled very warm introductions, which allowed sales reps to secure meetings with more targeted decision-makers — and close deals far more quickly.

But while many PGi sales team members approached LinkedIn as a tool for acquisition, several key account managers used it to find additional departments and locations where accounts had a presence, which helped them penetrate deeper and wider into their accounts. This facilitated multidimensional selling, so that reps had more than one contact within an account — especially helpful for selling PGi's new products to existing accounts. The PGi team uses Lead Builder and alerts to see when key contacts leave their roles, and whether contacts within their networks know and can connect them with target prospects.

After building LinkedIn into its daily sales activities and integrating it with Salesforce and Outlook, PGi's SSI scores increased 28%, with a 22:1 ROI.

CONCLUSION

Today, success in B2B sales demands a new approach — not one-to-one, but a web of interwoven connections. By uncovering and nurturing multiple contacts at client organizations, your sales team can build trust, gain deeper knowledge of the organization's needs and accelerate the sales process. Just as a web is stronger than a single filament, building multiple connections at client and prospect companies creates a more stable relationship — one that can withstand change.

With connections in different departments, functions and regions at a client company, you'll find it easier to uncover new opportunities, add value, foster customer advocates and grow your business. With in-depth knowledge of the entire buying team's individual needs, you can find the perfect solution for the customer, enhancing customer satisfaction and retention.

Savvy sales professionals tap in to the power of LinkedIn to help them expand their web of connections, close the sale and drive revenue.