LinkedIn's Definitive Guide to Smarter Sales Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

In my role at LinkedIn, I spend my days speaking with sales leaders, mostly from high-growth organizations. When we talk about what keeps them up at night, the concerns typically revolve around driving more revenue, shortening deal cycles, generating more leads, or achieving a larger market share. When we think about why companies like yours have difficulty in achieving these goals, we find it all comes back to one thing: conventional sales tactics no longer contribute to pipeline growth and closed deals like they once did.

Every qualified prospect and customer is valuable. All it takes is one bad move — one unprepared cold call or one meeting without the right people involved — to damage the relationship and leave a negative impression with long term repercussions.

In this eBook, we examine the problems that plague modern sales teams. Then, we provide evidence-backed strategies for overcoming these challenges so that you can get back to a healthier pipeline, higher win rates, and ultimately, more revenue.

Alex Hisaka
Head of Content Marketing,
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ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES:

Account executives are the face of your organization in the eyes of decision-makers. If your company has a strong relationship with a client, there's a good chance it was initiated by an account executive. Here are four problems account executives need to overcome to more effectively engage today's decision-makers:

Problem #1: Missing Critical Players

The latest research tells us that **an average of 6.8 people are now involved in B2B purchase decisions**.* And when your reps miss critical players in the deal cycle, they're putting themselves at risk.

The problem is, (a) it's really hard to find all of these people and (b) these decision-makers typically change roles at a rate of 20 percent per year. Which means, that even if you found the right people at the beginning of the sales cycle, several of those people will rotate out before the deal is signed. And when they leave, new people who you don't know and haven't yet engaged enter, possibly derailing your deal. When your reps miss critical players in the deal cycle, at any stage, they put themselves at risk. Not just risk of losing the deal, but seeing all the time and energy invested to this point go to waste. It can be demoralizing.

Problem #2: Lacking Credibility

Buyers have exponentially more information than the previous generation of B2B buyers. They're researching online and looking for references long before they reach out to your sales team. It's generally assumed they're at least 60 percent of the way through their decision by the time they engage with you.

When the buyer finally does engage with you, they expect you to know their business. But reps feel pressed for time, causing them to skimp on research, further causing them to do or say the wrong things at the wrong time. It's no wonder why **77% of buyers don't believe that sales reps understand their business well enough**.** When your reps make a bad impression it not only impacts closing the current deal, it also affects future business with that same company, and imagine what happens when that person leaves the role or company and takes that poor opinion with them.

*"The Challenger Customer" by Brent Adamson of CEB

**77% of buyers don't believe that sales reps understand their business well enough.

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES:

Problem #3: Losing Touch with Prospects

The reason deals go dark often stems from the very first interaction. When your reps enter into an account through a weak connection - whether it's an email or just cold outreach - that sets up the deal for future issues. And, when reps can't keep their customers engaged throughout the deal cycle with valuable interactions, the chance of the deal going dark increases as well. The key is to stay engaged throughout the sales cycle and provide value in every interaction. The problem is many reps haven't been properly trained on how to consistently do that.

Problem #4: Not Moving Fast Enough

Your reps know they should be doing the research to learn who their buyers are, what they care about, and the best path in. But this work takes time, and it's almost impossible for reps to perform thorough research for every opportunity that presents itself. This dynamic also requires that sales leaders train reps on using research to quickly tell the difference between high-likelihood deals and deals they should disqualify.

Unfortunately, if your reps can't do this quickly, they will continue to lose. In fact, **50 percent of deals are lost when you're not the first vendor in**.* Which means, solving the first three problems we discussed isn't enough – you've got to account for key players, establish credibility, and deliver value efficiently to be ahead of the other competitors sniffing around the same deals.

*www.insidesales.com

ACCOUNT MANAGERS:

Account managers are responsible for identifying and capitalizing on growth opportunities while also making sure all the stakeholders are satisfied with the current agreement. This requires a tactful touch. Here are three problems that prevent account managers from strengthening relationships and growing revenue:

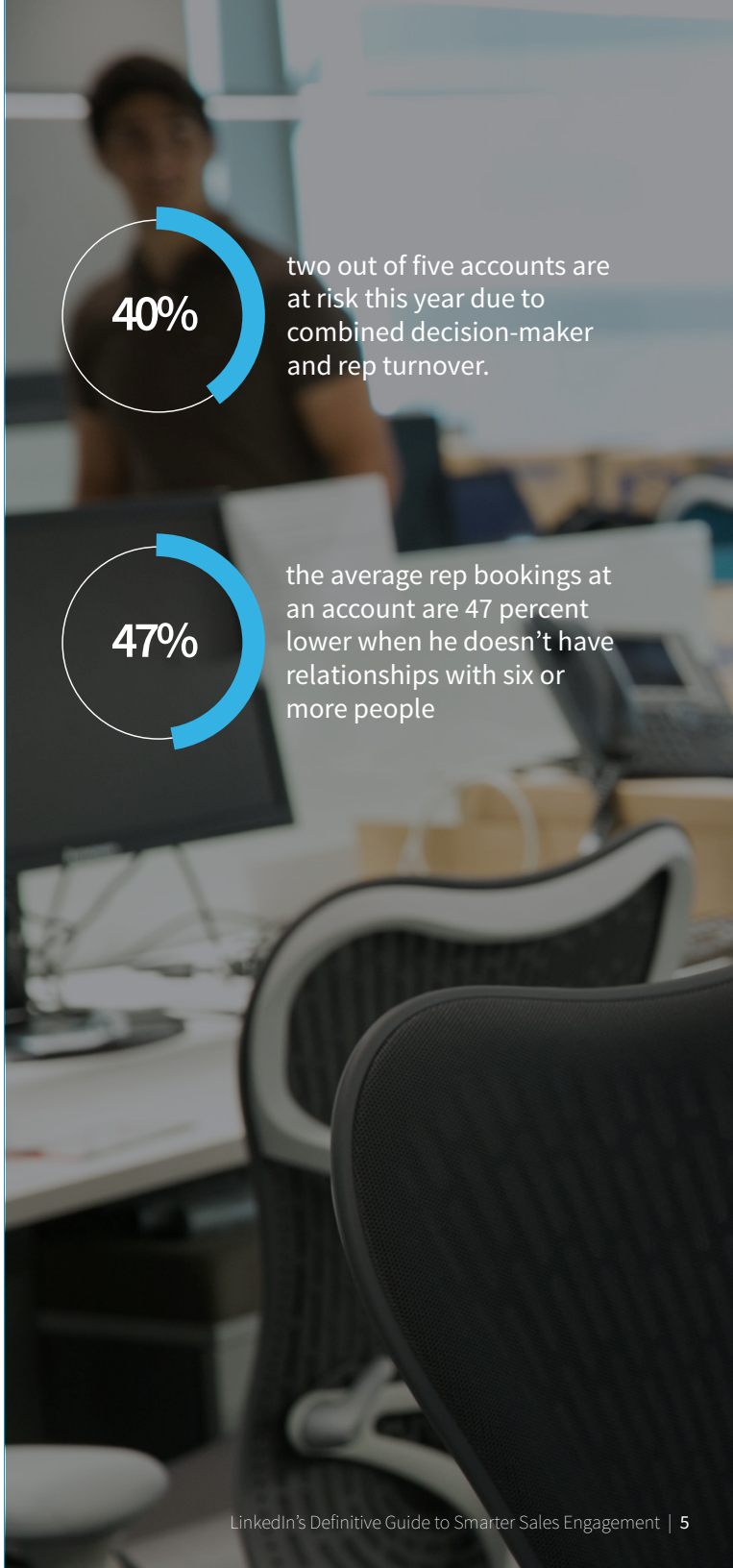
Problem #1: Relationships are put at risk when decision-makers or reps leave

Most account managers do have a relationship with the key decision-maker, but what happens if that stakeholder moves to another team or company? Your rep is left hanging, wondering if he can build or strengthen other relationships quickly in the short-term. Sometimes, by the time your rep notices, it might already be too late to find a new advocate before renewal rolls around.

In addition, you run the risk of losing business when your reps leave the company. Your account manager holds most of the institutional knowledge and the relationships that will make your next renewal successful. If he leaves, chances are that he will take all of that with him, which leaves you and the new account manager scrambling. In fact, **two out of five accounts are at risk this year due to combined decision-maker and rep turnover.***

Problem #2: Growth opportunities are missed when you're not hunting

But even when you think you've got the existing business handled, you might be at risk of stalled growth across the account when your account managers aren't acting like hunters. Your rep thinks that their customer will come to them when they have a new problem and that they'll get introduced to new people at the account over time. So, they stop asking questions, and they stop proactively looking for new business across the account because they assume it will land in their laps. On the other hand, your competitors are actively trying to capture new market share, and your accounts just might be their next target. And, even when competition isn't your biggest concern, your reps will still book less if they don't keep building relationships. We've seen that **the average rep bookings at an account are 47% lower when he doesn't have relationships with six or more people.***



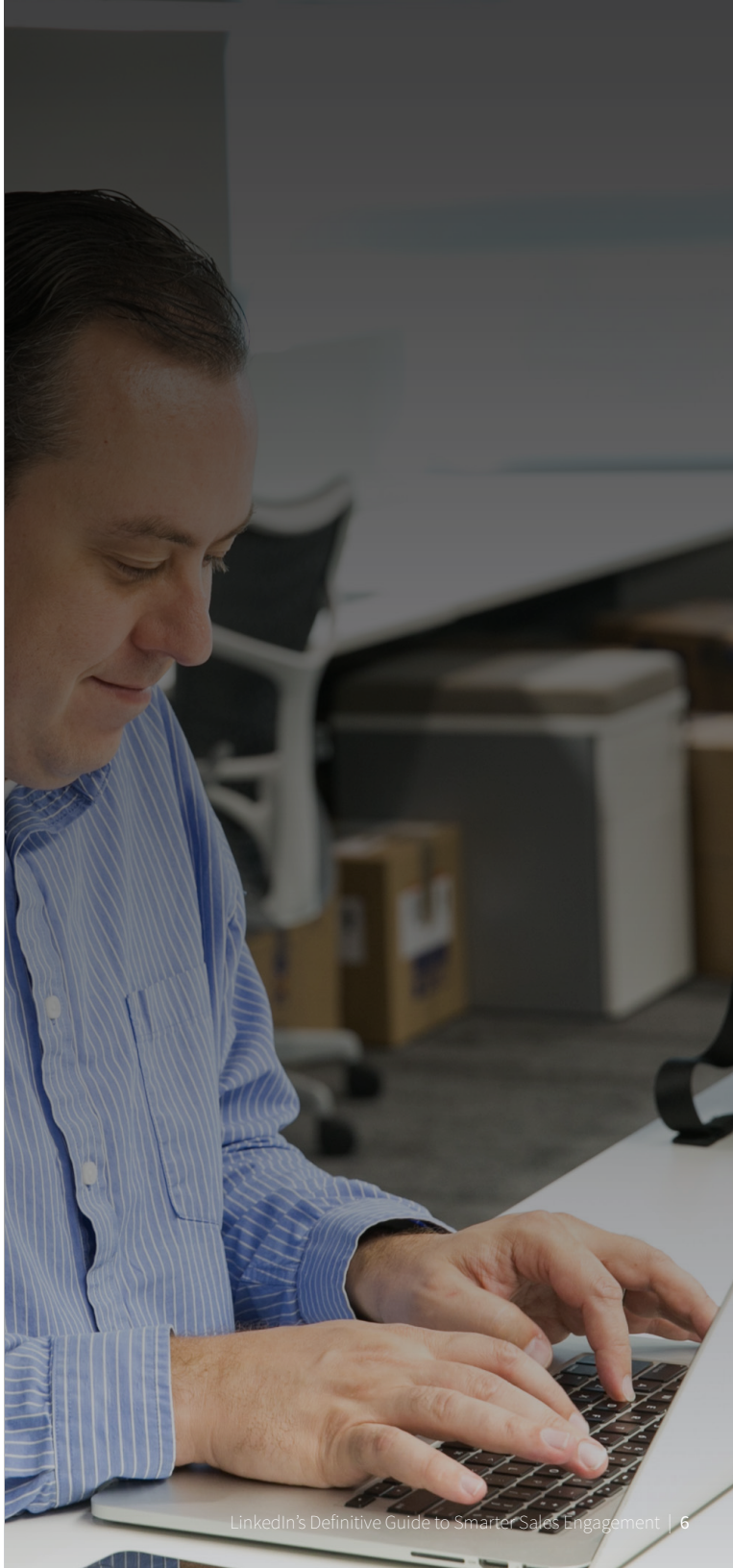
* https://www.slideshare.net/linkedin-sales-solutions/multithreading-relationship-strength

ACCOUNT MANAGERS:

Problem #3: Difficult to stay relevant in light of competing business priorities

Finally, we know that today's technology age has disrupted every industry, and companies are now being forced to compete and remain compelling in a way that they never did before. It's the norm now for buyers to compare products and services and find "like" alternatives, especially when they're trying to cut costs or build efficiencies. This can lead to unexpected price wars and discounting.

At the same time, we know that customer experience is the single most important variable in an account renewal, more than product and more than price. But the challenge lies in actually rising above the noise and proving that you are a valued partner with a seat at the table during the contract itself. It's difficult to provide this level of service, mainly because it's difficult to get your customers to pay attention to you. You need to be informed, engaged, knowledgeable. But that takes time and effort. Your account managers have tough calls to make - should they spend their time here? Or on new growth opportunities and increased wallet share?



ADOPT SOCIAL SELLING TO AVOID THESE PITFALLS

So how are you arming your salespeople in the fight to win? Luckily, modern sales approaches have helped reps make the shift to better service, close more deals and upsell their accounts. Salespeople are changing the way they sell - using social networks to **target** executive buyers and influencers, **understand** what they care about and **engage** credibly to build trust and add value over time.

By harnessing the power of LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network with more than **50 million business decision-makers in over 200 countries and territories***, sales reps can build and nurture trusted customer relationships to achieve their goals.

At LinkedIn, we have seen that social selling tactics work when trying to engage with target buyers. Compared to an average active member on LinkedIn, business decision-makers are **85% more connected, 29% more likely to check InMail and twice as likely to share content on LinkedIn**.*

* LinkedIn

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES:

With a growing number of influencers involved in buying decisions at B2B companies today, it can be tough to identify who to target and at what point in the sales journey you should contact them. Typically, you start with a huge pool of potential candidates and use research, investigation, and deduction to narrow them down to the most likely prospects. Fortunately, social networks like LinkedIn can help you search for the right prospects in a more efficient, targeted way than ever before.

Use Advanced Search

Use **LinkedIn Advanced Search** to identify the right decision-makers:

- If you sell to local companies (or if you have a specified geographic region), add the "Locations."
- If you sell to a specific industry like financial services companies, add the "Industry."
- Limit your search to only decision-makers by adding specific job titles in "Titles."
- Limit your search to only "2nd-degree connections" where a common connection can potentially introduce you.

Follow those decision-makers so you can receive their updates in your News Feed.

Map Out the Buying Committee

As we mentioned previously, there are now 6.8 involved in the average B2B decision. When you know who will be involved in the purchase decision, along with the role they will play, you can proactively address each decision-maker's needs. Taking time to map out the buying committee at your target account gives you greater insight into the process while simultaneously mitigating risk.

By uncovering and nurturing multiple contacts at organizations, you can build trust, gain deeper knowledge of the organization's' needs and accelerate the sales process.

QuickTip: *Encourage salespeople to connect with each other and other co-workers to expand your network. The more connections you have, the easier it is to expand your network within a company.*

ACCOUNT MANAGERS:

Existing customers can change quickly. Some decision-makers leave, others get promoted, and corporate priorities can change in an instant. Having your finger on the pulse of the buying committee allows you to anticipate needs and address them in real time, fortifying the relationship. Conversely, being unaware of changes opens the door for competitors.

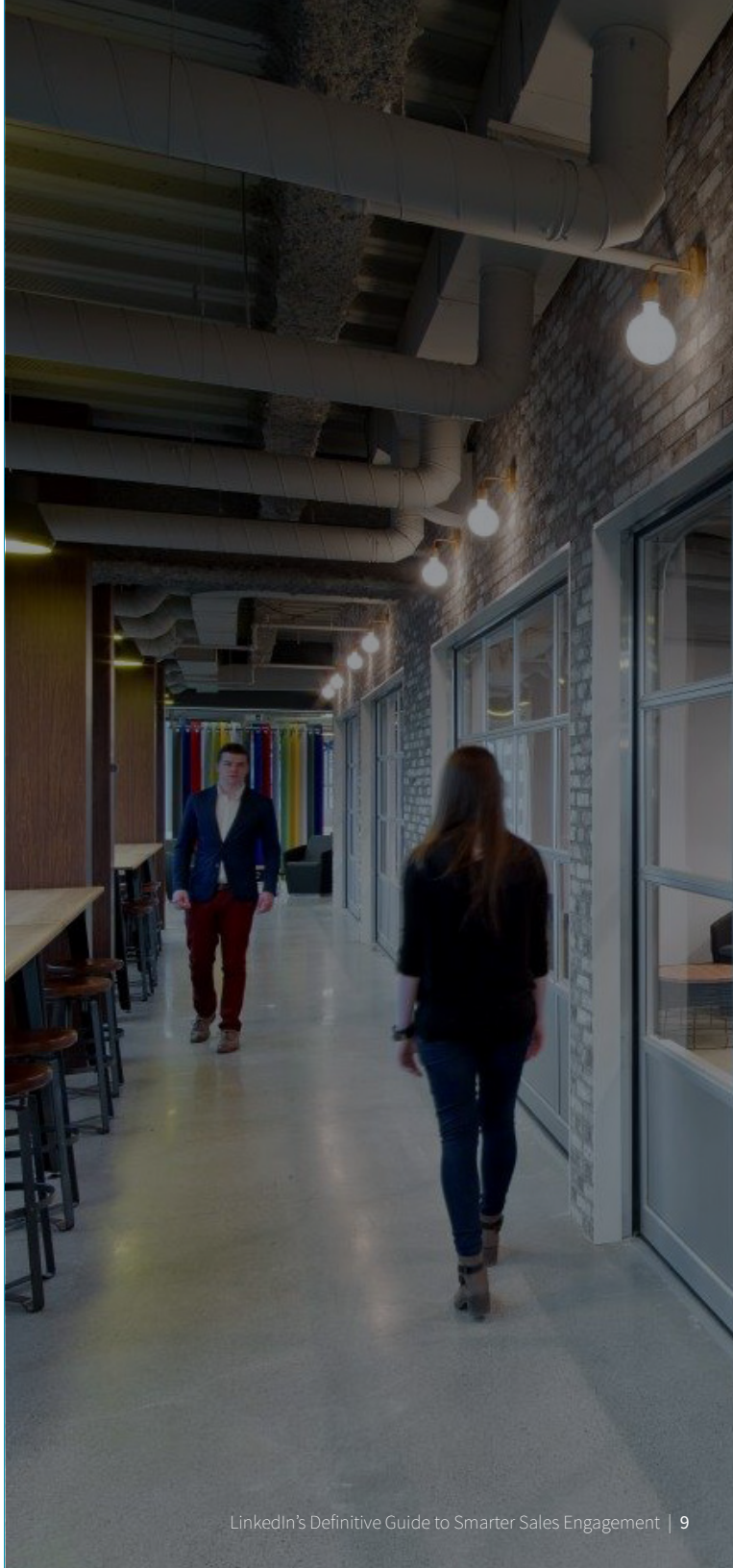
Use Advanced Search

Use **LinkedIn Advanced Search** to stay on top of your named accounts:

- Select the name of your account as your search criteria.
- Select all the titles that apply.
- Save the search so that you're automatically alerted to new contacts and title changes.

Map Out the Buying Committee

Keep a running list of all the stakeholders at each account, including their role. When you gain additional context regarding priorities, motivations, or relationship dynamics, note it and act accordingly. The key is staying on top of everything, so make it easy to gain insights. Connect with stakeholders on LinkedIn, follow their companies, even make private lists to follow them on other social channels. By knowing what the buying committee is up to, you are positioned to engage intelligently.



PAUL SIAL

Director of Marketing, Vena Solutions

LI: What's your best advice for sales reps and account managers who know they should be building multiple relationships at each account, but struggle to break the one-relationship habit?

PS: Even internally, the decision-making process has changed considerably, especially as you grow as an organization. There are many more stakeholders in any buying decision. If you're not factoring in those stakeholders, you're exposing yourself to risk. There may be parties that you're not aware of who will influence the decision. We might think we have a deal in place, that we're talking to the right person, but inevitably there is someone else who needs to sign the document or someone else who puts the brakes on the deal for one reason or another.

We've decided to implement a policy to get salespeople to look at all the people who might be involved in the decision early in the cycle. We ask directly, "So are you going to be the one signing off on this?" "Who else is going to be involved in this decision?" That way, we circumvent risk that might be exposed to later on. We identify influencers to make sure whatever we offer is catered to their specific desires or needs.

You also want to factor in anyone who might know about your organization. It's better to be aware of those risks early on. Don't presume that the person you're talking with is going to be the sole decision-maker or powerful enough to get the deal through.

LI: As someone who speaks fluent sales and marketing, what advice do you have for salespeople who want to become better at marketing themselves to potential buyers?

PS: You are a brand. You represent your company, but you are a brand also. When someone reaches out to me to sell me something, I'll always go on LinkedIn and see who they are. I want to get a sense of whether this person is someone I want to talk to. Does this person warrant my time?

We are constantly bombarded with people who want to sell us stuff. You don't have time to look at everything so you have to quickly filter out which ones are worth your time. There's a holistic nature to information whereby you have to make sure that everything you do is working cohesively. Your personal brand has to work cohesively with the company or product you're working with. Were in a position now where branding ourselve's is even more important because people expect to know who you are before they talk to you.

Position yourself as a thought leader who has experience or knowledge that others don't, and I'll be more inclined to talk to you. In the information age, you need to be cognizant of your brand. You need to protect it and project yourself as someone worth doing business with.

LI: Can you tell us about a change you've made within the last few years that's increased collaboration between sales and marketing, making both teams more effective?

PS: We have made some physical changes and some technology changes. On the physical side, we've created a chief revenue officer so that marketing and sales roll up to the same person. Having them roll up to a common person naturally facilitates better movement together. We've also create a physical connectedness by actually seating the departments together in the office. There are no physical barriers to prevent the departments from working together. We've noticed less indirect questioning and more cross-departmental communication. We've also setup more meetings where we combine the two teams with weekly checkpoints. It used to be a few marketing emails with sales copied. Now there's regular dialogue within joint meetings.

We also use technology to facilitate collaboration – Google Drive, Slack, etc. Collaboration is improving because of this technology, but it's really the combination of co-mingling and technology that keeps us working together more frequently than not.

TREVOR GRECH

Head of Sales Capability and Inductions, Australia Post

LI: What's your best advice for sales reps and account managers who know they should be building multiple relationships at each account, but struggle to break the one-relationship habit?

TG: Selling complex B2B deals is more complicated than ever due to the increasing number of buyers that are involved in the selling process. CEB research reports that on average there are 6.8 stakeholders per B2B deal. My best advice is to encourage your sales professionals to analyse and review their customer contacts per opportunity. Then, assign the relevant buying influence roles they have relationships with, or those will require relationships to progress the sale forward. Where they do not have relationships, they need to either develop coaches within the buying organisation, or the selling organisation needs to guide them through to a consensus sale with a decision-maker who can sign the order.

LI: Can you share a recent example of a B2B salesperson who really impressed you? What did they do that stood out?

TG: The sales professionals that impress me most are the ones who are prepared to be vulnerable and share their strategic account plans with internal stakeholders. Whilst there are a high number of stakeholders at our customers, it is similarly important to be able to harness internal resources to progress sales through the internal stages.

These sales professionals are prepared to seek support and they evangelise the importance of selling as a team. We know from LinkedIn research that 88% of B2B buyers will engage with sales professionals who are introduced through someone in their professional network. The recent sales professional I was working with was an advocate for LinkedIn Sales Navigator and understood the benefits of the TeamLink function. This really impressed me as they were not hesitant to either email one of internal stakeholders, or pick up the phone to ask for some information about the possible buying influence, or better still ask for an introduction.

LI: What's your favorite metric for tracking the continual improvement of a salesperson? What makes it your favorite?

TG: Due to increased complexity, both at our customers and internally, many organisations are finding that sales opportunities take more time. They are all wanting to move through sales stages as quickly as possible. The metric I prefer to review for continual improvement of a sales professional is their Go/No-Go opportunity scores at the sales cycle validation stage. It aligns both internal resources and support to drive joint venture selling from an organizational perspective. There is an abundance of data that exists through CRMs, although nothing more critical than having a Go/No-Go process that is seen as valid and reliable that can trigger the mobilisation of resources to support the sales opportunity to be won faster.

LI: In your experience, when sales people transform themselves from good to great, what's the most common obstacle they overcame to get there?

TG: Sales professionals that transform themselves from good to great recognise that sales success is not only about selling skills. It's just as much about the willingness to adapt to change. It's a willingness to be coached and to support new sales enablement technology. There is so much technology now available to support the seller experience, and adapting to change must be seen as both a personal and business benefit to ensure continued success.

PHIL CLEARY

Senior Director of Sales Enablement, Salesforce

LI: Can you share a recent example of a B2B salesperson who really impressed you? What did they do that stood out?

PC: Our best salespeople have a plan. They develop and execute that plan based on a deep knowledge of their territory - the companies, the industries, macro economic factors and the regulatory pressures that exist. They prioritise and focus. They leverage their resources carefully, and they have great relationships with their customers.

One of our most successful account executives from last year did all of these things, and leveraged Sales Navigator throughout. One of her key deals came from a deep understanding of what was happening in her patch - which industries were on the rise and which were struggling. Which companies need to transform to remain competitive or become irrelevant, and who within those companies was feeling the most pain.

She followed companies and executives, as well as the "do-ers" in those companies who she knew were influential. She joined LinkedIn Groups and asked lots of questions, while helping others in the group where she could. And she was able to leverage her existing network to get a warm introduction to a senior-level contact. She uncovered a major digital transformation project, with several stakeholders across the company who were betting the future of the company, and their careers, on this success of this project. All the way she reduced her risk by spending time researching the right companies and people, making sure she would be credible and trusted when she reached out. Ultimately the customer bought from her, not from our company. They bought the solution she brought to them, not the products we sell.

LI: Can you tell us about a recent change to your own sales enablement methodology that you would highly recommend to other B2B organizations?

PC: We've moved from delivering our Sales Navigator and broader social selling enablement as standalone programs to being weaved into our sales process training. When we rolled out Navigator initially, we approached it from beginner to advanced. We even segmented it by role - from those who were prospecting and building pipeline, to those who were working and closing deals. But now we break down the functionality and align it to the aspect of the methodology that best fits.

For instance, when we run a prospecting training program now, we train on the methodology and embed the Sales Navigator functionality into the overall process. So they're moving between Salesforce and Sales Navigator, saving searches, using the internet for research, following leads and accounts, picking up the phone, sending InMails, making connections and tracking all their Salesforce activity in a measurable way. I would encourage other B2B organisations to treat Navigator as part of their training process, not an isolated tool to be trained on separately.

LI: In your experience, what's one common attribute that separates companies that succeed with sales enablement on a global scale from those who don't?

PC: I've been in sales enablement for over 8 years, working with companies all across the world. The ones that succeed are consistent in their approach and they track everything. An account executive who is based in Chicago goes through the same onboarding experience as one based in Sydney. They learn the same methodologies, leverage the same tools and are coached across the same skills. And when you track everything you can measure nearly anything. How many programs, how often? How many people and where? What skills, products, processes and tools? How much did it cost and what was the CSAT?

Then you measure it on the other side - was there an increase in pipeline, win-rates, deal-sizes, product-mix? What worked, what should we change? But I would also say that successful sales enablement professionals are very tightly aligned with each of their local leaders across the globe. They treat them like their customers, earn their trust and help them be successful through standardised, measurable programs.

WENDY VAN GILST

Global Social Media and Content Manager, Sage

LI: Can you share a recent example of a B2B salesperson who really impressed you? What did they do that stood out?

WV: We recently held the Sage Summit in London. One of the people who really stood out to me was very active in sharing content to drive registrations, and she also created her own content by writing a post about it on LinkedIn.

The most impressive part, though, was how personalized everything was. Her LinkedIn post didn't just pitch the event in general terms – she approached it from a personal angle, describing why she felt the event would be interesting for her connections. She also sent personalized InMails. For the people she wanted to invite, she looked at the agenda of the event, then looked at the person's LinkedIn profile. She didn't use a template. She wrote one-to-one, highly personalized messages that matched the agenda to each person, recommending sessions they might find interesting. That's the perfect example of what social selling is to me: highly personalized, one-to-one communication vs. one-to-everybody communication that's personalized to nobody.

She managed to get a lot of people to attend the event, had lots of people viewing her LinkedIn post, and had lots of people visiting her LinkedIn profile, which helped build her personal brand.

LI: What do you feel will be the most important sales engagement trend in the EMEA region over the next few years?

WV: I think video content is already important, but I think it will become a very important trend in social selling as well. When we get to the point where sales reps use video content to interact with their prospects and customers one-to-one, prospects will find it more engaging than traditional email communication. Video content also offers more in terms of personal branding. Sales reps can use live video content to build their personal brand by sharing a lot of knowledge and experience, which will help them become a thought leader in their industry, which builds trust.

We've seen that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube all have the live video option now and I really hope that LinkedIn will have it soon as well. I think it's going to help AEs build a better personal brand because, first, it's easy to use, and second, it's a great way to establish that one-to-one approach with prospects and customers.

LI: As someone who oversees organizational content, what's one way sales professionals can be more proactive when it comes to capitalizing on their company's content?

WV: A lot of people just share company content without adding any personal touch to it. A lot of people share a lot of company content and they think they're doing a good job because they're sharing a lot of content. I believe it's better to share fewer pieces of content and to explain to people why you're sharing with them. What can this content do for your company? What's the value of this blog post to your connections and your followers? Explain why you're sharing and why people should click the link you're sharing.

On top of that, I don't believe we should only share our company content. I believe in the 4-1-1, rule, which states that, if you were to share six pieces of content, four should be from a third party, one should be something about your company, and one should be something personal you share. Nobody likes to hear someone who constantly talks about themselves. By using the 4-1-1 rule, you create leverage and build trust. That way, when you do share something about your company, people are more likely to read it because you've built that trust.

I also believe that it's good to share company content, but it's even better if you can create your own content where you add your own advice or takeaway before you link to something that relates to your company. Nine out of 10 times company content is not the most engaging content. By adding your personal touch, you can make it engaging.

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES:

With buyers empowered to gather so much information on their own, interacting with prospects via social media has taken on even greater importance. One of the most valuable activities you can undertake is sharing insights via social that will earn potential buyers' attention. The key is to do your research so you can glean buyers' top-of-mind issues and then reach out at the right time in the right way.

Put yourself in the shoes of your buyer. What type of content is most helpful considering their current stage? What questions do they need to answer before moving to the next stage of the buying process?

We always hear about how B2B buyers keep sales reps at arm's length until late in the process, but the truth is buyers want to engage with sales reps who bring clarity to their journey. In a buying landscape that features an overabundance of content and opinions, you have an opportunity to be the reliable source of reason B2B decision-makers desperately need.

But first, you need to get their attention. Here are a few ideas that can help:

Monitor your prospect's social media activity

- Evaluate the prospect's LinkedIn profile, connections and Groups to learn about their needs and pain points
- "View Recent Activity" to monitor their activity, including content shared and comments left.
- Look for commonalities between you and the prospect.
- Takes notes so you can use them throughout the buying process online and offline.

Monitor your prospect for "Trigger Events"

Start keeping track of the major or minor changes that can indicate your contacts are looking to buy, including:

- New job or promotion
- Connecting with someone in your network
- Posting status updates and articles on LinkedIn
- Engaging in discussions in LinkedIn Groups
- Mentions in the news

QuickTip: *Use a 3x3 social listening strategy: learn three new things about your buyer in three minutes or less. These three things can be about the buyer's personal life, professional life, company, or industry.*

ACCOUNT MANAGERS:

As an account manager, maintaining and strengthening relationships likely comes naturally to you. With the the right strategy in place, and with access to the right social selling tools, you can become even more efficient in building the types of relationships that produce sales.

One of the best ways to strengthen relationships with your accounts is to deliver value and relevance with each engagement. The problem is, how can you consistently know what your contacts will find valuable, or relevant? That's why effective account managers monitor for trigger events: opportunities to engage with relevance and deliver valuable insights. Below you'll find "trigger events" to look for, along with tactics for discovering them.

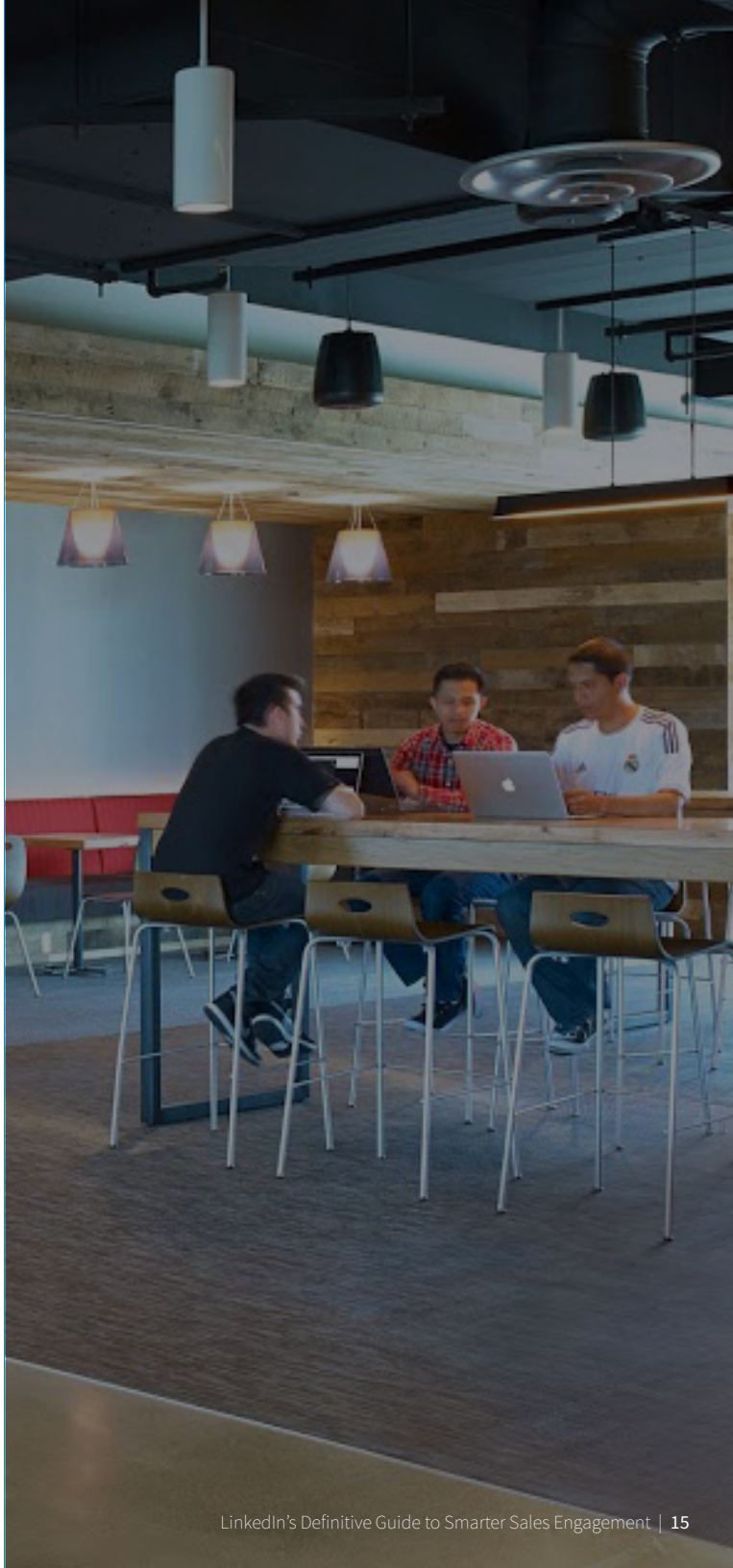
"Trigger events" to monitor with your accounts:

- Change in leadership
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Company announcements
- News mentions
- Market/product expansion

How to become aware of trigger events:

- Connect to and follow all relevant decision-makers and their colleagues at your accounts
- Follow each account's LinkedIn Company Page
- Subscribe to the blog of your accounts
- Connect with your contacts on other relevant networks such as Twitter
- Make private lists of your contacts so that you can easily monitor their Twitter activity
- If you have Sales Navigator, save prospects as leads and save accounts to receive news alerts beyond LinkedIn
- Create your own alerts using tools like "Google alerts"

It doesn't matter if the sales trigger is big or small. It can be as simple as referencing a status update as a way to start a conversation, opening the door for you to deliver value later. The key is staying in the loop so that you can pursue engagement opportunities when they present themselves.



MARIO MARTINEZ JR.

CEO, M3Jr Growth Strategies

LI: What's your best advice for sales reps and account managers who know they should be building multiple relationships at each account, but struggle to break the one-relationship habit?

MM: That's a great question. First, we all know there's more than one decision-maker at each account: 6.8 decision-makers on average. If we know this is the case, we should accept it rather than struggle with it. Second, it goes back to quality engagement. I'm reminded of a CIO of a Fortune 10 company. Someone asked him about his best advice for a salesperson coming in to meet with him. The advice was to never come into the meeting asking me what keeps me up at night. You should already know that info because you've already done your homework.

LI: Can you share a recent example of a B2B salesperson who really impressed you? What did they do that stood out?

MM: Here's an example of someone who has impressed me with the thoroughness and follow through, which is almost non-existent many times. He found me somehow, and was persistent in terms of outreach, using multiple channels. After having a conversation, he asked me, when would I like him to follow up? I gave him the timeframe, and he followed up. I kept pushing him off and he kept following up. Not only does he call, but he emails and sends specific action items, and asks if it's the right time to continue the conversation. Point is, he assessed, determined "no" meant "not right now," and he put it on me to name the timeframe for follow up. Then, he always followed through. He does continuous calls and emails then allows it go to quiet for a few weeks. He's been so thorough with follow up, that I feel compelled to want to buy!

LI: You're in online videos, you deliver speeches, and you're clearly not shy. Was this always the case? How do you help sales professionals overcome their stage fright to develop a public online persona?

MM: Yes, being out there has always been inherent to me. But here's what I'd say: The number one question I ask reps when talking about videos or presentations is, do you pick up the phone and have a conversation with your buyers? Yes?

Are you afraid to go into a meeting with a buyer? No?

So, essentially what we are doing is the same thing, just a different medium. I'm not afraid to be in a meeting or have a face to face. You shouldn't be afraid to engage in a conversation online like you would offline. And you definitely shouldn't be afraid to use video because you wouldn't be afraid of a buyer face to face. What comes into play in social video, though, whether recorded or live for virtual meetings, is that everyone thinks they have to look perfect. The reality is everyone works from home. It's a common thing. That BBC reporter with the little girl barging in is expected. It's going to happen! Also, having that treadmill in the background, it just makes you human. Don't forget the most important thing in overcoming shyness; be human! To sell is to be human.

In terms of writing content online, write how you would speak and call it a day. Don't worry about perfect editing. Be engaging and be yourself.

LI: In your experience, what's the best way for sales reps to stay top-of-mind among target prospects who are not ready to buy?

MM: If it were me, I would follow up with a multi-touch cadence over a couple of weeks, then give them a break. I would also find a way to tie my social posts to my customers or prospects. I would tag them and explain why I thought of them when I saw this article. My buyers have come to expect that I will push content to them when it's relevant.

An alternative choice would be to take that same article and directly send it to them as a message. You help your clients by sharing valuable content that actually helps solve their problems. This requires that your marketing team is truly providing content that maps to the buyer's persona and journey. If I were a rep I'd make sure that I was combing through the marketing team's content on a daily basis and deciding who to share it with strategically. I'd develop three lists: a) Hot opportunities, b) Beginning or mid-stage opportunities, and c) Those I want on my first two lists.

AMY MCILWAIN

Global Industry Principal, Hootsuite

LI: What's your best advice for sales reps and account managers who know they should be building multiple relationships at each account, but struggle to break the one-relationship habit?

AM: First, multi-threaded relationships are essential, especially in B2B. Reps are setting themselves up for failure if they're focused on just one contact, so they need to recognize the importance of building multi-threaded relationships.

It's also important to understand who you should know and who you need to know. Who are the decision-makers and who are the influencers? Then, use tools like LinkedIn to determine who at your company is the best person to reach out. All the pressure doesn't have to be on the rep. Maybe there's another colleague or executive who is better suited to reach out and form the relationship. Selling is a team sport. Once the rep maps out the relationships on the client end, they can look internally and approach it from a team standpoint.

LI: Can you share a recent example of a B2B salesperson who really impressed you? What did they do that stood out?

AM: A rep was scheduling a trip in his region, trying to meet with prospects and drum up some business. His approach stood out because of the way he leveraged social to schedule appointments, identify opportunities, and get around gatekeepers.

He first went onto LinkedIn and mapped out potential prospects in the area based on geo targeting, company size, seniority level, and identified targets. Then he leveraged Sales Navigator to see who could help him reach those accounts. He reached out to internal execs, then sent LinkedIn InMail, and followed up via email and phone. He also went onto Twitter to see what they were posting and subscribed to other relevant channels. It's important to figure out how to marry Twitter and LinkedIn to be most successful. When he wasn't seeing updates on LinkedIn, he was able to get on the prospects' radar by liking and sharing their content on Twitter. One time in particular he got in touch with a prospect by engaging with content and providing insight on Twitter. As a result of his efforts, he scheduled 11 meeting in three days, which resulted in three new accounts.

LI: How can sales professionals do a better job of staying in touch with key prospects without crossing the line of pestering them?

AM: The easiest thing they can do is engage with their content. Everyone appreciates when their content is liked, shared, or retweeted. Just showing you're interested is a great passive way to stay top of mind. You're not just trying to sell something but you're also trying to provide value. Engage, it's that simple.

LI: What would you say is the most underrated tool in the world of social selling and why?

AM: The telephone. So often we get caught up in the digital world and so many sales floors have become silent. We forget the value and principle of picking up the phone. Follow up with outreach. Call to make sure your prospect saw the article you shared, or saw your comment on LinkedIn. Leaving voicemails is fine!

In this age of social selling and the digital world, don't forget to pick up the telephone. It's still social selling – you're doing the research, you know what's going on, so you can congratulate them on social. But also pick up the phone. Pay attention to how people prefer to communicate. Not everyone wants to be tweeted at or texted. Some people still prefer the phone, so don't be afraid to make those calls.

DANIELLE USKOVIC

Head of Digital and Social, Lenovo

LI: What's your best advice for sales reps and account managers who know they should be building multiple relationships at each account, but struggle to break the one-relationship habit?

DU: Consider social the same as networking offline. It's easier to break down barriers when you're social because lines of management don't exist on social media. Someone in an executional role can talk directly to the leadership of a company, breaking down hierarchies and traditional barriers. Digital and social make the world flat – there are no boundaries. There's nothing that prohibits you from talking to someone in America, or India, or Singapore.

If you're not harnessing the power of social networking, you might as well find another job in another industry. Times have changed and you need to embrace it. I talk to IT managers all the time who say they don't have time to receive cold calls or emails from reps. They're spammed with emails and calls and they can't attend all the conferences and events, so they look for vendors via LinkedIn. They'll read an article and learn about what's happening in an industry. And then once they've researched the topic, they'll look at vendors that seem to have expertise in that area. They'll go to those vendor sites and they'll cull it down to maybe three vendors. They've done all the research, then they reach out to the sales rep. So, sales reps need to build themselves up as a credible thought leader on social media.

LI: Can you share a recent example of a B2B salesperson who really impressed you? What did they do that stood out?

DU: The people who impress me most understand the value of social networking. A recent example is of a sales rep based in Singapore who had been given a new account. He didn't know anyone in the company so he needed to develop relationships within the organization to figure out who he even needed to know.

He used Sales Navigator to figure out who the key decision-makers were, and found that I had worked with a key decision-maker in a previous marketing role. He reached out to me and asked for an introduction. I reached out to my former colleague asked if he minded if one of my sales guys reached out to him. He and I got to talking about working together 15 years ago and it rekindled our relationship. They now work together. It shows the power of relationships.

LI: B2B buying cycles are notoriously long. How can sales pros do a better job of using social media to keep prospects engaged throughout the entire sales cycle?

DU: The sales cycles are extremely long! For the sales enablement program I run, the goal is to teach our sales and marketing teams that the tools are there to track accounts, whether they're prospects or customers. Even five years ago, to be able to keep track of competitors and accounts, you'd have to set up hundreds of Google alerts and you'd get a ton of emails that weren't relevant or arrived too late. What I love about Sales Navigator is you can save your account, save a lead, and prioritize what content gets to you. It surfaces the best info and keeps you informed about your accounts in real time.

All I have to do is log into the Sales Navigator app and all the information is there. It only takes me 15 minutes to see what's new across all my accounts and leads. What they are liking, sharing, reading, and interacting with tells you what type of person they are and what they're up to. You can see if they follow your competition. If so, that's one of the vendors you'll have to compete against to win the business. It's just a matter of using the tools that are there to set yourself up for success.

LI: In your eyes, what distinguishes the top 5% of salespeople from the rest as it pertains to using social media for sales?

DU: It's always the same, it doesn't matter if it was 10 years ago, top sales people work smarter, not harder. Work on ways to be much more efficient. Social enables both sales and marketing to find new ways to create a pipeline, close deals, and build relationships. The top 5% are the ones using social, building their own professional brand, and are trying to solve real business problems. They are setting themselves apart by embracing a new way of communicating. Online is the same as offline, it's just a digital way of doing it. They don't have to attend a bunch of events, they can reach so many people and have one-to one conversations in the blink of an eye. They're the ones who are successful because they're delivering the value.

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES:

B2B buying cycles are notoriously long. On the plus side, this gives account executives plenty of opportunities to add value and improve their standing in the buying committee's mind. Conversely, long sales cycles can also zap momentum. The best way to ensure you remain positioned to win the sale is to engage the buying committee throughout the sales cycle, which is easier said than done. Here are a few ways to stay in touch with prospects without being overbearing:

Engage with insights

Use trigger events to your advantage so you can start relevant conversations and deliver value. If you are "just checking in to see how everything is going," you are not engaging with insights.

Stay active on social

Passive engagement can work wonders too. For example, seeing your thoughtful comment in their LinkedIn feed may be just the reminder your sales prospect needs to get back to you about solving their business problem. Staying active on social doesn't just build trust and contribute to your thought leadership, it also keeps you top of mind.

Leverage your network

Facilitate a warm introduction if you don't have one. Start by researching the buying committee to see if anyone in your network can introduce you. Or, if you've already got a strong relationship with someone at your target account, ask them about other members of the buying committee and request introductions when it makes sense.

Reach out with the right content and context

This goes back to engaging with insights, but you can also take it a step further with the message or the medium. For example, you could create a personalized presentation on PointDrive or send personalized message via a more exclusive channel like InMail. Use commonalities to your advantage. LinkedIn's research shows that the more you have in common with a prospect, the more likely it is that they will accept your InMail message.

ENGAGE CREDIBLY TO MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

ACCOUNT MANAGERS:

Account managers have a tricky job. Maintaining the relationship is part of your job description, but you are evaluated on your ability to strengthen the relationship and grow revenue. So when you think about it, account managers are sales pros in customer support clothing.

There's a delicate balance account managers must strike between being involved and respecting boundaries. Adding to this complexity is the fact that some accounts demand constant attention while other accounts prefer a hands-off, "we'll call you if we need anything" approach. But regardless of the preferences, the responsibilities remain the same: maintain the relationship and grow revenue. Here are a few ways account managers can establish themselves as a trusted advisor.

Engage thoughtfully

The goal is to have your contacts actually look forward to hearing from you. You can achieve this by reserving your communication for when you have something interesting, timely, or valuable to deliver.

Leverage current customer relationships

Facilitate warm intro to new decision-makers in accounts. The more relationships you have at an account, the more deeply entrenched you become, and the more opportunities there are to engage thoughtfully.

Wow customers with custom content

One of the best ways to establish yourself as a trusted advisor is to prove that you care about your account's success. Every so often, take the time to create personalized presentations and action plans based on the knowledge only you have - knowledge that no competing rep can duplicate. PointDrive is a good place to get started.

Monitor decision-maker engagement

For example, you might congratulate a decision-maker on a work anniversary or a promotion, which then leads to a meeting to discuss priorities over the coming year.

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES:

Account executives are forced to answer hundreds of questions each day. At any minute, you may be asking, which opportunity in the pipeline deserves my attention? Or, where will I find qualified prospects to fill my pipeline, and how will I learn about their business? Or, how will I earn this decision-maker's attention?

Given the reality of the world we operate in, we asked ourselves: How can we best leverage the power of LinkedIn to make life easier for salespeople? We call our approach the System of Engagement, and the vision is about creating a system that answers the question:

What is the next best action I can take?

With the right system in place, sales pros can efficiently target the right decision-makers, understand their needs, and engage them with relevant insights. It's a systematic approach to smarter sales engagement.

ACCOUNT MANAGERS:

There's no handbook for account managers that says, "do these things, and you're guaranteed to succeed." Every account is different. Every contact comes with their own motivations and fears. What works to grow revenue at one account may cause another account to withdraw. Contacts come and go. Priorities sometimes shift overnight.

It may be cliche to say that information is power, but when it comes to account management, and making the best possible decision, context is everything. To help you make the best decisions for your career and your company, we asked ourselves: How can we best leverage the power of LinkedIn to make life easier for account managers?

Our approach is called the System of Engagement. Our vision is about providing account managers with a system that takes the guesswork out of maintaining and strengthening relationships. It may not be an exact-science, step-by-step handbook, but it does answer the question: What is the next best action I can take right now?

By adding a layer of continuous context on top of your system of communication and system of record, you have a system of engagement you can rely on to engage the right people, at the right time, with a message they'll appreciate.

CONCLUSION

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, engagement is in the eye of buyer. What entices one buyer may bore the next buyer to tears. When it comes to engaging buyers, there are no hidden secrets. There are no cheat sheets. But there is a system.

With a system of engagement in place, you can:

- **Target** the right people
- **Understand** their needs, and how you can best help them
- **Engage** each person in a way that makes sense to them

We hope the information in this eBook helps you create your own system of engagement - one that makes you a more proficient seller.

If you'd like to learn how LinkedIn Sales Navigator can provide your team with a proven system of engagement, contact us today.

For more information on a range of sales solutions from LinkedIn, click here.