



**The Pursuit Group**

Optimize the business-to-business sales cycle

**A Convergence of Forces is Changing the Sales Landscape.  
Are You Doing Anything About It?**

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## **A Convergence of Forces is Changing the Sales Landscape. Are You Doing Anything About It?**

“If we can just get through the rest of the year, then things will smooth out.”

Ever heard that...or perhaps said it? It's a fervent hope for most of us, because it's becoming harder to cope with the pace of change. The good news is that you're not alone; most people – especially those in sales and marketing – feel that way.

The bad news for many is that – if anything -- the pace of change will actually accelerate. But that means really, really good news for those organizations ready and willing to embrace change: the opportunity to get a big jump on the competition; the chance to accelerate away from the pack in a way that the competition may never catch up.

The pace of change reflects forces that promise (or threaten, depending on your outlook) to alter the business landscape forever. Those forces include:

- The elimination of geography as a factor in many purchases. Customers can buy from (and vendors can sell to) anyone anywhere in the world at any time of day or night.
- The almost unlimited availability of product and vendor knowledge that enables customers to measure product/service value more easily and thoroughly.
- A restriction of customer time and availability for traditional sales pitches, together with increased resistance to traditional media messages.
- A proliferation of technologies supporting both communications and information management, forcing adoption by business functions that are traditionally uneasy with technology.
- A trend toward ethics oversight in business that is beginning to challenge client/vendor relationships that get “too cozy”.

Taken together, these forces pose a clear, black-and-white challenge to sales and marketing executives: 1) maintain an “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” approach, or 2) take action to figure out how change can be turned into opportunity. Either way poses some risks, but we want to show that “don't fixit” is the more risky choice in this sea of change. Moreover, this convergence makes today perhaps the best time in recent memory to optimize your sales process and drive change, rather than have change drive you.

### **“Don't Fix What's Not Broken”**

The “ain't broke” advocates will say “Sales is an art, not a science, and it will continue to be. Our biggest asset is our “feet on the street” and we simply cannot afford to disrupt them with major changes to their routine. Can you imagine the cost of a big hit to our sales cycle?

Besides, we're even with the competition, there's no reason to risk putting us behind by trying a big leap forward."

And they're right...to a point.

The problem is, some competitors out there are going to try for the big leap forward. And at least one is going to succeed. Then all bets are off while everyone scrambles to catch up. And while you're accelerating to catch up, the optimized sales organization is not standing still and waiting for you. In fact, their efforts at sales optimization made them better at accelerating, and competitors that learn how to do it right are not easily overtaken by the followers. More often, competitors slowly fade into a pack of also-rans. If someone else does the big leap right, be prepared to live with a permanent "we try harder" approach to the marketplace.

### **"Take action"**

This group understands the fundamental challenge of change, and clearly sees the strategic opportunity of creating an optimized sales organization. They also can see what happens to the followers when at least one competitor has become a leader. They want to step carefully, but they see the biggest risk is not stepping at all.

And they're right.

While adopting a strategic vision for the optimized sales infrastructure, they understand that – for sales organizations – change poses significant short-term risks to the bottom line. So they create the vision, and then cut it into bite-sized pieces for implementation. They understand that technology comes after process and process comes after people. They know that, unless the sales force is actively involved in change they will never buy into it. They never forget that they must be able to measure the right things, because all organizations pay attention to what they measure. And they are acutely aware that whatever is measured must ultimately lead back to the enterprise bottom line: increased revenues, reduced costs, more loyal customers, well-defended margins.

### **Change can be enabling, too.**

In fact, we can add one more bullet in the list of changes featured at the top of this white paper:

- The proliferation of powerful, inexpensive and easy-to-use tools, made available to small business by a new generation of Internet entrepreneurs.

These tools are not cut-down versions of enterprise software suites; most were designed from the ground up to support small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, they are available in a whole new way: for rent. No need to buy the software by the seat – along with a hefty maintenance contract – and build out the hardware infrastructure to support it. Just have a broadband pipe, and let the software provider house the data and manage the processes. Even the software that is not available on the rental model is still designed and priced for the smaller business.

Technology tools available today for sales and marketing support include:

- Simplified sales force automation software. The best-known is salesforce.com, which rents as many seats as you need and provides the software and hardware infrastructure for you. While not as sophisticated as many enterprise suites, it provides enough sales automation support for most small enterprises. Even larger corporations are embracing this simpler approach: salesforce.com has users with thousands of seats.
- Web portals that aggregate product/service information in a single location, and make it available to road warriors around the clock. No waiting until the west coast office opens and trying to get hold of an applications engineer.
- Presentation enhancement programs that add live and on-demand video to PowerPoint slides, extract spreadsheet data into compelling graphics, and support on-the-fly presentation assembly from thousands of slides located in hundreds of different documents.
- Affordable communications technologies that support Webinars and teleconferencing, even from the field; for example creating a live teleconference connection in the customer's office with a product expert back at the plant.

### **How the optimized sales organization weathers the perfect storm**

Let's look at each of the perfect storm elements and see how an optimized sales organization copes with, and perhaps even takes advantage of, the various components of the storm:

<b>Perfect Storm Component</b>	<b>Optimized Response</b>
The elimination of geography as a factor in many purchases. Customers can buy from anyone anywhere in the world at any time of day or night.	24/7 availability of product/service information in at least one media. Interactive and live communications tools utilized to connect with prospects and customers. Virtual connection of widely separated offices to extend time of availability as close as possible to 24/7. Product/service information available in multiple languages.
The almost unlimited availability of product and vendor knowledge that enables customers to commoditize product/service offerings more easily and thoroughly.	Selecting bundling or unbundling of products and services to maximize margins and meet customer needs. Clear value propositions for all product/service bundles. Aggressive customer retention efforts to minimize defection. In-depth product/service knowledge, packaged for flexible and easy assembly by the customer (prospects will gravitate to the vendor that makes it easiest to acquire and assemble product/service information). A focus on individual needs and efforts to win the emotional battle inherent in every purchase decision.

A restriction of customer time and availability for traditional sales pitches, together with increased resistance to traditional media messages	One-visit discovery process; comprehensive discovery data collection system. Ability to conduct virtual presentations to dispersed groups via Webinars and teleconferences. Individualized presentation and proposal content; generated quickly and easily with support tools and database of content. Use of e-mail and Web links to conduct follow-up support and provide specific information as requested.
A proliferation of technologies supporting both communications and information management, forcing adoption by business functions that are traditionally uneasy with technology.	Careful selection and implementation of sales and marketing support technologies. Involvement of users in selection with quick implementation designed to easily pick off low-hanging fruit. Development of meaningful metrics on the use of technologies. Proper use of incentives to ensure appropriate use.
A trend toward ethics oversight in business that is beginning to challenge client/vendor relationships that get “too cozy”.	More emphasis on driving and communicating the rational and emotional ROI engine, with particular attention to the unique business needs of each customer – and each of the decision-influencers within the customer’s organization.

In addition, an optimized sales force has the flexibility to adapt to change more rapidly and thoroughly. The result is a rate of acceleration that leaves all but the best of competition far behind.

NOTE: For more information on the characteristics of an optimized sales organization, please check out “The Optimized Sales Force”, a white paper from The Pursuit Group that is available at [www.thepursuitgroup.com](http://www.thepursuitgroup.com).

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