



The Change Around Us

'Good enough' is no longer good enough

by: Mike Lecak, Collaborative Consultant Group LLC

The only constant in the office technology industry is change. As business owners, we are seeing change around every corner — change in process, change in technology, change in our offerings and change with our customers. With so much change around us, we sometimes retreat into our comfort zones and do our best to resist. While this might offer us some short-term comfort, in the long run, it only puts us behind everyone else.

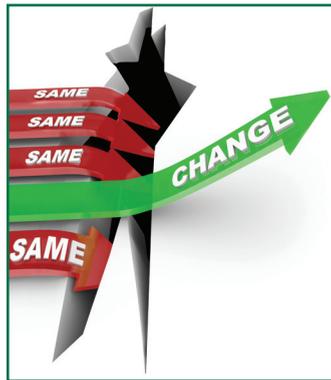
When we take a step back and look at our offerings, we must also look at our customers. How have they changed? How do the decision makers we are targeting every day access information? How do they communicate and want to be communicated with?

There are some things that will not change. We must offer value in our products and services. We must be able to communicate that value to get and keep our customers' and prospects' attention. These are constants. What has changed over the years is both who we are selling to and how we need to engage with them. For the most part, they live in a 140-character world. Speed is the measuring point. Understanding and working within that framework can keep you connected. Ignoring it might simply exclude you from that communication loop.

As a baby boomer, I can tell you that the changes I have seen over the last 20 years are both fascinating and too numerous to name. Technology has changed the way we give and receive information, as well as the speed in which those tasks are done. What has also changed are the expectations our customers now have. I often wonder how I was able to really keep up with my customers in the past. I would walk into my office, look at the message carousel for my name and grab the stack of messages to return calls from the previous day. That was an accepted practice, so to compare then to now does not seem fair or sensible.

Today, calls have turned into texts or emails. Those texts and emails seem to come with an expectation of an immediate reply. Because you can reply instantly, it is almost expected that you should; it is just the landscape in which we are operating. Many of your decision makers have never operated outside of today's norm; the Internet, cell phones, email — they have just "always been."

As I speak to dealers around the country, I am often struck by the challenges they face and the different ways in which they face them. We are an industry known for sales acumen. We are



a fertile ground for recruiters. Headhunters continue to comb our ranks. The simple reason: We can sell. That is why I am often amazed at how some cannot seem to navigate the "solution sale" that is now commonplace. Too many sales reps and managers seem to be stuck. They know their jobs and they understand their customers, but they do not want to rock the boat. While I can understand that sentiment, I could not disagree more with the premise.

As you continue to see the workforce changing in terms of both age and ability, what is certain is that those are not the only things changing.

In the past, our value as sales professionals seemed to boil down to a few certainties. We needed to understand our customers' needs, find the pain and provide a solution that would "plug the gap." As we call on customers today, very few things are the same as before. It is our ability as sales professionals to challenge the status quo that will make and keep us relevant.

Today, your customers know far more than they are given credit for; information is readily available for anything they want or think they need. Google is the great equalizer. To be truly relevant today, you need to be on the front end of identifying gaps in process or execution. When identified, these gaps should be the basis for your solution-centered sales model.

"Disruptive technology" is an often-used term today. I submit that while the technology used will continue to change for the better, your customers need guidance through that maze to completely understand how to take advantage of this shift. How can technology help them? Acting as the subject-matter expert and truly understanding how they can benefit from your solutions is a start. The concept is simple, but the execution is not easy. The landscape will continue to change as technology improves at lightning speed. Our ability to change and adapt with it will be the difference between success and failure. This is the challenge we must all accept. "Good enough" is just not good enough anymore. Remember, if you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. ■

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