



Leveraging Customer Voice:

The No Smoke and Mirrors Process to Leverage the Voice of Your Customers to Grow Sales Post Pandemic

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Introduction: The Covid-19 Dilemma

Right now, we're stuck in a game of 'many.' You might know *many* people that are worried, confused, and unprepared right now. I know I do.

Many companies are facing the most significant challenge any of their leaders have ever faced due to COVID-19. We are not preparing for disruptions that *may* occur but reacting to a huge disruption that is taking place *now*. Companies around the world have closed due to federal and/or state restrictions, and businesses deemed essential have had to pivot to the new climate of uncertainty.

Many sales teams I work with have shared that their once face-to-face buyer meetings are now phone calls and virtual meetings on Zoom. Salespeople who once could pick up the phone and call key contacts now have to use email because those key contacts are working from home.

Some businesses that required customer traffic are expressing that sales are down due to consumers quarantining at home.

Some customers are seeing a significant shift to online purchases. Others are experiencing cash flow concerns, as their customers are not paying their bills.

Many organizations have taken action with downsizing and furloughing associates, and some have implemented compensation reduction plans, and 2-3 mandatory unpaid leave each quarter, trying to reduce their costs creatively.

In response to these many issues, we need solutions that solve our biggest questions. How can organizations quickly adapt and create a customer experience based on the realities of today? How can businesses strategically retool the way they serve their customers?

What will the new normal be in terms of trade? What will change about the way we serve our customers both during and after this crisis?

I wrote this eBook to share how I have served organizations leveraging the voice of their customers to design strategic plans for companies. These plans are in place to not only survive this current state of chaos and disruption but to thrive when we get through it. And we *will* get through it.

Once the COVID-19 threat has passed, we will notice new behaviors and patterns emerge in how people do business.

For example, Domino's Pizza's commercials now promote how your *pizza is made handsfree* to eliminate consumer concerns of contamination and germs.

I believe this challenging market condition will force many distributors to make strategic business adjustments in how they serve their customers that they probably should have made years ago. We will see a retooling of their sales teams and roles based on customer requirements. I anticipate we will see a dramatic rise in inside sales roles and a decrease in outside sales.

Manufacturers who sell their products through distributors will adjust how they serve their distributors. We will see more virtual training and online product training and less live lunch and learn training. Salespeople who once spent over a day visiting and working with distributors will do so via Zoom meetings and find more time to actually sell.

B2C businesses are adapting and will continue to adapt. Realtors are offering virtual home tours, and car dealers are doing business virtually and delivering sanitized vehicles to consumers. Groceries and take out food is ordered online and delivered to our homes. Some of these behaviors may go back to the pre-COVID-19 way of life, but many will stay.

Overall, we all need to challenge everything we once believed to be true about what buyers want and need. We need to determine what they want, need, and value most *today*.

This eBook is about helping you and your team leverage the voice of your customers to make data-driven decisions today and for tomorrow. I have been leveraging the voice of customers for over 30 years to help sales organizations grow sales profitability, and I pulled content from articles I have shared over the years that I hope you can apply to your business today.

What I see many customers and business leaders doing is reviewing their numbers daily and adjusting to what they are learning as they should. However, what very few companies are doing is discovering how this disruption has impacted their customers and how they want and need to be served today.

The ideal information we need to make strategic decisions about our businesses is found by reviewing our transaction data. This way, you can gain insights and trends, and then we can act up and conduct Voice of the Customer research to determine how your buyers want and need to be served today and in the future.

With this data-driven, buyer-centric approach, teams will develop strategic plans that resonate with their customers and come out of this current challenging environment leaner and more focused on their customers than ever before. Leaders who review their current transaction data and customer voice feedback will make decisions based on data instead of gut and instinct. Keep in mind, most of your gut instinct developed in much different times, so it may not serve you as it always has.



A Little About Me

My name is Mark Allen Roberts.

Why include the middle name, you might ask? Well, when the internet started impacting sales and affecting how buyers were buying, I googled "Mark Roberts" and found two disturbing sites that ranked high in search.

One belonged to Mark Roberts, the world's most famous stalker. Yes, you heard me correctly; I share my name with the guy who runs naked at famous golf tournaments and all sporting events. The other belonged to a Mark Roberts that is known for designing collectible fairies. So I started using my middle name to reach the people that wanted to get my help, review my work, read my content, and read customer testimonials about me.

I have led sales and marketing teams domestically in North America and globally for over 36 years now. My passion is healing companies, their leaders, and associates and helping them strategically fix sales problems. If you google the phrase "[fix sales problems](#)," you will find me often-ranked number one in the world.

I've helped companies experience what I refer to as "explosive growth" in sales revenues, profits, market share, and market leadership.

In 2007, I wrote my first book titled *Branding Backwards*, and over 14,500 people have downloaded it from my website. It was written for business leaders who are very skilled with the technology and operations of their company but struggle with marketing and branding.

I've been given many titles over the years: salesman, college instructor, manager, consultant, coach, COO, SVP, worldwide manager, Vice President of Marketing, President, and CEO, to name a few. I've served companies that range in size from startup to Fortune 500 organizations throughout North America, and for three years, I opened international distribution and established joint ventures throughout the world.

This eBook is about sharing what I've learned through experience and the application of thought-leading content I have read. It was important to me to deliver this valuable information in a practical way that adds value to you.

My personal goal is to have this eBook become a two-way conversation between current leaders and those wanting to be leaders and to have them share their new challenges as they emerge. A quote I hold dear is,

“

None of us are as smart as all of us.

My dream is that working together, we solve new roadblocks as they emerge, and we help businesses pivot and adjust their model and processes based on data, not just knee jerk reactions.

As I reflect on my past and present experiences, I see a common thread interwoven in all the roles I have played: *Identify and breakthrough roadblocks that are preventing teams from becoming market-leading organizations.*

Thank you in advance for reading this eBook, and I hope to hear from you. I may not be a professional writer, but I'm passionate about helping teams and individuals become the leaders they were destined to be.

Yes, that means *you!* You're destined for greatness, and this book will help you get there.



Chapter 1
One Thing



Two questions:

1. If you could only do one thing to pivot, to help you strategically adjust the way you serve your customers, what would it be?
2. If you could only do one thing to improve your sales revenue and profits, what would it be?

In this eBook, I'll share how capturing and leveraging the current voice of your customers is that "one thing."

When your team understands your customers – how they buy and what they need to buy today – you will experience the following:

- Increased sales
- Increased profits
- Increased market share
- Improved sales close rate percentages
- Faster sales cycles
- Higher sales close rates
- Improved customer experience
- Improved business relationships
- (Oh, and much better board meetings!)

Why do most sales plans fail? The most common reason I have experienced is a [dated value proposition](#). What worked years ago is not working now due to some change or shift.

The COVID-19 virus has caused many buyers to adjust how they buy, and market-leading organizations will adapt to a buyer-centric sales process.



As the authors of the book *The One Thing* share, we achieve more when we go small. Each of us can make a long laundry list of things we could do, but that dilutes focus.

The most powerful thing sales leaders can do is equip sales teams with a repeatable sales process, sales training, and sales tools to hit their numbers based on how buyers buy **today**.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What do you need to know?
- [Why do customers buy from you today?](#)
- Why don't customers buy from you today?
- What is your buyer's buying process today?
- What buying criteria must your buyers have today?

All of these questions (and more) must be answered to write a strategic sales plan and a buyer-centric sales process.

Many of the teams I have served have been in business 10-20-80+ years.

We serve dynamic markets that are always shifting, and we need to adjust to those shifts or realize stalled or declining sales. How do we capture the current customer voice and market truth?



Process

By now, you may be wondering what processes I've used to capture the voice of customers for the teams I've served? Here's a breakdown:

1. Meet with your top 20% of accounts that represent 80% of your net profits.
2. Meet with three accounts you recently tried to sell but did not win. *(I have found some of the best actionable data comes from people you did not successfully sell to previously).*
3. Meet with two or three accounts that were once in your top accounts, but today have sales that are down more than 40 percent.
4. Meet with three prospective accounts that match your ideal customer profile.
5. Ask open-ended questions *(Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a yes or no answer).*
6. Your questions should start very broad, then become more specific.
7. Add at least two questions that demonstrate your knowledge of your customers' business and industry.
8. Use active listening. You are listening to learn, not reply!
9. Take notes. Once all interviews are completed, look for trends. Ideally, ask permission to record the interviews and have them transcribed.
10. You must manage expectations. Understand that you are doing this exercise to better serve your markets and buyers and win more business. You are not looking for a "throat to choke" or to blame any person or department.

"It can't be that simple," I hear some of you saying.

Actually, yep. It is.

The great news is that what used to take me months can now often be accomplished in two weeks to 30 days by leveraging technology and business partners I work with for better results.



Questions

What are some questions I have found to produce useful feedback?

1. If you were the president of our company, what would you have us do to win a larger percentage of your purchases?
2. What do our competitors do very well? How important is that to you?
3. Is there anything we are doing now that you wish we would quit doing?
4. Have you experienced any changes that have altered how you make buying decisions and if so, please explain?
5. When you search for products or services, where do you look?

Results

I still feel some doubters out there.

Below are some companies I have helped leverage the voice of their customers and the results they experienced.

I have not shared their company names because often, the work I do is with the CEO, owners, and the senior executive team. They don't want their clients to know they worked with me to understand their customers' needs better.

What I *can* share is the type of company and the results I achieved for them.

I share this not to brag but to illustrate that this process works in every industry I have served, and for many organizations that felt their business was very unique. Most companies have unique characteristics, but the process of understanding your market voice is always the same.

Here are some examples:

- A plastics company that made mechanical security devices grew more than \$38 million in 18 months at gross profit margins exceeding 50%.
- An adaptive automotive vehicle manufacturer realized a \$50 million sales increase and a 6 percent increase in gross profits over six years.
- A compressed air manufacturer realized over 150% sales growth in its worst-performing region. The growth rate continued for many years after our engagement.
- A company that supplied custom engineered product solutions grew over 30%, adding just over 200 new accounts in 18 months and gaining 3.7% in gross margins.
- A firm that designed retirement plans doubled their revenues in 24 months.
- A web development firm grew 4X in three years.
- A training company grew 128% at higher margins in 2008 when everyone else in their industry had to make severe cuts to survive.
- A venue for team building events grew 2X.
- A new dealership for custom vehicles grew to be the largest dealer in revenues within 18 months.

- An irrigation supply company grew 150% in 12 months.
- A software company selling paperless solutions to physicians grew 138% in 24 months.
- A financial advisor's practice grew revenue by 2X after making a few adjustments in how he positioned his services in 24 months.

There's more, but I hope you get the point. There is power in understanding your buyers today and leveraging their voice to drive profitable sales.

In today's competitive markets, you must:

1. Understand the current voice of your customers and markets.
2. Develop a repeatable sales process that mirrors how your buyers buy today.
3. Create sales tools that proactively provide answers to the criteria buyers must have to buy today.
4. Assess the skills of your sales team and fill skills gaps while training them to use a repeatable buyer-centric sales process based on the way your buyers want and need to buy today.
5. Have prescriptive and actionable transaction data.

Understanding your customers today is that powerful "one thing" that will position your team for profitable future success.

Chapter 2

Create a Buyer-centric Sales GPS





Create a Repeatable Sales Process

The quickest path to creating a [repeatable sales process](#) that drives sales growth is understanding the journey your buyers take today. This sounds pretty intuitive, right? But when I work with clients, they often cannot answer the below questions, or they answer, but their customers have a much different point of view.

To understand your buyers' journey, ask:

- How do your buyers buy?
- Why do they buy?
- Why don't they buy?
- What do buyers in your market need to have to make a buying decision today?
- What do they expect from salespeople?
- What is the best way to serve them?

Once we have answers to these questions, we can create a repeatable sales process that drives profitable sales growth.

A buyer-centric sales process that mirrors the way your buyers want to buy becomes a GPS for your salespeople. They learn to follow the steps of the buyer-centric sales process, anticipate turns, and provide much-needed content for points on the buyer journey where traffic stalls.

Years ago, I was asked to speak at an event for business owners and leaders. I prefer interactive discussions, so I asked the room what problems they would like to solve in our short time together. We wrote issues on the whiteboard, then consolidated the list.

What we agreed as the top three problems these business owners wanted to solve were:

- Finding and hiring good sales talent
- Getting found on the internet and increasing e-commerce sales
- Making sales more predictable, efficient and effective

We agreed to spend our time together in this engagement focused on making their salespeople more efficient and effective.

As of late, I have asked CEO's and senior leaders to identify the top problems they wanted to solve since COVID -19. They mentioned:

- How to plan in so much uncertainty and chaos
- How to retool our go-to-market strategy based on the new normal
- How to build virtual relationships and have sales teams become skilled at virtual sales?
- How to create a business plan not only to survive this COVID-19 crisis but also to position our businesses to thrive when it is over
- How to decide the best role for every salesperson
- Determining who they can't afford to lose when this crisis is over



Back to my meeting with the business leaders ...

I asked the business owners and leaders to share how the above problems are seen and felt in their organizations, and this is what they listed:

- Financial results
- Service experience/customer satisfaction
- Overall buying experience
- Turnover/retention –customers and employees
- Margin loss
- Sales decline
- Morale decline throughout the organization
- Brand damage
- Cash flow
- Employee engagement
- New business decline

This group was really sharing some great ideas, and we agreed the above list held the top ways that not having a market-driven repeatable sales process hurts their business.

Next, I asked what one thing could we do that would make this entire list go away? (This question came from one of my favorite books: [The Power of One Thing](#))

The room grew very quiet.

So I asked a simple question:

How do I get to the airport after this meeting is over?

And then I drew their instructions on the whiteboard.

One gentleman started with directions: turn left out the parking lot, and at the second light turn right. Stay on that road until it deadends and take a left, merge onto the highway and drive North for about 11 miles, and look for the airport sign. Exit the highway on the left and follow the signs to the airport and car rental return.

A young lady said, "I would not send him that way," and she proceeded to detail two turns, and it had me on the highway much sooner with fewer turns and in less time.

The last person first asked me a question: "What time of day will you be driving? If it is between 4 pm and 6 pm, you want to stay off the highway..." and proceeded to give me a very lengthy and complicated series of directions.

When they finished, I challenged the room:

"Why did you all assume I wanted directions from here?"

I went on to share how this is the most common problem we have when trying to sell to current customers as well as new customers - we assume we know the buyer's starting point.

After they challenged me that this was not fair, we moved on.

I pointed to the maps I drew of the directions I was provided with all the turns and routes.

The one with the least amount of turns and steps is what it's like to sell to a current customer. They already know you and your company, they have some level of trust, they have a logical series of steps they use to buy, and they have the criteria they need to make a buying decision. As you can see, it has fewer steps, it's harder to get lost on, and it's much faster.

On the other end of the scale is the direction that did not have me using the highway at rush hour. These directions had the most steps, turns, and twists to get me to my final destination. This route has the highest probability of me getting lost with many red lights along the way that are beyond my control, so I had better plan more time for this journey.

This process is what it's like selling to a new customer who has never done business with your company before or maybe never heard of your company. You will have many steps the buyer will use to build trust. Some of them may feel odd to you. You will meet people who influence the buying decision, and others who have a voice but little influence, and you have to navigate each engagement.



Depending on the study you read, buyers today are completing between 53% and 70% of their buying journey BEFORE they speak with one of your salespeople. That number probably does not surprise you.

But let me ask you something you do need to know: What are they doing? Where are they going? What process are they using, and what exit criteria is important to them to go to the next step in their purchase journey?

We must know what they are doing!

The last directions resemble selling a current customer a new product or service. The number of steps the buyer takes is more than the short journey, but less than a buyer who never heard of you before.

They trust you and your company but need assurance that this new product or service will completely solve their problem. This is the process to gain a greater share of wallet with your current customers. Your product must produce some value greater than the current vendor, or the time and effort to change is not worth the buyers' efforts.

“**“Not knowing how your buyers buy and what they need to have to make buying decisions today is a sales sin.”**

- Mark Allen Roberts

(Note sin means, "missing the mark")

It is second only to asking your salespeople to achieve sales growth goals with a dated value proposition that no longer resonates with buyers.

I went on to share that their businesses had common buyers and buying influencers that we need to group into [buyer personas](#).

Once we do, we need to understand how each of these [buyers buys](#) and what they need to buy when in the buying process. What do they value most? Shape your presentation to speak to their needs.

The more you understand about each of your key [buyer personas](#), the more your repeatable sales process and the tools your salespeople are presenting at just the right time will resonate. This results in a greater win rate, increased sales, and increased gross margins.

Eventually, an older distinguished gentleman in the third row said:

"OK, I see where this is interesting and important, but how? How do you map this process and gather so much information?"

Keeping with the spirit of the *power of one thing*, I answered: ASK!

I shared the process I use to interview current customers, customers you lost, and potential customers my clients have always wanted to sell. I shared my top 12-15 questions I use that work in every industry. The only people you do not interview during this process are those currently in the quote process.

What I asked everyone to do is ask the open-ended questions and listen, really listen. You're listening for any place in the buying process where the buyer enters a roundabout and goes round and round, not making a decision. If you have a CRM, look for places in your current repeatable sales process where most of your sales slow down or come to a grinding halt.

Listen for any time the journey slows down. Red lights, if you will, in our driving example. What criteria does the buyer need to have, and when?

What does your buyer need to move to the next phase of their buying process? Compare it to me looking for the airport sign on the highway with enough time to still change lanes. Listen for any road construction that has changed how they buy in the last few months, causing them to detour from their old buying process.

I closed our discussion with some advice.

"The best way to make your repeatable sales process effective and efficient is taking the time to understand your buyers, the process they are using, and the criteria they need (and when they need it) in today's market."

Put another way:

“**Knowing your Buyer's Journey is like creating a GPS for your Sales Process.**”

– **Mark Allen Roberts**

Your salespeople's and marketing's activities will **mirror how your buyers want to buy** and provide buyers with the tools they need at just the right time in the buying journey to close more sales.

How about your company:

- Do you have a repeatable sales process? Are you sure?
- How is it working? Are you hitting your sales numbers?
- Does someone on your team clearly understand how your buyers are buying today? Who?
- Does your team clearly understand what your buyers need to buy and when?
- How effective is your team's sales process?
- How efficient is your team's sales process?
- Does your team know when a buyer is entering a roundabout, and what to do to get them back on the buying journey?
- Is your team showing any or all of the above symptoms of not having a defined, repeatable sales process?
- Could your buyers be taking a detour while your salespeople keep selling the same way, and are your salespeople unaware of that?

The markets we serve are dynamic. We must tune into how buyers buy and what they need to buy today. What new challenges have they faced in the last month? Market shifts and other changes that can cause sales growth to stall happen all the time.

Market *leaders* are continually asking their markets how they buy and what they need to buy. Leaders identify detours early and *adjust*.



Chapter 3:
**Value
Proposition**



Why Do Salespeople Lead With Price?

Easy: They Lack a Strong Current Value Proposition

A common frustration I hear among senior leadership teams is, "Why do my salespeople lead with price?" In an article I wrote some time ago, I shared that one reason is that your salespeople may be "selling naked." They lack a clear value proposition that resonates with your buyers today.

To get started, we need to answer a question:

What is a Value Proposition?

Simply put, it's a promise of value you propose to deliver your buyers and the buyer's belief of how they will experience that value.

Kaplan and Norton (the authors of the [Balanced Scorecard](#)) put it this way: "Strategy is based on a differentiated customer value proposition. Satisfying customers is a source of sustainable value creation."

How do we create value propositions that connect with your buyers today?

When creating a value proposition, you must conduct win-loss market analysis and identify **why buyers buy from you and why they don't**. You must clearly understand, through doing the market work, your buyers and prospective buyer's problems and pains today. You must clearly understand the issues they have, the criteria they look for to solve them, and the buying process they are using today. Then you must **create distinction**.

At the end of the day, the two main core attributes buyers use to determine value and differentiate your product or service from that of your competition are **Price** and **Quality**. If your product and company can produce a higher quality overall **buying experience** and solve buyer problems completely, you can command a higher price.

Unfortunately, this Gain /Pain teeter-totter swings the other direction as well. If your products or services lack a compelling value proposition that resonates with buyers in your market(s) today, your salespeople can only lead with price.

Let me ask you:

Have you equipped your salespeople with current value propositions that share how you serve your buyers today?

The most common problem I see when asked to help companies increase sales and profits quickly is they lack a current value proposition that connects with buyers.

I have served many companies that make quality products and once clearly understood their markets, buyers, and the value they provided. That value was so strong buyers were often willing to pay a premium for their service.

Then something changed. It could be a new technology that emerged in your market, your competitors improved, your company stumbled in delivering promises and sales stalled and profit margins started to decline.

It could be an economic condition or, as we are now experiencing, a global pandemic.

The buyer's journey and the criteria buyers use to make purchasing decisions have changed, but your team failed to identify and adjust to these strategic shifts.

The result is your salespeople sounding like they are playing **Marco Polo** on sales calls. They're calling out possible problems they think they can solve for your buyers and just waiting for the buyer to yell, "**BINGO!**" *Now I understand the problem you can solve for me!"*

When your salespeople have enough of these types of sales calls, they resort to the quickest method in their minds to sell: *lead with price*. That's where the sales and profits death spiral begins.

Once your salespeople have the sales mindset that your products and your services are a commodity like their buyers have convinced them (been trained to convince them), the only way to win the business is with the price.

Have I convinced you that spending time on your value proposition is worth your team's effort?

If so, below are some excellent articles on Value Propositions from thought leaders in this space:

- [4 Steps to Creating a Value Proposition](#)
- [Value Proposition Kit](#)
- [How to Write a Value Proposition](#)
- [Creating a Value Proposition](#)
- [The Customer Value Proposition](#)
- [How to Create a Strong B2B Value Proposition](#)

A couple more questions and I will let you go.



- Do you have a Value Proposition that resonates with buyers in your markets today?
- If so, are your salespeople trained to use it?
- Are you frustrated and feel like you're in a sales and profits death spiral?
- Are you tired of explaining to your owners, investors, and your board why sales have stalled, and profits are declining?

If so, creating a value proposition is critical to driving explosive sales and profit growth for your organization. If you lack a value proposition that resonates with your buyers today, that Gain/Pain teeter-totter will shift, and you will experience poor financial results. Take the time to do the [market work](#) and understand your market's problems and how they solve them today, and you will be on your way to creating a strong value proposition.

Chapter 4

The Role of Content



In a [recent article by Sales Benchmark Index](#), they shared how buyers only have so much time to search for information. The article discusses how one company uses content to help buyers solve problems.

"For content marketing to generate revenue, you must know exactly what your customers need, where they need it, how often they need it, and in what form they need to consume it. Miss any of these items and your content marketing efforts will fail to contribute to revenue growth in any meaningful way."

Steve Keifer/Leaseaccelerator

If your team clearly understands why your buyers buy, why they don't buy, and the criteria they need to buy, it puts you far ahead of your competitors to capture buyer mindshare.

Market-leading teams create content based on the feedback received from customer voice research. They update their sales tools and website to include the content your buyers are searching for, and they answer these questions:

- **What content is your buyer actively searching for today to make a buying decision?**
- **What criteria do your buyers need today?**
- **Does your website provide content your buyers are searching for now?**
- **Who will buyers perceive as a market leader? Someone with the perfect content they need today, or a company that doesn't even show up in their online research?**

Capturing the voice of your customers today helps you understand how your buyer buys.

In that buying journey, it often includes research for meaningful content that they must have to make a buying decision. When buyers find that content on your website, it starts to build trust with them.

Spend time understanding the voice of your customers and develop content that helps them buy.



Chapter 5:
**Who Should Own
the Voice of Your
Customers?**



Who should own the voice of the market and customer? The answer may surprise you: *Not Sales!*

Before we unpack this topic, we need to understand the differences between the Voice of the customer (VOC) and the Voice of the market (VOM).

Voice of the Customer

"Voice of the Customer (VOC) is a marketing research technique that encompasses the collective insights of your customers' needs, wants, perceptions, preferences, and expectations."

– Iperceptions

Voice of the Market

"Voice of the Market (VOM) is different in that it incorporates input from the greater market. The market contains not only your customers, but also those who chose not to buy your solution – those who bought someone else's product and those who just didn't make a decision."

– On Product Management



Capturing the Voice of your Customer (VOC) is critical to providing your customers with the best overall buying experience and growing sales profitably.

I also use Voice of the Customer to help me understand how customers describe the problems my clients solve in similar markets.

The Voice of the Market is even more powerful because it not only captures your customer, but it also captures prospects in your market that you want to serve as well as customers you once sold to successfully. VOM helps you scale your solutions to unresolved problems to new customers in the markets you serve.

So, again ... who owns the voice of the market and the customer? *Marketing!*

Why?

A few lessons I have experienced over the years:

First, you want sales *selling*.

I don't mean to sound trite, but this is about focus. You want your sales resources actively selling and not conducting market research. You do not want them to do any behaviors that do not align with their specific objectives and hitting their sales numbers. Their drive should be to serve their customers and solve their unresolved problems.

In the average sales organization today, salespeople spend less than 15% of their time selling as it is. Do not ask them to do research when you need them to deliver sales and profits.

"Diluted Sales focus causes diluted sales results."
Mark Allen Roberts

Second, you want unfiltered feedback from your customers and markets. What if the reason buyers don't buy is the most common: the buyer felt that your sales team did not adequately understand the problem to be solved, so they did not trust their proposal to fix the problem. Will sales tell you that? Maybe, but it would be a difficult thing to share.

For example, what if the reason your customers don't buy more is that they were unaware of the new products you introduced over a year ago? What if the reason your buyers are not giving you a greater share of their wallet is that your salespeople cannot have a business discussion and create a compelling business case?

Third, your customers have a relationship with your salesperson. It would be challenging and uncomfortable for them to share concerns directly with the salesperson that calls on them. However, your customers will share feedback if asked correctly to give them a better overall buying experience.

Fourth, your salespeople are trained to sell. Great, right? Not when it comes to understanding your buyers and how they buy. Your salespeople may hear something the buyer is sharing that prompts them to start selling (overcoming objections) instead of actively listening and capturing the entire thought. The quickest way to shut down a good Voice of the Customer or Voice of Market conversation is to try to sell through objections to the buyers' concerns.

Marketing owns the Voice of the Market and the Voice of the Customer.

If you're like many companies, you may not have marketing team members that have experience conducting interviews. If that is the case, I highly recommend you hire a third party to interview your customers and markets. This tactic is by far the best method of gathering what your buyers need and how they currently buy in the shortest amount of time.

The outside third party will interview all the important people without interrupting your sales team. That means interviewing your customers, customers you lost, and the prospects you always wanted to be customers.

Another approach would be to have a senior member of the leadership team conduct these interviews. As VP of Sales and Marketing, I would often conduct this research when serving small companies.



Another approach would be to have a senior member of the leadership team conduct these interviews. As VP of Sales and Marketing, I would often conduct this research when serving small companies.

The only companies you should never interview are new companies who are currently at some stage of the sales process. You don't want anything to interrupt the flow of the sale through the funnel. I've seen companies that were inexperienced with this process call prospects they are quoting to help close the deal faster, and end up losing the sale entirely.

When working with a third party, make sure you're clear about the deliverables.

Possible market VOC work deliverables include:

- Present raw data/customer feedback unfiltered
- Map buying journey and process the buyers are using today
- Identify buyer personas and buying influencers
- Prepare a summary report
- Identify shifts and trends
- Determine your Net Promoter Score
- Prepare a summary report and recommendations based on the raw data
- Share how buyers want to be served today
- Recommendations based on data

When I conduct customer and market voice research, I present a summary report and recommendations for a specific project fee based on the number of people interviewed, the time to accomplish the project, and how the customers and markets are interviewed. Some clients ask that I personally meet with 2-5 of their customers, so the cost is higher than a phone interview due to travel expenses.

I feel I need to warn you at this point.

In this voice capturing process, you will hear several great things that will make you proud of your team. You will probably also hear things your customers believe to be true (*their perceptions*) that may or may not be accurate. Keep in mind that your customer's perception *is their reality*, and that reality is what you must use in your strategic adjustments.

After the market VOC work, your team will be nervous. Sales, marketing, operations, and even quality will be nervous about what your customers and markets share. As the leader in the organization, you must strategically set the stage for this exercise.



When I work with teams, I have four meetings:

Project launch meeting with the senior management team – I share what we will be doing, how we will do it, who we need to speak with, and potential outcomes. I emphasize that this is not a witch-hunt, but an opportunity to learn how to make strategic adjustments that ensure we all hit our numbers. This meeting is about education and communicating expectations.

CEO/President/VP of marketing/VP of sales – In this meeting, I share my summary report and some specific customer interviews with raw data and recommendations, adjustments to the sales process, and needed new sales tools. This meeting is about understanding opportunities, not **finding a throat to choke**. We decide what we will share with the team and in what depth. We plan to share after we have drafted a corrective action and plan.

Senior leadership team – This meeting is to present a summary of finds and recommendations without specific customer interviews. I ask the CEO and other leaders to prioritize the action items and commit to investment if required in this meeting. This meeting is about gaining team understanding and commitment tied to outcomes and shaping a plan to meet what buyers need today.

Sales VP, Marketing VP, sales, and marketing teams – Here, I present findings, design a new sales process, and list new sales tools needed. Conduct 4-8 sales trainings over 6-8 months and provide coaching as needed. This first meeting is about applying the work your team has committed to do and reinforcing new behaviors. This is a great team-building exercise to tear down any silos that have developed over the years. Following those skills and sales process trainings, we schedule future training to reinforce and refresh new behaviors and coach team members through any difficulties they are experiencing.

Coaching – Typically, I offer coaching for sales associates and senior leaders for 12-24 months.

The number and severity of the adjustments needed will depend upon the market and customer feedback as well as the senior management team's prioritization; most teams learn a few opportunities and misperceptions of customers, make 2-5 strategic adjustments, and add new sales tools.

It is not unusual for teams to create a project roadmap with phase gates to tackle findings. You can have a senior manager lead the project internally, or I have been hired to hold team members accountable to their assigned deliverables.

Once your team understands the voice of your market and the voice of your customers, you have the foundation for a strong sales plan to hit your sales and profit numbers.

- Does your team understand the **voice of the customer**?
- Does your team clearly understand the voice of your market(s)?
- Who owns the voice of the customer and market in your organization?
- When was the last time you gathered this information?
- Are you sure your **brand is in sync** with your customer expectations?
- How often do you feel you need to gather this information?

Market-leading organizations achieve their sales and profit goals consistently (even in challenging times like we find ourselves in today).

They accomplish this by spending time understanding how buyers buy, what they need to buy, and why they don't buy, and taking action. They couple this with insights from their transaction data, and they act.

They take current market data and adjust their plans to serve their existing buyers and markets better.

They are agile and not afraid to adjust their plans as new information becomes available.

They communicate and over-communicate, so their teams are all on the same page.

Chapter 7:
**Identify
Key Buying
Triggers**





One outcome of understanding the voice of your customers and markets is identifying sales trigger events.

What triggers one of the buyers in your market to begin the buying journey?

The answer to that question becomes a key consideration when developing your business development plan.

One of my favorite markets to serve was consumers in wheelchairs wanting wheelchair accessible transportation. Consumers in wheelchairs must have a vehicle they trust and is reliable.

You might say: *well, Mark, I need that, too.* The difference is if our vehicle dies on the road somewhere, we can call a tow truck, and they will tow it and give us a ride to a service garage. Tow trucks are not equipped to accommodate a consumer in a wheelchair. Should their vehicle experience a malfunction, the consumer is left at the point where the car failed until they make alternative transportation arrangements.

Reliability is an even higher buying criterion for consumers in wheelchairs. Based on this, we should not have been as surprised as we were when we kept hearing how consumers with accessible lowered floor minivans often start shopping for a new van within three months of their vehicle warranty expiring. When we surveyed our customers, this came out loud and clear in almost every interview.

Our team sorted our customer database based on when vehicles were purchased, and each month proactively contacted customers whose vehicle was about to lose its warranty. We established a four-touch campaign.

1. The first touch was a simple letter notifying the customer that their vehicle warranty was about to expire, share any current promotions, and remind them that we sold extended warranties. We suggested we quote the trade-in value of their current vehicle.

2. The second touch was a phone call, ideally from the salesperson that sold them the vehicle, reminding them as a service that their warranty was about to expire.

3. The third touch shared specific dealer incentives, rebates, and once again mentioned their warranty was about to expire.

4. The last touch was a request for us to book an appointment to have their vehicle inspected by one of our certified service experts at no charge.

Identifying this buying trigger and developing a strategic series of communications, a *GPS to new sales for our salespeople*, helped us increase sales and build customer loyalty. As a side benefit, it also provided our dealership with a supply of used vehicles that were in huge demand in this community.

- **What triggers your buyers to start the buying journey?**
- **Does someone on your team know?**
- **How has your team used this information?**
- **What could your team do to serve buyers who triggered the need to buy?**
- **What is your team doing to make lifetime customers for your products?**

Understanding the voice of your customers and market has many benefits. One benefit is to intimately understand what triggers your buyers to shop or to search for a new purchase. Taking the time to understand your buyers, why they buy, and what they need to buy is critical to consistently hitting your sales numbers.

Chapter 8

Understand Key Buying Seasons



Voice of your Market work identifies key buying seasons for specific products.

I was hired to grow the sales for Gardner Denver in the rust belt region. Gardner Denver is one of the leading manufacturers of industrial air compressors and accessories in the world. Industrial air compressors support manufacturing plants by supplying compressed air to power machines and tools used in the manufacturing process.

The first step in my business development process was to meet with as many end customers as I could on four-legged sales calls with my dealer distributor salespeople. While the salespeople asked questions about upcoming changes that may require new or additional air compressors, I asked open-ended questions and listened for unresolved market problems and buying trigger events.

Working with one of my larger dealers, [Atlas Machine and Supply](#), we identified a common problem end-users have every year from May through August: moisture in their air. Industrial air compressors compress ambient air, and one of the by-products of this process is water. Buyers purchase air dryers to remove moisture before it has a chance to damage machines and tools. What buyers shared was that during the summer months in the Midwest they experience humidity, and it often taxes their compressed air dryers. It is often a challenge to find new dryers when one of their dryers fail.



We developed a proactive business development plan based on this common seasonal problem our buyers were experiencing. Our dealer produced a postcard mailer that we sent to all their current accounts as well as targeted new accounts they have always wanted to serve. It was a simple message asking if they would like a free audit for moisture to ensure their plant does not have any manufacturing problems when the high humid months hit. We conducted a sales training meeting and trained the distributor sales team on how to execute the [sales process](#).

Our distributor sales team followed up with each account within seven days of the mailer and scheduled audits to ensure their customers and prospects they always wanted to serve would not experience any service interruptions in the humid summer months.

Our compressed air dryer sales more than doubled compared to the same months the prior year and new compressor sales increased. Since our dealer sales were contacting buyers about a common seasonal problem and offering to solve that problem, buyers trusted the sales and service people.

They demonstrated that they knew the industry and common unresolved seasonal problems. The sales and service team was not focused on "selling" but on "[serving](#)" the market. While conducting audits proactively, our maintenance managers and plant managers openly shared other issues that concerned them.

These "other issues" resulted in new incremental compressor sales, service revenue, and aftermarket sales increases.

- Do your end customers have buying seasons for specific products and services?
- Who on your team is responsible for helping dealer distributors grow their sales?
- Does your sales team proactively reach out to buyers to address seasonal buying trigger events?
- Would your team like to double your product sales in key buying seasons?

There is nothing more strategic than understanding your buyers, how they buy, and the criteria they need to buy TODAY. "Today" is the keyword. Think about all the changes we have seen over the years, the last month in particular, in how buyers buy. If you have not adjusted your repeatable sales process or created new sales tools, I promise you have a broken sales process, and you're losing orders you should have won.

The Voice of the Customer, Voice of the Market work becomes the foundation of your sales, marketing, and business development strategic plans.

Here's the most important question to take with you:

If you don't have an understanding of how buyers buy and what they need to buy today, how do you plan to hit your sales numbers next year?



Chapter 9

Understanding Buyer Needs and Criteria Improves Net Profit

Understanding the voice of your customer and market will help your team better understand and prioritize key buying criteria, and this will result in increased sales and profits.

I heard a fun story a few years ago. It seems a recently married couple bought a home and wanted to have everyone over for Christmas dinner at their new place. So they went out and bought a massive ham with all the fixings.

The guests arrived, everyone seated around the dining room table for the holiday feast. Much to the husband's surprise, the wife brought out two Christmas hams. On closer inspection, he realized she had cut the ham they bought in half.

As the dinner went on, the husband had to ask: "Honey, why did you cut the ham in half before you cooked it?"

She quickly replied, "Well, that's how my mom always cooked it."

Her mother chimed in, "Yes, and that's how Grandma always cooked it."

Grandma smiled and said, "I had to cut the ham in half because our oven was so small, but with that huge oven of yours, there's no need!"

When I work with teams, it's not unusual to find "*Christmas hams*" being cut in half when they no longer need to be.



Does your team clearly understand the buying criteria your buyers must have to make a buying decision today?

Of the criteria buyers are asking for, do you know the most important to least important?

Sales teams often make the mistake of *assuming* they know the answers to these questions based on how buyers have always bought.

If that is the case in your company, one of two things is happening:

- Your salespeople lead their conversations with a dated value proposition, and the buyer does not buy.
- The buyer buys, and the rest of the team scrambles to execute on something that is no longer a key criterion, costing your team frustration and margins.
- Your net profit suffers because the cost of sales is higher than it truly needs to be.

I was asked by a private equity group to help one of the companies in their portfolio that struggled with both sales and profitability.

The first step in my [business development process](#) is establishing market truth. So I joined these companies' salespeople on [four-legged sales calls](#) with key customers. For the most part, I was pleased the customers were happy with the products' performance. Being the new guy, I asked a lot of questions.

One common sales approach all their salespeople were using was promising two-week delivery. In this market, the competitors typically delivered orders in 8-10 weeks, but the company I was helping was offering two weeks.

So I had to ask the buyers: **When you decide what vendor to order from, how do you make that decision? Or put another way, what is important when you pick a supplier?**

I heard things like:

- Quality products
- Good service
- Do what they say they will do
- Ship products on time
- Reports from our engineers that the product solved the problems it was purchased to solve
- Competitive price
- Service after the sale
- Warranty policy
- Payment terms

So I asked: **If you had to rank the top three, how would that look?**

- Reports from our engineers the product solved the problems it was purchased to solve
- Do what they say they will do so we trust them
- Ship products on time so we can meet our commitments on time

What I kept hearing was "**ship on time**," but I wasn't hearing "**ship in two weeks**." So being the *new guy* in the room, I had to ask:

How important is it that we ship our products in two weeks?

The buyers all consistently replied that it used to be really important 8-10 years ago when they lacked the buying planning systems that they have today.

"Back then, we were kind of ordering blind based on the past. However, today our systems give us buyers a look into what production plans in the future, and we order appropriately."

How far out of a view are you able to see today?

"I can see as far into the future as I want, but I typically look 4-6 weeks out."

So if we shipped your product in 4-5 weeks, you would be happy?

"Yes, as long as it shipped and arrived on time."

We learned other things like new products our competitors were about to launch, problems our competitors were having with one particular product line, and so on.

We learned the warehouse employees at a number of the OEM accounts did not like the pallets we were shipping on because they did not fit on the standard rack designs.



After spending over 30 days on the road in front of customers, we gathered how buyers were buying today and what they needed to buy today.

We gathered very useful information by calling on prospects about how they buy, the steps they go through, and where and how they search. For example, they shared the keywords they used when searching for solutions like ours. None of the search terms the prospects gave were on our website.

I presented the findings of our (VOC) work to the private equity firm and the management team.

I had to ask: *In each of the calls I went on, sales promised two weeks delivery, but none of the customers required that anymore. When did that start?*

The previous owner identified our ability to ship quickly as the main way we could win business from the competitors, and that it's how we have done things for the last 12 years. A Christmas ham, cut in half!

As you can imagine, operations and quality were thrilled to hear that buyers no longer *needed* two-week delivery.

To execute two-week delivery, this company had a large amount of inventory and whip since most of their vendors for the electrical components required six weeks, and the glass vendors were 8-10 weeks.

As we kept *peeling this onion* we discovered:

- Over 40 % of orders required overtime at time and a half assembly labor.
- To meet two weeks, we were expediting component parts from New Jersey and paying overnight freight charges.
- To make our deliveries in two weeks as promised we were paying for overnight delivery more often than anyone realized.
- When our assembly workers worked overtime, we saw a direct correlation to an increase in quality rejections during pre-shipment testing.
- Since we had to order and store the glass components, they were often damaged and thrown away from moving them around the plant.
- We had to buy a truckload of the pallets we were using, and we paid a premium for them. It seems the original owner designed this unique configuration to maximize the number of master cartons we could ship per skid and then designed our bin rack system to accommodate them.
- We occupied a large warehouse with expensive rent based on our perceived need for so much inventory and proximity to the previous owners' home.

As a team, we ranked what our buyers valued most today, and we created a number of projects to serve our customers better while reducing costs (and often frustrations).

Over 12 months, our quality failure occurrences dropped to almost zero, and our on-time vendor scorecards improved significantly at our two largest accounts.

We moved to a much smaller warehouse, and we started using standard pallets that fit our customers' racks. Standard pallets were a much lower cost, and we bought them just in time instead of tying up cash in slow-moving pallet inventory.

The result of our Voice of the Market work was sales increased by 125%, and profits increased by over 20%.

- **When was the last time you captured the voice of your customers?**
- **Could your team be cutting a Christmas ham in half for no reason?**
- **How would your buyers rank their buying criteria? Do you know?**
- **Could your team be jumping through flaming hoops customers no longer value?**
- **How excited would your owners and investors be to realize a 20% profit increase?**

Capturing and leveraging the voice of your customer helps your team understand what is important to your buyers, how they buy, what they need to buy, and how they shop **TODAY**.



Sales teams that "assume" buyers are still buying as they have for 10, 15, 20 years are losing sales they could have won and/or losing margins they could have enjoyed.

Market leaders **leverage the voice of the customer** to increase sales and profits.

Why not understand the **voice of your customers** today and leverage that information to increase sales and profits?

I guess you can "**assume**" your team knows, but you know what they say *assuming* makes you and me ...



Chapter 10
**Find Your Sales
Secret Weapon**



We need to meet with our customers and prospects and understand how they shop, the buying journey they take, and the key criteria they must have to make a purchase.

Without this information, your sales team is playing what I refer to as "**feature and benefit BINGO**." They are calling out features and benefits in hopes that the buyers jump up and say, *yes, I need that one. BINGO!*

In this sales model, you're relying on your buyers to *figure out the problems* you solve or could solve for them.

In today's market, you must intentionally share the problems you solve for your customers and understand the personas of different buying influencers and decision-makers.

Sales teams who have been trained to understand how buyers buy and what they need to buy, and are equipped with the right sales tool for each twist and turn in the buyer journey win sales.

I read an interesting [article in Adweek](#) this week concerning how sports teams use various giveaway items to increase ticket sales and encourage fans to arrive earlier to the ballpark. Fans who arrive early spend more money; it's as simple as that.

What do ballpark giveaways have to do with your business?

Great Question!

Please answer the following questions:

What buying criteria must your buyers have today to buy?

What is the order of importance for these criteria?

How does your overall service offering compare to what buyers want and need today?

Some common giveaways I see companies offering include:

- Time of shipment
- Service level
- Free freight or FOB freight
- Payment terms
- Packaging specifications
- Quality specifications
- Added value engineering
- Marketing tools
- Online order entry/ EDI
- Customer salesforce training
- Technical support
- Material recommendations
- Discounted material costs based on your total buying power
- Returnable freight packaging
- Quality guarantees
- Outgoing product inspection
- Product testing

The list can go on and on based on your specific industry.

I'm sure you've heard many requirements from buyers that vary based on your industry. Obviously, the job of a buyer is to ask for as much as they can receive for the lowest price. The trouble occurs when your salespeople do not understand how key buying criteria rank in order of importance for your buyers.

Market-leading sales teams are trained to ask. They don't have the high need to be liked as much as a strong desire to understand their customers' needs clearly, so they solve their problems completely.

What I have observed more often than not are sales teams that [spill their candy in the lobby](#). They "*show up and throw up*" until the buyer agrees to buy. It is not your sales team's fault. They are trying to use the tools they were given.

My challenge is what if you could have sold the buyer with the ability to execute three key buying criteria and not all 12-15 that your salesperson listed? If this occurs, your team is incurring costs and performing features, benefits, and services that are costing your team margins and are not of crucial value in the buying decision today.

For example, I mentioned the Adweek article. This article shares how major league baseball teams have taken the time to understand the voice of their customers, the fans, and in doing so, identified a direct sales increase on the game nights where they give away bobbleheads. Bobbleheads produce more results than any other giveaway.

Major League teams have given away all kinds of things (*just like your business may be doing now*) in the hopes of increasing ticket sales and getting consumers to arrive at the ballpark earlier—things like tote bags, T-shirts, baseballs, baseball cards, towels, and bobbleheads.

When fans arrive earlier, they spend more money. It's as simple as that.

The article shared the following:

- Bobblehead giveaways increase ticket sales 15%-30%
- The Cubs realized a 71% increase in fans arriving more than an hour before the game

What I like about this information is it is simple, quantifiable, and easy to execute.

What impact could your sales and profits see if you identified your one to three top "bobbleheads" secret sales weapons your buyers need to buy today?

Do you agree with how powerful this information would be to increase sales and profits?

With this kind of focus, do you feel your team could execute in delivery (I bet they can)?

The trouble with most businesses today is they are providing a laundry list of features, benefits, and services and are often not sure the top one or two that genuinely drives sales behavior.

So what do most teams do? They offer them all.

Just like giving away tote bags and baseballs fail to move ticket sales dials, your team may be (*and more than likely is*) giving things away that buyers do not value today, or do not value as much as they did in prior years.

How can your team know what buyers value today? They can find out by capturing and leveraging Voice of the Customer and Voice of the Market.

How about *your* company?

Do you know the key buying criteria your buyers must-have today?

What are all the features, benefits, and services your team is offering to win sales today?

What impact would just offering what buyers need today have on the efficiency of your operations?

What impact could knowing and ranking buying criteria have on your teams' sales close rate and gross profit margin?

What additional profits could you realize by eliminating things no longer high on your buyer's key criteria list?

What is your team's one or two bobbleheads that really drive sales growth?

I have helped companies increase sales and profits for over 30 years. I wish it were some crazy technical secret process, but it really isn't. If you take the time to understand your customers, capture their voice, and leverage what you learn, you will see what I refer to as explosive growth.

Why?

Simply put, most companies you're competing with have salespeople showing up and throwing up. They are verbally vomiting all kinds of promises to win the sale. Some are important, some are industry-standard performance requirements, and some are no longer a value, and some are dated based on *how we have always done things around here*.

If you have not captured the voice of your buyers and market recently, I promise you:

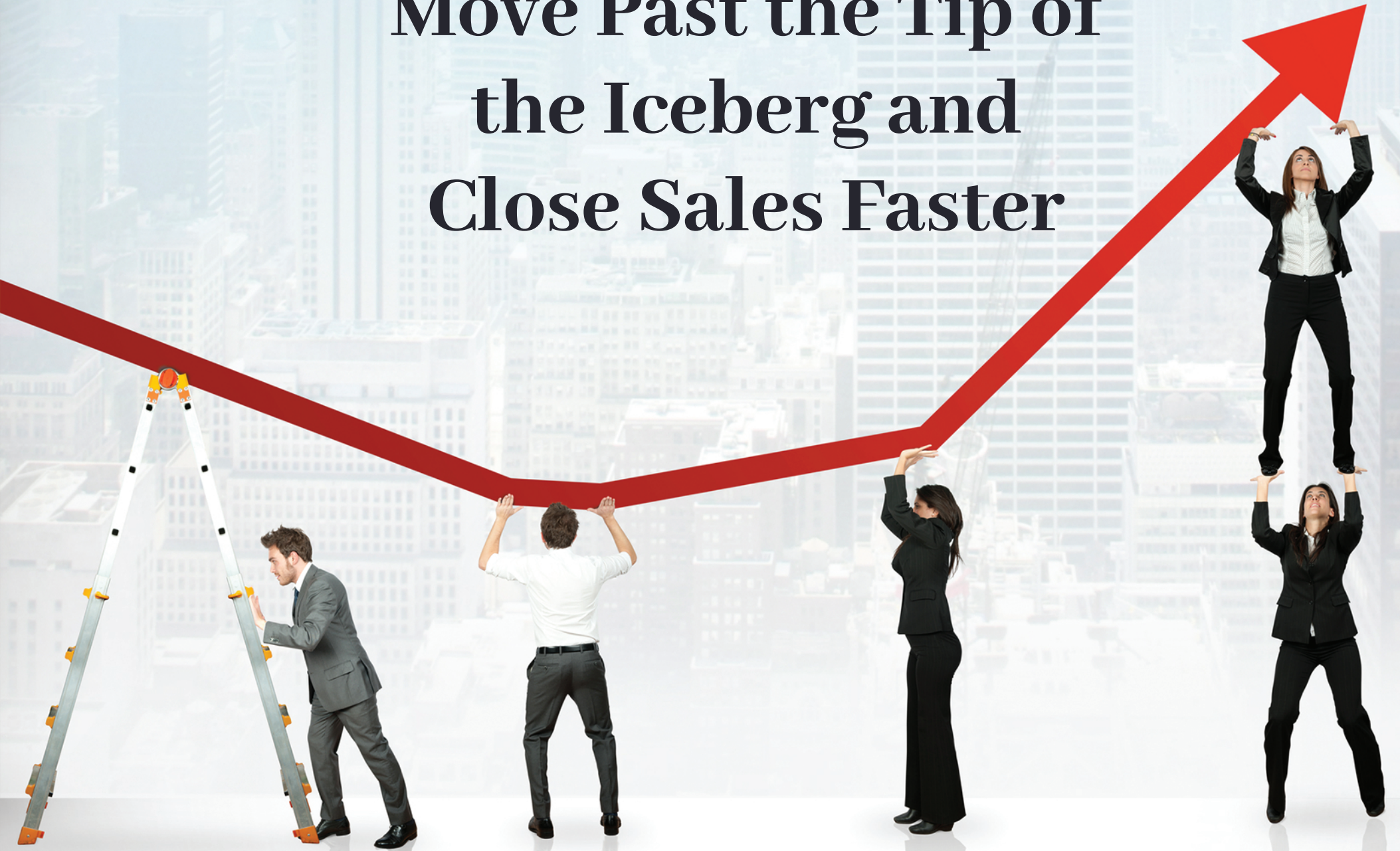
- ***Your sales process is broken.***
- ***Your team is giving away things buyers no longer value.***
- ***Your team is losing sales you could have and should have won.***
- ***You are giving away margins needlessly.***

Once you capture the voice of your customers, you can **leverage** that knowledge into a **repeatable sales process**, sales tools, and sales training that guides your sales team based on what your buyers value most today.



Chapter 11

Move Past the Tip of the Iceberg and Close Sales Faster





Why **don't** buyers buy
from your team?

Why **do** buyers buy
from your team?



When I ask these questions, I usually get speedy answers that often lack any customer understanding. They are internally driven.

As much as senior leaders want their sales teams *selling* value, I often hear "price" is why buyers don't buy.

I often hear many reasons why buyers do buy, and it usually accompanies stories of how they have won over the years. It is very rare, however, that I hear what I am looking for: **why buyers buy and don't buy today.**

Think about all the changes we have seen in the last five years (even in the previous five weeks). We serve rapidly shifting markets, and it should not surprise any of us that market leadership positions change about every ten years or so.

Why?

"New market leaders emerge after identifying shifts in the buying process, buyer problems, and or criteria, and leveraging those changes."

Mark Allen Roberts



When Sales says they lost a sale due to "price" or that buyers buy based on "price," this is what I hear:

- **You do not understand the value of your product or service to your buyer.**
- **You lack a strong current value proposition, or the one Sales is using is dated.**
- **You do not clearly and thoroughly understand the problem the buyer is seeking to solve**
- **You do not entirely understand how the buyer buys and what they need to buy.**
- **Because you have not taken the effort to understand your buyer and their business, you have not earned the right to know all the buyer needs to buy today.**

Earned the right to know?

Yes!

There was an excellent article recently in [Brand Quarterly](#) by Dave Tovey titled *Did Price Really Lose the Sale?* In this article, Tovey shares that: *"Price is often blamed when we got something else wrong."*

Salespeople are trained to sell; I think we can all agree on this. Salespeople have a very high utilitarian trait. If I do this, I get this reward quickly. That is why [salespeople should not own the voice of your customer](#), but many leaders think they do.

The work that you do to find the voice of your customer and the voice of your market does not produce an immediate reward. That is why salespeople should not own this information. It is their nature to sell, and buyers will take their probing, open-ended questions as a manipulation, a trick to win a sale, and trust will be broken.

Marketing and or a senior executive in the organization must own deeply understanding the voice of your customer and markets, not salespeople.

That is why I'm often contracted as an independent 3rd party. Customers felt free to share their buying criteria and process as it works for them today because I was there not to sell to them, but to understand them.

The author of the [Brand Quarterly](#) article does an excellent job of describing what it's like to meet with a new buyer.

New buyers often act like Ernest Hemingway used to write: with the iceberg principle, often referred to as the theory of omission. Basically, they share just surface information and do not share the whole story until they trust you.

What I like about the iceberg analogy is it's not the 10% of the iceberg that you see that will sink your ship (your sale). It's the other 90% you do not see or do not know.

Most sales are lost because the buyer did not trust you completely understood the problem and, therefore, did not trust your proposal.

The author leaves us with this:

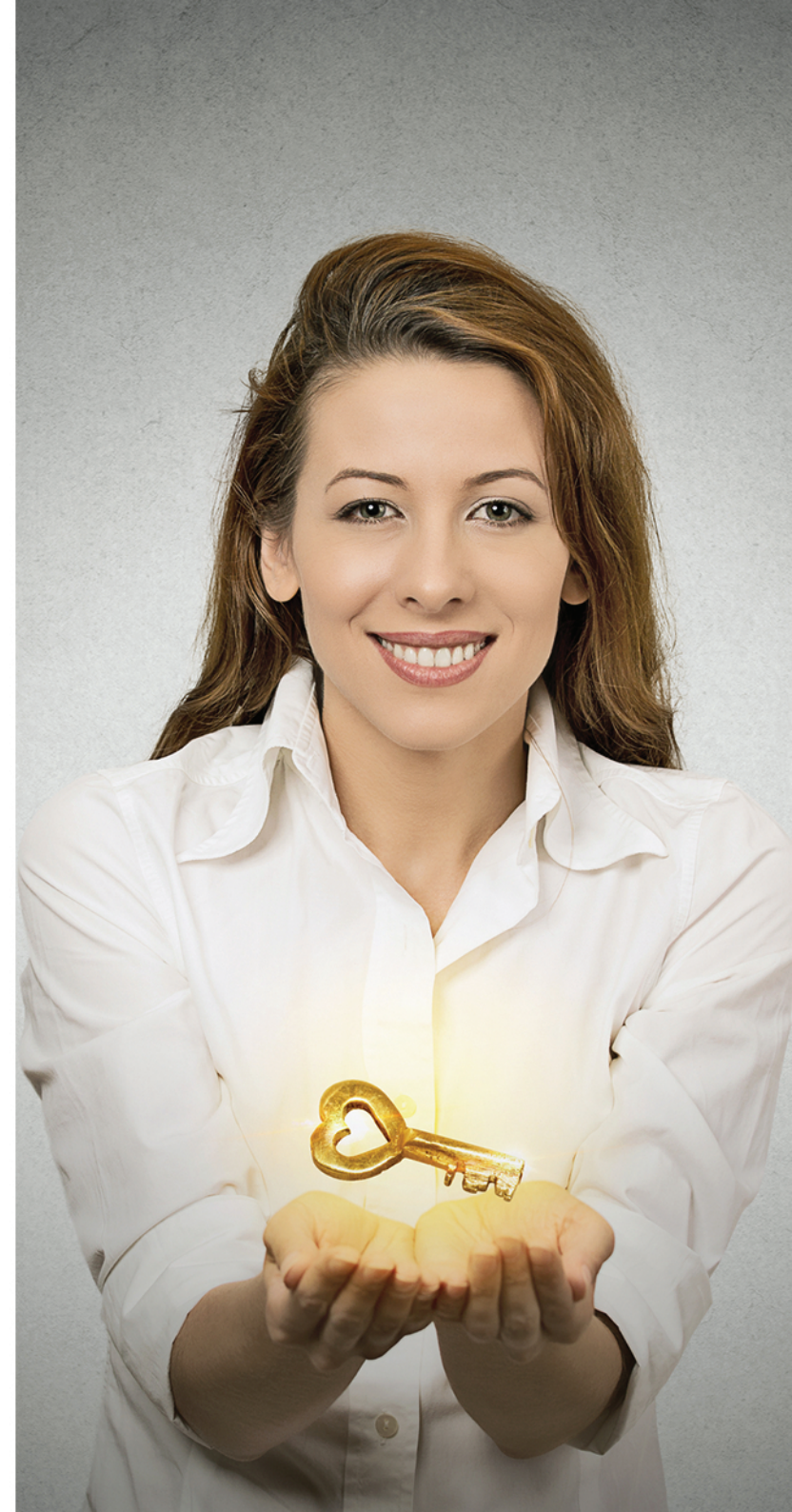
You earn the right to hear more than a client's story of omission when:

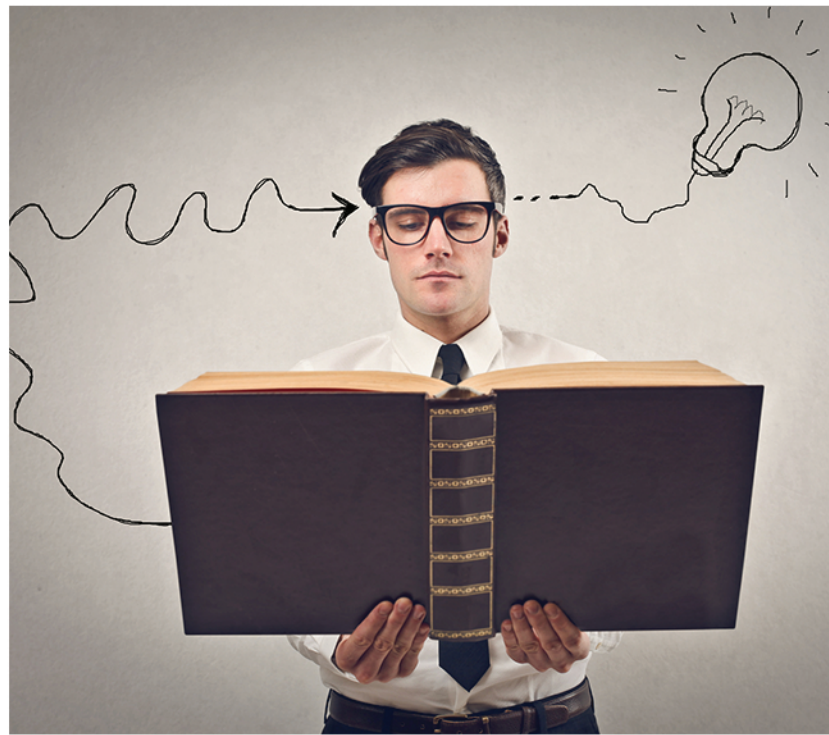
- **You ask insightful questions**
- **You listen for understanding**
- **You avoid manipulation**
- **Your behaviors are congruent with your marketing messages**
- **You are authentic, selling ethically and with integrity**
- **You are human – remembering that buying is rationalized emotion**

Market-leading teams take the time to understand the voice of their customers and markets; that other 90% of the purchase iceberg. They know how buyers buy, what they need to buy, and the criteria they must have to buy today.

They are constantly scanning the horizon and sensing for shifts in how buyers buy and the problems they are trying to solve today.

- **Why do buyers buy from you?**
- **Why don't buyers buy from you?**
- **What do your buyers need to buy today?**
- **What does the buying journey look like today for your buyers?**
- **Who else is involved in the buying decision today? What do they need?**
- **What new problems are your buyers searching to solve today?**





When your team understands the voice of your buyers and the voice of your markets, you will know the answers to the previous questions. Understanding this information, you will train your sales teams to serve your buyers with precisely what they must have to solve the problems they may not share with everyone.

Your sales proposals stand out in a sea of RFP's because they speak to real needs your buyers must have *and that they failed to share with competitors who only scratched the surface.*

When your competition is just scratching the surface with price, your team will be providing a complete solution your buyers must have.

Stop blaming price for the reason your teams fail to win the sale and understand what all buyers need today, and you will find that **price is not even high on the list.**

When you understand the voice of your customer today and the entire buying iceberg, you will equip your sales teams with the big picture, and they will build trust much faster with buyers because they will demonstrate that they understand them.

While competitors are scratching the surface and awkwardly trying to build trust, your sales team will be discussing meaningful solutions and writing orders faster.

Chapter 12

Increase

Sales Productivity and Sales Effectiveness





Each year sales reps hit the streets armed with their new goals and striving to hit their numbers. The sad reality is close to 60% will not hit plan. Why? There are many reasons, but the leading cause is that they are using [dated value propositions](#).

Your sales team is saying what they've said for years, and it does not resonate with buyers today.

We need to leverage the voice of the customer to improve sales productivity and sales effectiveness by understanding your customers in the here and now.

I read an excellent report: [The State of Sales Productivity](#). This report is the result of the authors surveying many sales leaders to understand how they plan to achieve their new sales goals. 56% of sales representatives are expected to hit a sales growth goal of 20% higher than last year.

What gives me pause is that close to 60% of those same teams failed to hit their number in the last sales calendar year.

How can VP's of Sales and Marketing change this trend?

With Voice of the Customer/Market work, you will understand:

- **Why your buyers buy from you and why they don't**
- **What is your buyers' buying process today**
- **What criteria your buyers need today to make buying decisions**

With this information, you will create a repeatable sales process that mirrors how your buyers' current purchasing guidelines, and create new sales tools that proactively provide the key buying criteria.

Once you create this for your sales team, we must conduct training to ensure your salespeople understand the sales process and are aware of the new sales tools, where to find them, and how and when to use them.

Voice of the Customer work improves your sales teams' overall productivity and effectiveness!

What percentage of the time are your salespeople actually presenting and selling customers?

I have seen some teams where sales spend less than 20% of their time actively selling. In the report mentioned above, they found salespeople spend 32% of their time selling. Having been the president for two companies (and the CEO for one), this is the kind of data that drives me nuts!

What are my salespeople doing most of the time?

- **Searching for data and content to help them sell, 30% of the time**
- **If they can't find it, they are creating their own content (that should really scare you)**
- **Updating CRM and reports**
- **Administrative duties**
- **Customer service functions**

Sales teams spend as much time selling as they do searching for meaningful content and/or creating their own sales tools. That's a broken, unproductive sales model.

In this report, 79% of sales leaders plan to hit their numbers by improving sales productivity. 62% said they plan to increase headcount.

What if sales were spending 60% of their time selling this year?

30% of the time selling as they have been + 30% more time selling because they are trained in the right sales process and know where the right content tools can be found.

In a past post, I share one company I helped that sold training. We conducted customer win-loss interviews, mapped how the buyers were buying today, and identified the HR managers had experienced a shift, a [roundabout](#) in the sales funnel where sales stalled and spun out of the funnel.

HR managers now needed to get budget approval from the CFO and or CEO, which was not the case prior).

We listened for places in the sales funnel where sales experienced roundabouts and created tools to keep the sales on track to a close.

We created content.

We developed a concise slide deck to help the HR manager win the budget for our training.

We adjusted the sales process and introduced the instructor earlier in the process.

We conducted sales training and shared the new sales process with our team, the slide deck for HR managers, and other key content to be used in the trust-building early funnel activities as well as case studies to be used after our quote. Within months we experienced a 200% sales increase.

Was our process perfect out of the gate? No, but we experienced significantly improved sales close rates. I coached sales to adopt the new sales process and challenged them when I saw that they shifted back to old sales tools or created their own.

We kept listening to our buyers, adjusting, and experimenting with content until we consistently realized our sales objectives.

This shift took a focused effort for over 12 months, and after 12 months our team was breaking monthly sales records.

What percent of the time are your salespeople selling today?

How does your team measure sales productivity?

Do you track team and individual close rates, for example?



To close this report, it also shared that 80% of organizational leaders felt creating meaningful content and helping sales find it was a top priority. However, only 35% of those surveyed had a plan to do so.

Let me help your team improve sales productivity and avoid having to keep hiring more people.

Spend time capturing the voice of your customer.

Once you understand how your buyers buy, the journey they take, and the criteria they must have, you will be able to create a repeatable sales process and sales tools that help your buyers buy.

Your process will be a **GPS** that takes your team, step by step, to closing more sales.

Understanding your customers and markets builds a foundation for a sales business development plan that creates sales velocity for your organization. Your sales team becomes more productive and effective, resulting in faster sales cycles and more closed sales falling to the bottom-line.



Chapter 13

Confirmation Bias: The Biggest Threat to Customer Voice Work?



Companies who understand the power of leveraging the current voice of their customers thrive!

They experience:

- Sales growth over 30% year over year
- Higher than industry-standard profits
- Increased market share
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Improved customer retention
- Discover and design more new products and services
- Improved sales quote to close %
- Reduced costs
- Improved operational efficiencies

Based on the above, why wouldn't your team want to capture the voice of your customers? Understanding your buyers, the buying journey they take, and what they need to make buying decisions today is old school. It's how I was taught to sell back in 1983.

The trouble we have today is the speed of change we are experiencing. Think about how the recent election is changing how some may view their business. Or how today more Internet searches are done from a smartphone than a desktop.

Just imagine the poor companies who have awesome websites, but they are invisible on a smartphone? If capturing the voice of your customers sounds too simple, it is because it is. The difficulty often occurs in getting buyers to open up and share beyond the surface.



The good news is there are ways to understand and capture why buyers buy, why they don't, and what they need to buy.

Was there ever an instance where gathering the Voice of the Customer information did not increase sales and profits?

Yes. In over 30 years, there was one instance where gathering the voice of the customer and voice of the market did not work.

Why didn't it work?

Confirmation Bias!

What is confirmation bias, and how can we avoid it?

The definition of confirmation bias is *the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.*

Or put another way:

"While we like to imagine that our beliefs are rational, logical, and objective, the fact is that our ideas are often based on paying attention to the information that upholds our ideas and ignoring the information that challenges our existing beliefs."

Verywell

Wikipedia describes it as:

*The tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses while giving disproportionately less consideration to alternative possibilities.[1] ... The effect is stronger for **emotionally** charged issues and for deeply entrenched beliefs. People also tend to interpret ambiguous evidence as supporting their existing position. Biased search, interpretation and memory have been invoked to explain **attitude polarization** (when a disagreement becomes more extreme even though the different parties are exposed to the same evidence), **belief perseverance** (when beliefs persist after the evidence for them is shown to be false), the irrational primacy effect (a greater reliance on information encountered early in a series) and **illusory correlation** (when people falsely perceive an association between two events or situations).*

Years ago, I helped a 40-year-old company in the irrigation industry to increase their sales and profits. I was introduced to them through their new Private Equity investor in Arizona.

A vital part of the **no smoke and mirrors process** (as I call it) is to meet with buyers and understand:

- **Why do they buy?**
- **What process do they use? What is their buying journey?**
- **What criteria must they have today to make buying decisions?**
- **Why don't they buy from your company?**

I met with the companies' top accounts that represented 80% of their current net profits. I met with three huge accounts they recently presented and lost. I also met with five accounts that were once huge accounts, but sales had dropped 50% or more in the last 24 months.

I always ask the same open-ended questions to get the buyers talking. Two of my favorite questions, for example, are:

If you were the president of our company and wanted to grow sales with your company, what would you do?

What do our competitors do very well for you?

I used between 12 and 20 questions, depending on how much the buyer is opening up. If a buyer shares something that is an interruption, I often ask for more information.

I usually ask 2-3 industry-specific questions that help the buyer feel comfortable that I understand the market and



After meetings, I write a **customer voice market summary report** and present it to the senior executives with strategic recommendations. If they agree that the report captures current customer perceptions, I propose new sales tools for common areas where sales stall and a new sales process based on how buyers are buying.

The good news in this client meeting was the senior executives and family members listened and took notes. The bad news was that one senior leader's reaction demonstrated he did not believe what his customers were saying.

"I knew it; our salespeople have been doing a terrible job of selling value!" This was in response to identifying that three competitors had invested in new technology that provided products faster and at a lower cost due. My client was the only one with this capability ten years ago, but the competitive landscape changed.

"If a customer does not value all we do, we should not have them as a customer." One common comment from their customers (that were once top buyers but had slipped below 50%) was that they needed to purchase products in much smaller order sizes because they switched to a just-in-time ordering process. Their competitors adjusted, and this company had not.

"Our lagging indicators demonstrate that that one point about the on-time shipment is simply not true." My client did an excellent job of measuring things that matter, and one was on-time shipments. What I found was sales was still promising a delivery that was ½ the time their three plants could execute. The plants received the orders, shared a ship date with the buyers, and the buyers were aggravated that the date was twice as long as what sales promised. This oversight was not an operational issue but a sales training opportunity.

"We are the only one in this industry who ———, and I do not believe our competitors now also have our capabilities." A big part of why this client realized robust gross margins was that they were the exclusive supplier of a specific product type. They priced it based on this exclusive position (great strategy).

Before the internet, their customers used local regional suppliers. Their salespeople led with that exclusive supplier value proposition with current and targeted new clients. However, two other competitors now had that capability. Buyers were doing Google searches and finding those new suppliers.

"One of your recommendations is that we update our website; I think our site is just fine. We are in a relationship business, and not many of our accounts are actually using it." A big part of customer voice work is understanding how buyers shop today. What consistently came out of my interviews was buyers searched the web first, and the buyers even shared the keywords they used when searching. This client's website was not being found with the keywords given.

What was happening here?

Confirmation Bias!

This senior leader dismissed the new current data that was not in alignment with his thoughts and ideas that he has repeated over and over to himself. Those thoughts became beliefs over his 22 years with this company.

Was he just feeling insecure or threatened? Honestly, I thought I was dealing with an emotional intelligence issue.

The reality that he was experiencing is one we all do to some degree with every judgment we make. Heck, I do it all the time, so I needed to give him some grace. In his case, as with many business leaders, there was an intense emotional connection to the strategy of this business that he helped write 25 years ago. That strategy was strong, it worked for years, and that is why he was promoted to senior management.

[Psychology Today](#) does a much better job of explaining what is happening:

When people would like a certain idea/concept to be true, they end up believing it to be true. They are motivated by wishful thinking. This error leads the individual to stop gathering information when the evidence gathered so far confirms the views (prejudices) one would like to be true.

How do we prevent this problem from occurring?

How do we avoid confirmation bias from hurting our ability to be agile, to pivot and adjust to changes in our markets?

- Consciously look for information that feels like an interruption
- [Remove your ego](#)
- Discuss findings with a diverse group of people
- Allow contrary thought
- Avoid anchoring; feeling like you have to make a quick decision hurts your brain's ability to hear new contrary information. (*Great article on this called [Ladder of Influence](#)*)



How about *your* company?

Would your culture and leaders value new current market data based on the voice of your buyers' perceptions today?

Has someone recently shared market information? Was that person viewed as not being loyal or a heretic?

Could confirmation bias be negatively impacting your team's sales and profits today?

The best and swiftest method to increase a company's sales and profits is to understand how their buyers are buying today and what they must have to make buying decisions today. Once you capture the current voice of your customers, you can leverage that information by adapting your sales process, adding new sales tools, and adjusting how you serve your customers.

The biggest threat to customer voice research is confirmation bias, what our gut tells us based on the past. It's based on data that was probably true at some time but is not relevant in your market today. It could be based on a leader's desire for the way they want things to work based on their known constraints. Or how things used to be when times were good.

To be a market-leading organization, we must listen to the perceptions of our customers and adapt.

By the way, not everything customers share in customer voice research is negative.

Sometimes they share that they no longer value services that cause your team operational inefficiency problems and, once eliminated, improve your operational efficiency and reduce your cost to manufacture.

Customer voice is a crucial part of [lean six sigma](#). And if your team is implementing LEAN, you will need to understand your customers.

As the leader of your team, be intentional in capturing the voice of your customers, look for interruptions in the data, and adapt.

Chapter 14

Identify Purchase Influencers



Understanding the voice of your customer also helps teams identify people who influence a purchase decision today.

What is an Influencer?

The [influencer-marketing](#) manifesto by Brian Solis shares:

"Influence is the ability to cause effect or change behavior. Influence is not the act of trying to influence. Nor is an influencer someone who simply has a lot of followers. It should be very clear. Someone who influences does so because they have the capacity to have an effect on something..."

- **What do companies who focus on influencer marketing have to say?**
- **81% of marketers who have executed Influencer Marketing campaigns agree that influencer engagement is effective**
- **65% of brands have plans to spend more on Influencer Marketing this year vs. last**



Adweek shared an article going over how [Influencer Marketing is the next big thing in marketing](#). The article went on to share:

"There are few things that drive a sale more effectively than a warm word-of-mouth recommendation. A study by McKinsey found that "marketing-induced consumer-to-consumer word of mouth generates more than twice the sales of paid advertising." And of those that were acquired through word-of-mouth had a 37 percent higher retention rate.

Influencer marketing presents a glaring opportunity for brands to leverage the power of word-of-mouth at scale through personalities that consumers already follow and admire."

I was asked to help a company that manufactured wheelchair accessible vehicles grow their sales. We spent a considerable amount of time out in the market, speaking with consumers in wheelchairs to understand.

- **Why do they buy?**
- **Why don't they buy?**
- **What is their buying process?**
- **What are the key criteria they must have to buy?**
- **Who are the leading influencers in your purchase?**

We discovered for consumers who recently started using a wheelchair because of a medical condition or an accident, influencers included certified driving instructors, association groups like the [MDA](#), [MS Society](#), [Veterans Association](#), personal injury attorneys, and many more.



However, one key influencer they all shared was their rehabilitation therapist.

As one consumer shared with me:

"When I need something or face a new challenge, I turn to my rehabilitation therapist who taught me how to get dressed or take a bath again."

We developed and initiated an influencer-training program where our regional managers would conduct in-service training at rehabilitation clinics and educate one of our top buying influencers about our vehicles. We shared how they worked, the right vehicle based on the five most common buyer personas, and provided education and information. We connected training and education with these influencers with our local mobility dealers.

Our local [mobility dealers](#) did a great job of building a relationship with therapists and were on call to answer any questions they had.

The key to influencer marketing is education or, as I share in my next book, "Serve don't sell." The quickest way to shut down an influencer is if you start selling.

Your mission is to provide much-needed information and education that the influencer can share. If you have created new content, you can leave that content with your influencers and show them where they can find it so they can share it.

What our dealers experienced over time was consumers coming into their dealerships already sold, so to speak. Their leading influencers shared our dealer with who they held a [relationship of trust](#).

The therapists shared content specific to what consumers needed to make a buying decision.

Understanding the voice of your customers identifies leading buying influencers in the purchase process.

Who are the leading influencers for your buyers?

Does your team strategically educate and share content with influencers?

Does your team understand the voice of your customers today?

Influencers play a critical role in the purchase decision today. As markets shift and change, influencers also change. Salespeople often have *great meetings* with buyers that often never lead to a sale. Why?

In complex sales today, it is not unusual to have 6-10 sales influencers involved in the buying decision. Customer voice work helps to identify the leading influencers by market vertical, and you can develop your value proposition to resonate with each of these buyer personas.

Make it a key initiative for your team to understand the voice of your customers today and who they turn to as purchase influencers.



Chapter 15

**Identify Sales Skills
Gaps and
Train Salespeople**



I can remember, growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, when the Circus came to town. There was such excitement! Streets would close for parades, and as children, we would line the streets to see the clowns, tigers, and elephants.

Our families bought our tickets, and we filled the big top. If we were really lucky, our parents would buy a ticket so we could sit on an elephant.

Even as a child, I felt sorry for the elephants. They seemed to have a sad, almost surrendered look in their eyes. They looked more like their spirits have been broken than trained.

2017 marked the [end of the Greatest Show on Earth](#). Why?

I was not alone all these years feeling sorry for these magnificent elephants and other animals. Animal rights groups investigated how elephants were treated and trained. Elephants are first given a sizeable tight chain around one of their ankles, and the other end of the chain is staked into the ground a specific distance away. The elephant quickly learns the length of its chain.

If the elephant tries to wander beyond its training limits, it experiences pain. Over time the elephant surrenders, the chain is removed, and a much smaller rope replaces it. The elephants, now "trained," do not try to explore. They are set in their ways. Even with the chain removed, they do not step outside of their understood paradigm.



Consumers learned about training conditions, and ticket sales decreased. The Circus announced it would no longer have elephants in its show by 2018. However, they adjusted too late. The greatest show on earth is over.

At a recent Toastmasters meeting, I heard this story about elephant training, and it reminded me of how some sales teams have been trained over the years.

Before the "[Internet of things](#)," we often chained our sales teams to features and benefits. Our training was 75%-90% technical and maybe 10%-25% communications, relational, and selling skills.

I was trained in this time, and it made sense back then. Buyers didn't have easy access to your product specifications. If a buyer wanted and needed technical information about a product or service, Sales was the keeper of the *information keys*.

There were no Google searches or smartphones. Heck, we didn't have laptops or cell phones when I trained to sell.

Back then, we trained in 2-3 day long *death by PowerPoint* presentations and were given 3" thick three-ring binders with copies of all the slides and more product datasheets than we could ever want or need. We learned to sell using features and benefits, and "overcome objections."

The leading reason why sales stall or decline today is a shift, a change occurred, and the team failed to recognize it and then failed to adapt and pivot.

I see customer voice research work helping us to adapt to how we train our sales teams for markets of today. What buyers want and need has changed. In most industries, buyers have instant access to technical data now.

In a buyer survey conducted by Florida State, 85% of buyers shared they expect salespeople to connect what they sell to the value it produces to their bottom line. Sadly only 15% of salespeople were meeting this expectation.

A shift has occurred, and sales teams have failed to adapt in many companies.

I want to emphasize salespeople who are serving their customers, and meeting with potential new customers must still understand the technical information and be able to access it quickly to give their buyers exceptional service and win more business.

I believe buyers are telling us through Voice of the Customer work that their needs have changed, and sales training must adapt to those changes.

Your type of product and industry requirements will dictate how much your training will need to adapt to your buyers of today.

How should sales training evolve today?

In an [excellent article](#), Bob Apollo shares: ***"It's a sad fact that today's average B2B salesperson is still far more comfortable talking about their products than they are discussing business issues. However, the average B2B buyer regards a sales person's relevant business knowledge as being far more valuable than their ability to regurgitate product features, functions, and benefits."***

Even more telling, the author explains: ***"87% of the revenues in complex B2B sales environments are being generated by just 13% of the sales population. Needless to say, the gap between the best and the rest is far narrower in best-in-class sales organizations. What sets these top-performing organizations apart?"***

There's abundant evidence to suggest that one of the most significant differences lies in their ability to systematically create unique value to their customers through the disciplined application of value-based selling techniques."

Buyers today no longer want (*not that they ever really did*) salespeople trained in overcoming objections. Buyers today value a salesperson that understands their industry and possible challenges the buyer's company may be facing and offers value-based solutions to those problems.

Why are many teams adapting Value-based selling?

Jim Heffernan shares in his [article](#): **Why Value-Based Selling Is So Successful:**

"Good value-based sales techniques are tailored to the needs of the customer, making them understand why they are buying a quality product for the asking price. Value selling resolves potential customer issues with pricing and prevents the stalling of important deals and the wasting of precious employee man-hours."

Market-leading organizations listen to their buyers and are adapting.

I see companies allocating 50% of training to technical product training and 50% to value-based selling, understanding buyer personas, communication skills, presentation skills, and other sales methods like the [challenger model](#).

Studies show companies who have a complex sales environment experience 4.5 times greater performance when applying the challenger model. Teams are adapting based on their type of product, market, and what their buyers require in terms of much-needed criteria to help them make buying decisions today.

Markets leading sales teams are no longer chained to training methods that fail to serve how buyers buy and what buyers need to buy today. They have a balance of technical, relational, and strategic sales and communication training.

As markets change, and they will, salespeople are encouraged to venture beyond their current skill levels and explore, learn new skills, and adapt to serve their customers better.

Today we can quickly assess the sales skills, motivations, and beliefs of an entire sales team and prescribe training based on the need of the team as well as develop individualized learning plans for each sales team member.

Markets shift just like our buyers shift. Therefore, how we train our sales teams must also adapt to give our buyers the best overall buying experience. We must equip our teams with a strategic advantage to help them win more business.

For example, Richard Branson shares just how important communication is and how [storytelling is a powerful communication strategy](#). Warren Buffet recently shared how if we want to double our value, we need to improve our communication skills. John Millen shared in [an article](#):

"Buffett believes so strongly in the importance of leaders being effective communicators that he offered his own return-on-investment estimate for effective communication."

There are many benefits of listening to your customers and capturing and leveraging customer voice. One big benefit this current understanding provides is how we train and equip our sales teams to serve their customers.



We must also capture the voice of our internal salespeople and leverage that information into new sales training and tools. We need to ask and understand what our salespeople are facing and develop tools and training to serve them.

- **What do your buyers value today?**
- **How do your buyers want to be served today?**
- **What % of your sales training today is technical versus value-based sales techniques?**
- **Does your sales training today include communication training?**
- **Could the way your salespeople are trained to communicate with buyers become your value proposition?**

Conduct internal and external customer voice research and adapt your sales training to match how your buyers want and need to buy today. Do these things, and you will enjoy profitable sales growth.

Sales today are no longer about being the greatest "show" on earth. They have evolved into the greatest "value" on earth.

Sales today is about serving your customers and helping them buy. Our training must help our salespeople build **trust** early (and often) in the sales process.



We must use the customer voice work to understand what buyers value and assess our sales teams' skills to deliver what buyers expect. If they have a skills gap, we can prescribe training and coaching to help them better serve their customers.

We must adjust how we train our teams.

What if the circus was listening to their buyers' voice sooner and learned new ways to train their elephants? Would they be going out of business today?

My guess is no.

What new sales training is your team adding today?



Chapter 16
**Identify
New Markets**



Capturing and [leveraging the voice of your customers](#) is a powerful tool to grow your sales. In addition to helping your sales team realize explosive growth in sales and profits, it also can identify new markets.

My daughter and son in law just purchased their first home. Like a lot of starter homes, it has many fixer-upper projects. Each room needed painting, the kitchen cabinets needed updating, and the wallpaper in the bathroom had to go. What I learned is, as dads, we typically get the jobs no one wants, like removing layers of wallpaper.

It was a small bathroom, but the first day I spent four hours removing wallpaper. I shared my frustrations with a friend. Without missing a beat, she said, "Did you treat the walls with Downy fabric softener first?"

"What?" I was using a tool to score the wall and a steamer. What would fabric softeners do? I figured it couldn't hurt, so I tried it.

It turns out this is something [home remodelers often use](#) to make removing wallpaper much easier and quicker. I searched the internet, and there are articles about using fabric softener that you typically would buy for your clothing for stripping wallpaper.

There's even a [YouTube video](#) that shares how using fabric softener helps to make wallpaper removal easier. A [do-it-yourself website talks about using this process in more detail](#).

It worked so well that if Downy did Voice of the Customer research, they might offer small 4-6 ounce bottles at Home Depot and Lowes in the wallpaper isles. I would recommend they charge between \$3.50 and \$4.95 for these small convenient bottles to be mixed perfectly with one gallon of water when stripping wallpaper.

How do your customers use your products and services?

What problems do your products solve?

Could you have a new market you're serving today that you can expand?

Take the time to capture the voice of your customers and learn how they buy, what they need to buy, and how they use your products.

You may find new markets and new distribution channels for current products that can grow into profitable new business. You may even find new uses for products you determined obsolete years ago.





Conclusion

Markets, how buyers buy, and what they need to buy are constantly shifting.

To improve your overall sales productivity and effectiveness and deliver more profit to your bottom-line, you must include Voice of the Customer as a key strategy. This will help to ensure your go-to-market strategy aligns with how your buyers buy, and that you train your salespeople in the skills the buyers want and value most today.

I have used Voice of the Customer to help many companies fix sales problems and improve their profits for over 30 years.

If you're convinced you need Voice of the Customer research to understand and adapt to your buyers today and need help, please contact me.

What is Your NPR?

What is the best data-driven way to measure customer loyalty and how companies can effectively measure the experience they deliver? The Net Promoter Score is a common metric organizations use. What is the most effective way to use the Net Promoter Score (NPS®)?

The basic idea of an NPS score is that an NPS score is the percentage of *promoters* minus the percentage of *detractors*.

A **promoter** is the most loyal of customers. They are the ones most willing to refer new customers. A promoter is a survey respondent who gives a rating of 9 or 10 to the NPS survey question: *On a scale of 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely), how likely would you recommend our product/service to a friend or coworker?*

A **detractor** is someone displeased with the product or service provided. Negative word-of-mouth is very influential with new customers, and detractors share their experiences publicly in a number of social communities. A detractor is a survey respondent who gives a rating of 0 to 6 to the NPS survey question: *On a scale of 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely), how likely would you recommend our product/service to a friend or coworker?*

Passives are customers who are quietly consuming your product or service but are not actively promoting it or being a detractor, so they have little impact on your company's growth.

NPS calculation is simple: % Promoters – % Detractors

***Note: Net Promoter Score (NPS®)** is an index ranging from -100 to 100 that measures the willingness of a customer to recommend a company's products or services to others. It implies a customer's overall satisfaction and loyalty with a company. NPS® is a trademark of Bain & Company, Satmetrix Systems, and Fred Reichheld.

How many of your current customers would refer your products or services in their trade groups and networks?

How many of your current customers are actively sharing complaints about your product or service?

How many of your customers are indifferent?

Wouldn't it be valuable to understand your Net Promoter Score?

I hope these topics have helped you rethink your current strategy. Taking these concepts to understand and leverage Voice of the Customer will help your company survive any crisis, shift, or change.

Does your team have the sales skills, mindset and motivation your buyers need today? If you would like to assess your sales teams' skills, identify skills gaps and create a plan to strategically close them with modern learning, please contact me and mention promotion code: **VOC SKILL** to receive your assessment discount.



About Mark



Mark Allen Roberts brings an exceptional background of over 35 years of sales & marketing successes and leadership with manufacturers & distributors.

Mark has had senior sales, marketing & training development positions across a wide array of businesses, including The Timken Company, Mobility Works, Gardner Denver, VMI, Pragmatic Marketing, Frito-Lay, & many other industry leaders.

With a long history of building, training, coaching, & leading sales teams, the National Association of Sales & Marketing recognized his contributions with The Business Excellence Award. Highspot recently recognized him as one of the Top 50 for his expertise in implementing Sales Enablement.

Mark is also the author of the book Branding Backwards, a keynote speaker, trainer, a thought-leader on LinkedIn, and his strategic business development blog No Smoke & Mirrors.

A graduate of the Executive MBA program at Kent State University, he also completed a management-development program with Harvard Business School.

Mark has a passion for continuous personal improvement and helping his clients drive profitable strategic growth.

When he's not serving customers, he actively volunteers in the community. He and his wife Kecia rescue Labradors and help them find their forever homes.

A NOTE FROM MARK:

Would your team like to realize a 10X sales increase over the next 6 -8 years and/or a \$38 million sales increase in 18 months like the companies I have shared recently?

If so, it involves capturing the voice of your customers and voice of your markets, which is a key part of the [no smoke and mirrors process](#). **Feel free to visit my website, and there are a number of free articles and videos to serve you.**

My passion is helping teams understand their buyers and give them such great service that how they sell becomes their distinctive competence in the marketplace.

Please contact me so we can discuss ways to serve your team. My email is [Markrobertsnosmoke@gmail](mailto:Markrobertsnosmoke@gmail.com), and my phone number is 330-413-8552.

Thank you for your time!

www.nosmokeandmirrors.com

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