

ISSUE 30

October 2023

CUSTOMER ACUMEN

INSIGHTS TO BUILD CLIENTS FOR LIFE

**EMPOWERED**
LEARNING SYSTEMS



EDITORIAL



Dear Reader,

In today's dynamic business landscape, contract sales force is gaining prominence for their flexibility and cost-efficiency. They allow companies to swiftly adapt to changing market conditions, scale up or down as needed, and capture new opportunities without the commitment of full-time employees. These teams bring industry-specific expertise, fostering trust with clients. However, effective management requires clear communication, training, and alignment with company values, emphasizing the importance of strong relationships to maximize their contributions to the business.

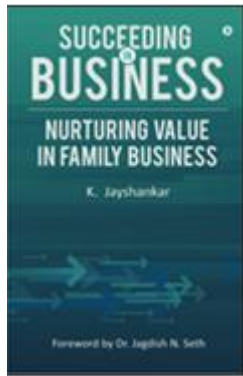
This quarter in **Customer Acumen**, we delve into the '**Role of Contract Sales Force in Building Business.**'

In the Musings segment, **Jay** shares his thoughts on building a successful sales team which includes careful personnel selection, ongoing training, having supportive leadership, and a competitive, values-driven culture. In the **Spotlight** section, **Ravi Sankar K. - CEO, Maven Marketing** explains the concept of contract sales force and their differentiation from in-house sales teams, highlighting their strategic importance, challenges, and risks associated with managing them. We review '**Buyer First**' by **Carole Mahoney** which is a read that discusses the importance of integrating sales and marketing in a buyer-first approach to improve conversations and sales outcomes.

Our in-house Cartoonist, **Vikram Nandwani's** super salesman comes to your service!

We value your relationship with us and look forward to your feedback and comments on how best we can serve you through our e-zine, **Customer Acumen.**





Out Now!

Succeeding in Business: Nurturing Value in Family Business

What makes some family businesses grow from strength to strength? How do you ensure that value is created and not destroyed when a business passes hands from one generation to the next in the Indian context? How can old families incorporate new ideas to revitalize themselves? Is there a role for professional management in Indian family business?

*This book offers answers to the vexatious issues that families face in their growth journey. The pointers provided can be used as a guide for nurturing the business and to leverage the traditional strengths that family businesses possess. As a counsellor and trusted advisor, the author, **K. Jayshankar (Jay)**, has had a ring-side view of how family businesses have functioned. The practical insights drawn from his experience of four decades has been combined with conceptual elements to become a valuable primer for a family that wishes to succeed in the competitive marketplace that is India.*

Click below to order your copy now



Special offer for Empowering Times readers. Get 30% discount by using coupon ETSPECIAL on the **Notion Press online store.**

Click here to connect with Jay.



MUSINGS



Preparing to win: Is your Sales Team geared for success?

- Jay

A highly productive sales force is a boon for any business. But priming them for success is an on-going exercise. Let's look at five keys for building a crack sales team that can add muscle to your business.

First, hire right. Not everyone can be a good in Sales. Let's get that clear. Too often sales has been the last refuge of people who could not get any other job, and they have wandered into the sales role. Firms that have not selected the right persons will encounter the attrition challenge constantly as the heat of the marketplace will compel many to quit the battle. The biases in the interviewer's mind creates a halo effect and the quest for 'good personality' still clouds selection strategy in many organizations. It is time to recognise that good looks alone does not cement a career even in the movies today but what is genuinely valued is stamina and resilience, as consistency in performance is more valuable than one-off hits. It is useful to labour over the selection process and even use psychometric tools to shortlist candidates for deeper probing using behaviour events interviewing techniques. This extra effort is akin to the service selection board process that the military uses - as having the right team member is a greater predictor of future success than the random hit-and-miss approach that many firms employ to bring on board salesmen when they act in a hurried manner. It is a cliché that you must get the right people on the bus - yet this is not a common virtue still in industry.

Second, invest in training your sales force. Here again, a powerful lesson can be learned from the armed forces. A professional army spends hours on training sessions (be it on the parade ground, the class room or in war games) as good simulation creates better results on the battle field. The sales force needs skills that are valid to today's needs. And, in a fast paced world where customer's appetite is fickle and attention span diminished, the ability to create productive and crucial conversations is a super power that gets results. Remember, while price conversations are bound to happen, more often than not it is not the decisive factor in procurement. Skilled sales people are able to turn the conversation to the value dimension to enhance their success ratio in business transactions. This is a craft that is honed through rigorous practice, and firms that provide avenues for simulated exercises will create a talented and well-chiselled sales force that can fight on all terrains.

Third, astute firms recognise that good process begets impactful results. Insightful leaders prepare their battle strategies after carefully studying current reality. So often we find that leaders are fighting today's battles with yesterday's tactics, copied from the used playbook of previous years or lazily borrowed from consultants who have offered it ad nauseam to many others. Just like an army's success depends on not being cut off from their supply lines, a sales force too depends on robust supply chain and smart despatches by a dynamic distribution team. Arguably, this calls for enhanced forecasting skills and capacity planning. Moreover, investment in modern technologies, including predictive data analytics, can become extremely beneficial for a firm. Unfortunately, orthodoxy in a firm leads to frozen or static processes. Consequently, the firm is caught like a dead duck in the face of a new and agile competitor. A firm that is open to experimentation will welcome innovative steps when the sales force comes up with unusual suggestions. This kind of responsiveness enthuses the salesperson as it provides him with a backend that is aligned to the aggressiveness that he carries into the marketplace.

Fourth, shaping the morale of your sales team is a leadership challenge. Smart sales forces have good leaders guiding them. At the end of the day what matters is not the size of the weapon but the intensity of the fury. This is a drive that is displayed on a daily basis by the field force because they know that they are led by commanders who would be expecting results from them only because they believe that they have prepared them well for the reality of the markets. Thorough and professional preparation presages market entry, and sustained marketing campaigns are added boosters to the troops on the ground. Also, empathetic leaders are in close touch with the field force and do not hesitate to make joint field calls when needed to tackle extremely recalcitrant accounts or prospects. Morale is also sustained throughout the year with powerful messages that are both broadcasted to the larger team and converted to bespoke strokes that act as balm to those in acute pain following business disappointments. In the career of every salesperson there are troughs when success eludes them and targets seem impossible to achieve. Receiving wise counsel at such dark times from battle-hardened leaders is the perfect elixir at such crunch moments. Knowing that the leaders have your back provides second-wind to those who appear to be laggards for they are not truly so but often are victims of temporary situations. Positive words - backed by prompt actions - have created resurgence in many a dormant career of field personnel.

Which brings to me my final point: culture. Competitiveness is natural in a Field Force. Without it they lack the sting to withstand challenges thrown at them by market forces. Besides, friendly and sporting rivalry is also nurtured inside firms to add spice which boosts better performance all round. A culture of high performance also means that serious misdemeanours or violation of values are not traded for target achievement. There is also acceptance that no benchmark is forever, and high standards means that records and boundaries are to be pushed aside with constant gusto. Let's keep in mind that a Field Force is just one part - nevertheless a vital part - of a firm. Obviously, all elements of the firm have to operate in unison for consistent business excellence - but the bleeding edge of the firm is undoubtedly the Field Force, and they deserve our respect.

[back to top ^](#)



SPOTLIGHT

Ravi Sankar K

CEO, Maven Marketing



Ravi Sankar K. is the CEO of Maven Marketing. He graduated in Chemistry and has a Master's degree in Marketing Management from Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies.

Before kicking off his entrepreneurial journey, Ravi Sankar held key leadership positions in few of the pharmaceutical companies. His vast knowledge across the therapeutic categories is being today leveraged by pharmaceutical companies and healthcare start-ups. He is not only a seasoned professional but shares his knowledge as a guest lecturer at management institutes, contributing to the growth of future leaders.

With a remarkable 25-year career that started as a Medical Representative and eventually led to entrepreneurship, Ravi Sankar has successfully built iconic brands in the pharma industry. At leisure time, he enjoys unwinding through reading and indulging in the art of cooking.

CA. Can you explain the concept of a contract sales force and how it differs from in-house sales teams?

RK: Technically, the contract sales force mirrors the in-house sales teams. However, due to strategic initiatives such as customer coverage expansion, market penetration, additional coverage of extra urban space, freeing the internal sales team from the burden of legacy brands to stay more focused on the new brands, and merger/acquisitions that add to the product portfolio a mixed bag of strategic brands and unintended brands, sets the platform for contract sales team. The intention is to bring experienced and knowledgeable Contract Sales Organization (CSO) to bridge this strategic gap and leverage market dynamics. Essentially, contract sales force is an extension of the internal team with flexibility and adaptability.

CA. Can you elaborate on the challenges and risks associated with managing a contract sales force, and how do you mitigate them?

RK: There are few challenges with managing contract sales force:

i. In house payroll Vs. Third party:

The most common challenge is own vs. third party. The candidates are reluctant to join third parties. We have created robust HR initiatives to ensure our employees don't feel discriminated, thus creating a performance-oriented team. Maven as an organization unfailingly pay the salaries on the last working day of the month, to create a positive impact on the employees.

ii. Escalation matrix:

In our experience in the initial phase of the project roll-out, we found employees disoriented due to interventions from clients and Maven. We created various platforms to encourage employees to come up with their grievances and address them in a time bound manner. This led to a high level of satisfaction among employees.

iii. Attrition:

This is a universal challenge. In the nascent stages of the project, the attrition rate tends to be higher, but with HR interventions like employee connect, it tends to get lower as the project starts maturing and delivering the intended performance markers.

iv. Two supervisor syndromes:

Amalgamation of organization client managers vs. reporting managers. To get a clear direction for performance, we recommend the immediate supervisor to be from the client payroll – shared responsibility.

v. Building trust:

There are trust issues between the client and CSO businesses in the initial phases. We encourage the client to audit our processes and systems on a regular interval to build mutual trust. Further, Maven suggests diligent review process for the teams with respect to their KPI achievement.

CA. How does technology and data analytics play a role in optimizing the performance of contract sales teams?

RK: Technology plays a pivotal role. Maven has embraced the advent of newer technology. One of the critical components in the data is to have a clear line of sight for all those who are involved including access to clients in a real time basis. We use one of the

most advance technologies in our SFA platform, which can generate Lat Log records and provide specially curated data analytics as per the client's needs.

We operate an online Human Capital Management module which takes care of employee life cycle with all the records available at the click of a button.

We are constantly looking for newer technologies to improve efficiency and enhance transparency levels with clients.

CA. What advice would you give to businesses considering outsourcing their sales efforts to a contract marketing firm for the first time?

RK: Selection of the CSO is the most crucial parameter. My strong recommendation is to engage small to medium organizations to execute the marketing initiatives as the involvement of these organizations are very high and their will to succeed is higher.

Contract Sales force is an extended arm of the client organization and gives them the same space to operate without any prejudice.

The outcome of sales is dependent on defined variables. Nothing comes out in an instant. It is a slow and time-consuming process to add new customers and importantly to retain existing customers. Therefore, the ROI would not be as envisaged as in the earlier phases but it will definitely come when it is a joint responsibility of the client and the CSOs.

Lastly, start a small pilot and scale up the project slowly with defined timelines – after all the benefit of CSO is scale up and scale down.

CA. How does your company, Maven Marketing, differentiate itself in the market?

RK: At the outset, Maven is a healthcare specific CSO – the experience of the leadership team in healthcare sector is vast. This knowledge translates to newer marketing initiatives and therefore we believe in designing projects to successfully manage them.

At Maven, we offer transparency of operations through technological interventions. We have heavily invested in technological solutions.

At Maven, we believe in institutionalized processes and being compliant to all the statutory laws of the land. We encourage our clients to do regular audits to build trust and line of sight. We have recently achieved ISO certification ISO 9001 - 2015 and for Information Security Management System ISO/IEC 27001: 2013.

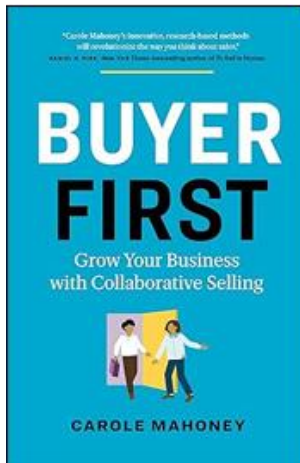
[back to top ^](#)



RESOURCES



Buyer First: Grow Your Business with Collaborative Selling - Carole Mahoney



Carole Mahoney's book, "Buyer First: Grow Your Business with Collaborative Selling," offers a fresh perspective on sales, challenging the traditional focus on closing deals. The author advocates for a buyer-first approach, which involves understanding the customer's needs, nurturing relationships, and delivering solutions that genuinely benefit the buyer. This approach prioritizes assisting customers in achieving their objectives rather than simply selling products.

One fundamental element of the buyer-first strategy involves collaborative selling which is all about getting sales teams to operate in sync, efficiently closing deals. In this approach, team members freely exchange valuable information, pool resources, and tap into each other's expertise. The goal you ask? To present customers with tailored solutions that genuinely meet their needs. Going beyond this, it is also about creating an atmosphere of trust and cooperation within the organisation. Mahoney underscores the importance of providing salespeople with the essential tools and resources to thrive in this kind of collaborative setting.

When a business transitions to a buyer-focused approach, the rewards are substantial. This encompasses a tangible uptick in sales, elevated customer contentment, and heightened employee involvement. The author lays out a simple blueprint for organisations keen on embracing this tactic. It encompasses a series of stages: comprehending buyer personas, charting the path buyers take, constructing a sales process oriented towards the buyer, ensuring the sales team is fully equipped, and perpetually assessing and refining the approach.

One of the standout features of Mahoney's book is her reliance on data to support her claims. She provides robust evidence to substantiate the effectiveness of the buyer-first approach and effectively communicates the benefits of collaborative selling. Her practical approach makes the book not only relevant but also compelling for sales professionals and leaders.

In the current sales environment, excelling requires organizations to embrace a buyer-centric approach. By empowering sales teams with the essential tools and strategies to improve deal closures, elevate customer satisfaction, and foster employee engagement.

[back to top ^](#)

FEEDBACK

UNSUBSCRIBE

<https://www.empoweredindia.com>

Empowered Learning Systems

101, Lords Manor, 49, Sahaney Sujan Park, Lullanagar, Pune – 411040, Maharashtra, India

®The ELS Lotus logo is trademark of Empowered Learning Systems

© 2023 Copyright Empowered Learning Systems (ELS). For private circulation to clients and well-wishers of ELS. While ELS endeavors to ensure accuracy of information, we do not accept any responsibility for any loss or damage to any person resulting from it.