

From one-way communications to two-way conversations

By Bob Apollo



The trouble with far too many of today's interactions between prospects and their potential suppliers is that they are conducted as asynchronous communications rather than synchronous conversations.

You're probably on the receiving end of hundreds (maybe thousands) of these one-way communications every day. They include every conventional advert you're exposed to, every mass email that is sent to you and a whole raft of other marketing devices.

And the reason you probably are moved to action by so few of these messages is that this media deluge still largely reflects a process of asynchronous broadcast communications to a largely unreceptive audience.

Now, there's no doubt that some companies have become dramatically smarter at delivering their messages to a much more precisely defined audience, and that in many B2C and some simple B2B markets this is enough.

When messages must be tailored...

But in complex, high-value B2B markets, simply getting the

messages and the audiences right is just the start - because where messages need to be tailored to the prospect's specific requirements, the best way of doing this is through a proper two-way conversation.

Switching from indiscriminate broadcasting to carefully defined narrowcasting, although a welcome development isn't enough - and can never be enough unless and until the communication leads to an active two-way conversation.

If you have a complex value proposition to convey, or if you have to persuade the prospect of the need to change before you can have any chance of persuading them of the need to invest in your solution, the faster you can evolve from one-way communication to a proper **two-way sales conversation** the better.

Communications must stimulate

Here's the problem: this requires a level of provocative communications skills that only a small minority of commercial organisations and a disappointingly small percentage of marketing communications seem able to master (by the way, for a shining example of one agency that's really on top of this, I suggest you visit www.velocitypartners.co.uk).

We need to be crafting messages and creating content that does not

simply inform and educate - it needs to intrigue our audience into wanting to learn more, and to be prepared to engage in a conversation sooner rather than later.

The importance of first contact

And then - and this is equally difficult to master - that all-important first live interaction with our organisation needs to reinforce the promise rather than dash their hopes. They need to engage with a smart and articulate person who shares something valuable with them during the course of the initial conversation.



The need to feel that they are learning something valuable rather than being crudely sold to or subjected to some crass and unthinking "20 questions" style of qualification checklist or (heaven forefend) a brutal sales pitch of almost Stalinist single-mindedness.

This, of course, is hard to do, which is why so few b2b marketing organisations are even on the road to mastering it. In fact, I doubt that any organisations have fully mastered it - but those who have at least embarked on the journey are stimulating customer interactions that are an order-of-magnitude superior to the luddites who haven't even bothered to try.

Engage the prospect early

If your product is a simple transactional sell, then the investment may not even be worth it - you're probably better off simplifying the customer experience to the point where doing business with you could not be easier.

But if - like most of the clients I work with - you're involved in high-value, complex buying environments where there's no chance of making a sale happen without intensive series of two-way conversations, the sooner you get started, the better.

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About the Author

Bob Apollo is the founder and Chief Strategist of Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners Ltd, a pioneering B2B sales and marketing performance improvement consultancy, based in Reading, UK. Inflexion-Point is one of the UK's leading B2B Sales and Marketing Performance Improvement specialists. Their research-led, evidence-based approach enables clients to increase pipeline values, shorten average sales cycles and improve average sales win rates.

Bob now works with growth-minded organisations of all sizes to help them build scalable businesses. He has written hundreds of articles on the subject of sales and marketing performance, spoken at dozens of

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