

## Understand How Your Customers Buy Before You Develop Sales Tools

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Last night, I saw my wonderful wife trying to reattach a curtain rod by using a wrench to drive in a nail.

She was having a devil of time getting the nail to go in straight. I cautiously asked why she was using a wrench to hit the nail. She gave me a look and explained that since I left the hammer downstairs, the wrench was more convenient. After almost 22 years of marriage, I knew what I needed to do. I apologized and retrieved the hammer.

Within minutes the nail was properly in the wall and the curtains were in their rightful place.

Watching my wife try to drive in a nail with a wrench, reminded me of how many organizations develop sales tools. It is so easy to reach for the nearest tool and begin to whack away at the nail in front of them.

Instead of a wrench, these sales tools take the form of brochures, white papers or press releases. Just because these pieces exist doesn't mean that sales will use them. I often hear sales people complain that marketing continues to invest in tools that they never use.

And marketing people complain that new product revenues are not meeting expectations because sales people don't know how to sell. Sales points the finger at marketing and marketing blames sales. It may be small consolation, but this scenario pre-dates the industrial revolution.

One way to ensure that the sales tools are used and not ignored is to analyze how your customers buy. By documenting your customers' buying process, you gain insight into how your sales team can accelerate sales.

A common buying framework in the industrial (B2B) arena was first outlined by Frederick Webster in his groundbreaking 1969 article "*New Product Adoption in Industrial Markets*" that appeared in the *Journal of Marketing*.

- Awareness
- Interest
- Evaluation

- Trial
- Adoption

Obviously the framework is not new. However, applying this framework to the creation of sales tools can yield valuable insights.

Start by working with your sales people to describe how a typical customer moves through the process of buying your products and service. For example, how do they become aware of your product? Is it primarily through a cold call? A call on an existing customer? An article in a leading journal? If so, what can your organization do to accelerate awareness?

Then, analyze what actions the customer takes at each step of the process. Questions that start with "How" are great questions to ask as you go through this exercise. For example, ask customers "how do you decide to commit to an evaluation?" Then ask yourself "how can we accelerate the customer through this process."

Once the role of the sales person as buying process accelerator is understood, it becomes much easier to decide what sales tools to produce.

And your sales people will be much more effective than someone trying to drive in a nail with a wrench.

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