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INSIDER: Sales Shift

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Due to the pervasive technique of inbound marketing and exponentially increasing consumer demand for content-driven promotions and advertising, the sales paradigm has changed. But has your selling approach changed? If not, are you facing a decline in sales or a decline in your lead-to-sale ratio?

Tried-and-true selling techniques may not be as rewarding as they once were. This does not mean blind luck dictates whether a lead comes your way or whether it has any closeable potential. In *Sales Shift: How Inbound Marketing Has Turned Sales Upside Down Making it More Difficult and More Lucrative at the Same Time*, Frank Belzer not only identifies and analyzes the shifting sales paradigm, but offers insights into what salespeople can do to adapt to this new sales model. In a changing world of sales, real-estate professionals can utilize Belzer's techniques to not only survive, but to thrive.

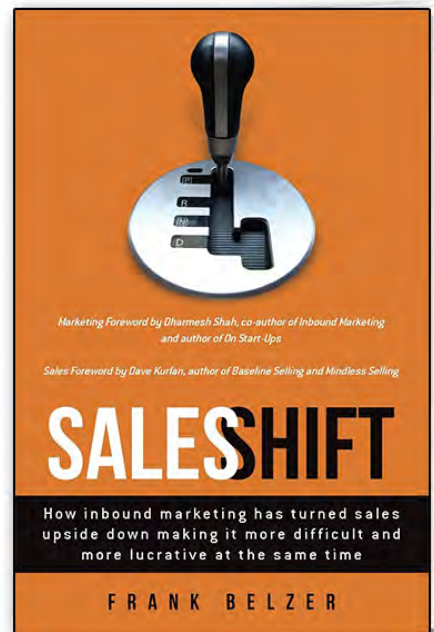
THINK POINT #1: Identifying Characteristics of the Change

The changing sales environment is not something altogether unfamiliar to us; we can see how we, as consumers, have changed. We manage money, shop, book hotels, gather news, and communicate differently than we did in the past. Your buyers are facing the same personal developments. As a result, buyers find real-estate professionals differently and seek different information and help from the professionals they choose. This customer attitude will have several impacts on your day-to-day operations.

First, it is more difficult than ever to reach the right people. Consumers seek out the seller when *they* wish, not the other way around. Additionally, the Internet, caller id, instant streaming, and DVR all make it more difficult to make targeted contact with consumers.

Second, prospects enter the sales funnel more informed and more educated on what they want. Consumers feel they know themselves best, have researched exactly what they want (often without help), and are more informed than most salespeople with whom they have spoken. In many cases, they are probably right.

Additionally, an abundance of available information attracts more “window shoppers” and buyers that plan well in advance. Endless information available at the click of a mouse or a tap on the phone may also mean your leads increase dramatically without any



proportionate increase in closeable prospects. Differentiating between non-buyer and buyer leads can be a challenge in and of itself, but with “not-now, but maybe soon” buyers thrown in the mix, the sales environment is becoming even more perplexing.

Lastly, how prospects find real estate agents has changed. Many buyers search for their agent through Google searches and social media. Thus, attracting leads to these sources and keeping them interested by appealing to where they are in the sales process is imperative for closing.

A real estate professional’s role has not changed; a real estate professional must fill-in the gaps of information a prospect lacks. It is the amount and kind of lacking information that has changed. Adapting to the new sales culture means developing the ability to determine what gaps need to be filled-in and to break down the psychological wall consumers put up on the basis that they have informed themselves on all requisite information.

THINK POINT #2: Adapting Sales Skills to the Sales Shift

Identifying the shift in sales is the first step, but selling techniques must be tweaked and altered in order to sell successfully within this new sales climate.

First, a real estate professional must learn that it is acceptable (and even beneficial) to be consultative to your prospects. Window shoppers and early browsers are looking to educate themselves on your services, houses, and the real estate market. *Let them.* Even better, *help them.* Perhaps in the past, information was only given in exchange for a promise to buy or sit through a sales pitch. However, today’s culture is one where people expect to receive endless information in exchange for practically nothing. If you do not give it to them, your competitors will. Additionally, allowing yourself to consult for free creates goodwill and gives you an opportunity to begin building a relationship. This approach could also help you close on leads and bring back window shoppers when they are ready to purchase.

Once you accept your role as “consultant,” you must adapt your techniques to that role. This involves asking questions. To ask the right questions, you must: set the context by explaining why you are asking them a particular question; focus on big-picture and long-term goals; ask genuine questions from a place of true concern for client needs (to avoid sounding scripted); and keep the conversation and the client focused on their desired outcomes and goals (rather than features and details).

Second, a real estate professional should develop a trusted advisor relationship with her clients. To accomplish this, the relationships should be defined as business-oriented, genuine, and strategic. Simply discussing sports or kids as means to developing a trusting relationship status will likely be unsuccessful. Buyers might think you are nice, but will they really trust you when it comes down to business? Probably not. You must encourage probing business discussions that allow you to uncover the prospect’s goals, vision, and passions. For a buyer to trust you as an

advisor, be genuine. It is as simple as that; people will sense your sincerity and align their trust accordingly. Also, be strategic in your decisions, discussions, and actions. Think about the long-haul with your clients, not just that afternoon's meeting. Developing these types of relationships - rather than just any relationship at all - will lead to an increase in closed sales, repeat customers, and referrals.

Third, you must develop a natural style. Prospects want to have a conversation, feel empathy, and avoid sales clichés and gimmicks. This means be yourself and avoid sounding scripted. Doubting, skeptical feelings and questions may arise in a client's mind if your speech sounds fake. Relaxing and not having a "script" is the best way to master a natural style. A great practice technique is to record yourself. Hearing how you actually sound when interacting with clients will allow you to identify your weaknesses and improve upon them. Remember, when you have the opportunity to have face-to-face (or voice-to-voice) contact with your client, you can create value by offering a warm, natural, human approach to the conversation.

THINK POINT #3: Master this Selling Paradigm by Adjusting Your Perspective

Keep your perspective honest and simple: leads are leads. Real estate professionals that view and treat leads as either closeable or a waste of time will not maximize sales opportunities from their leads. Leads that are approached as closeable when they are not often result in forced, dominating sales techniques. However, approaching a lead as a waste of time when there is real potential is just throwing away business. If you truly take leads for what they are, every approach will be professional, well-organized, yet casual and conversational. This perspective allows for an appropriate approach to the varying close-ability that exists in today's market.

Also consider that your marketing and sales functions need to join forces. The sales function is often very prospect-focused, while the marketing function often remains market-focused. Looking at prospects only as individual leads may cause you to miss trends or movements within markets that could be impacting your sales and future leads. However, looking solely at markets (and not at individual prospects) you may fail to see the client's unique needs and the opportunity to learn more about a market through the individual. A real estate professional is often both marketer and sales professional, making it imperative to have a healthy, dual perspective.

Lastly, using inbound marketing techniques to eliminate waste will result in the most efficient use of your time. Once a person has expressed interest, whether it be from website hits and registration or social media comments and messages, qualify prospects into four categories: does not need your services and does not want your help; wants your services but does not want help; needs your services but does not want help; and needs your services and wants your help. The last category consists of the only leads worth your focus. Qualifying your prospects and focusing on true leads will create lean and successful operations for you moving forward.

The world of marketing and sales has changed forever. However, by identifying the shift, adapting skills and techniques, and developing a new perspective, real estate professionals can not only maintain their business, but prosper. Outdated sales approaches should be left in the past, leaving room for inbound marketing sales professionals to make their mark on the world.

Recommended Reading

Belzer, Frank (2012), *Sales Shift: How Inbound Marketing Has Turned Sales Upside Down Making it More Difficult and More Lucrative at the Same Time*, North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

About the Author

Natasha Ashton, MBA Candidate

Baylor University

Natasha Ashton is a graduate student from Fort Worth, TX. She received her BA in Public Relations with a minor in Business Administration from the University of Texas at Arlington. She is currently pursuing a JD/MBA at Baylor Law School and the Hankamer School of Business. While in school, she interned with Mission Waco Legal Aid with a focus on research, case analysis, and client interfacing. With her cross-functional education and skillsets, she plans to transition into business transactional law.

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Baylor University » Keller Center for Research » Hankamer School of Business
One Bear Place #98007 » Waco, TX 76798
www.baylor.edu/kellercenter » Keller_Center@baylor.edu

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