Can Big Data Bridge the Gap between Sales and Marketing?
Morris George, PhD

Recognizing the Real Estate Recency Trap
Gail Ayla Taylor, PhD, Scott A. Neslin, PhD, Kimberly D. Grantham, PhD, and Kimberly R. McNeil, PhD

Explicit Marketing: Personalization of Email Subject Line
Wesley Bryan, MBA Candidate

The Power of Storytelling
David A. Gilliam, PhD, and Alex R. Zablah, PhD

Emotional Ability and Nonverbal Communication
Blair Kidwell, PhD, and Jonathan Hasford, PhD

Selling Effectiveness: The Role of Interpersonal Mentalizing
Subhra Chakrabarty, DBA, Robert E. Widing II, PhD, and Gene Brown, PhD

INSIDER: Consumer Decision-Making In The Age of Perfect Information: Absolute Value
Margie McGregor, MBA Candidate
Selling Effectiveness: The Role of Interpersonal Mentalizing
Subhra Chakrabarty, DBA, Robert E. Widing II, PhD and Gene Brown, PhD

The effectiveness of salespeople depends on how they interact with customers. Sales organizations recruit and train salespeople so that they can identify and satisfy customer needs in the long-run. Highly customer-oriented salespeople put the customers’ interests first and avoid behaviors that might dissatisfy customers (Saxe and Weitz 1982). Highly adaptive salespeople take advantage of the unique nature of personal selling by tailoring their sales presentations to the unique nature of each selling situation (Spiro and Weitz 1990). In general, customer-oriented selling and adaptive selling improves sales performance.

While customer orientation and adaptive selling can be learned, salespeople may have some natural abilities that may enhance the effectiveness of their learned behaviors. For example, salespeople may naturally place themselves in customers’ minds to see and feel the buying situation from the customers’ perspective. This ability to attribute mental states of customers and understand their beliefs, desires, and knowledge is known as interpersonal mentalizing (Dietvorst et al. 2009). To be productive, salespeople need to form accurate impressions of their customers. Salespeople with strong interpersonal mentalizing skills are good at rapport building, detecting nonverbal cues, taking a bird’s-eye view, and shaping the interaction by creating a positive ambience.

In our 2014 research published in the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, we examined the manner in which abilities, such as interpersonal mentalizing interact with learned selling behaviors, such as customer-oriented selling and adaptive selling to shape sales performance. This is an important consideration for real estate professionals since they can build rapport with customers to read customers’ nonverbal cues, which might be useful in positively moving the client toward a final decision. Thus, the question is: How does interpersonal mentalizing interact with learned selling behaviors to affect sales performance?

Our Study

A random sample of independent insurance agents was selected from a database of the National Alliance for Insurance Education and Research in the US. Email surveys were sent out in several waves and a total of 324 responses were received. The average size of agencies ranged from three to four million dollars in annual revenues. The majority (60.8%) of respondents were college graduates and 66% were male. On average, respondents were 48 years old and had 19.4
years of insurance selling experience. The respondents rated their interpersonal mentalizing abilities (rapport building, detecting nonverbal cues, taking a bird’s-eye view, and shaping the interaction by creating a positive ambience), customer orientation, adaptive selling, and sales performance.

The results indicated that customer-oriented selling and adaptive selling helped salespeople build rapport with customers and improved sales performance. These selling behaviors also improved sales performance indirectly by helping salespeople shape the customer-salesperson interaction by creating a positive ambience. Rapport building with customers improved sales performance only when salespeople were able to detect customers’ nonverbal cues. Finally, salespeople’s interpersonal mentalizing ability of taking a bird’s-eye view increased, the positive relationship between customer-oriented selling and sales performance became stronger. Therefore, salespeople’s interpersonal mentalizing abilities strengthened the relationship between selling behaviors and sales outcomes.

What This Means for Real Estate Professionals

These findings have important implications for real estate professionals. While selling real estate, agents should be customer-oriented by identifying home buyers’ needs, collaboratively handling buyers’ objections, considering buyers’ interests first, and using informative closing techniques (Homburg, Müller, and Klarmann 2011). Real estate professionals should also adapt to the selling situation by being flexible in their sales approach to different home buyers. To enhance the effectiveness of customer-oriented selling and adaptive selling, these guidelines can be followed:

- Visualize the mental states of customers in an effort to understand their beliefs, desires, and knowledge.
- Create a positive environment by making the home buyer comfortable during the sales conversation, and connect your visualization to the conversation.
- Take the home buyers’ perspective by summarizing the sales conversation according to his/her words and ideas.
- Read home buyers’ body language even when engaging in small talk.

Conclusion

Real estate professionals can use their interpersonal mentalizing abilities to make inferences about what home buyers may be thinking or feeling and predict their actions accordingly. Specifically, taking a broad perspective of the selling situation and using customer-oriented selling and adaptive selling to create a positive sales atmosphere should result in more sales.
estate professionals who learn to read the body language of home buyers are more successful with rapport-building sales conversations.

Sales training programs for real estate professionals should emphasize interpersonal mentalizing skills through role-playing and/or observational learning. In addition, since interpersonal mentalizing skills develop at an early age and facilitate social interaction throughout an individual’s adult life, the SToM (Dietvorst et al. 2009) scale may be useful to identify real estate sales agents who naturally possess interpersonal mentalizing capabilities.

**Recommended Reading**


**References**


**About the Authors**

Subhra Chakrabarty, DBA
Associate Professor of Marketing, College of Business & Economics
American University of Kuwait

Subhra Chakrabarty (DBA – Louisiana Tech University) is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the American University of Kuwait College of Business and Economics. His research on
selling and sales management has appeared in the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* and other scholarly publications. Professor Chakrabarty has industry experience in pharmaceutical marketing and holds a DBA from Louisiana Tech University.

**Robert E. Widing II, PhD**  
Dean and Albert J. Weatherhead III Professor of Management  
Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University

Robert E. Widing II (PhD – Ohio State University) is the Dean and Albert J. Weatherhead III Professor of Management at the Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead School of Management. He has over 100 publications and his research has appeared in the *Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, European Journal of Marketing* and other scholarly publications. Professor Widing is the lead author of *Customer Behaviour: Consumer Behaviour and Beyond* (Thomson Learning, Pacific Rim). Professor Widing’s research has been presented in numerous academic conferences and received awards from the American Marketing Association and the Academy of Marketing Science. Prior to joining the Weatherhead School of Management, Professor Widing was a Professor and Dean of the Macquarie Graduate School of Management. Prior to that he served as Professor of Marketing and Provost at Thunderbird School of Global Management. Before Thunderbird, he served over 10 years at the University of Melbourne, which included terms as Coles Myer Professor of Retailing and Marketing (Melbourne Business School) and chair of marketing and associate dean of graduate studies (Faculty of Economics and Commerce). His earlier academic appointments included Bond University in Australia and Case Western Reserve University. He received BA (History), MBA, and Ph.D. (Marketing and International Business) degrees from The Ohio State University.

**Gene Brown, PhD**  
Valentine Radford Professor of Marketing  
Bloch School of Business and Public Administration, University of Missouri – Kansas City

Gene Brown (PhD – University of Alabama) is the Valentine Radford Professor of Marketing at the University of Missouri – Kansas City Bloch School of Business and Public Administration. He has published over 70 academic articles in journals such as the *Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, Journal of Advertising* and other scholarly publications. He is the CEO and founder of Market Intellect, a marketing services company. Professor Brown has worked on consulting projects for companies such as, Beauty Brands, Bayer, Sprint, Hallmark, Pizza Hut, Denny’s, General Motors, and others. He holds a PhD and Masters in Marketing from The University of Alabama.