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What B2B marketers need to know about social selling

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Introduction

"Social *selling?* Why do I need to worry about that? I'm a marketer," you may well be thinking.

But the reason it needs to be on your radar is that social selling has everything to do with marketing: despite its name (it should really be called 'social nurturing', 'social prospecting' or 'social relationship-building'), it's an important element in every marketer's toolkit.

Sales people might be the ones practising it, but social selling won't work without marketing's involvement and support. After all, marketers are the experts when it comes to managing social media, creating compelling content and nurturing prospects – and these are the exact foundations of social selling.

According to a recent study carried out by B2B Marketing, almost two-thirds of senior marketers believe marketing should own social selling in their organization. You'll get no argument from us on this – and to prove it, we've put together this guide. It'll explain:

- What social selling is (and isn't) – and why you need to understand how to do it
- What marketers need to do to make it a success
- How to ensure marketing and sales are on the same page
- How to engage with sales employees and encourage buy-in
- The tools marketing can provide to enable social selling
- What to measure and how to track success
- Case studies from brands that have made it a success.

> *"It's not selling on social media; it's using social media to attract, discover and nurture relationships until customers are ready to buy. Very simply, it's converting conversations to customers"*
>
> **Nicky Kriel, social media consultant and trainer**

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1. About social selling

1.1 What is social selling?

The first thing to note about social selling is that it isn't really about selling at all. It's about developing relationships. It's the art of using social networks to find prospects, build relationships and achieve sales targets.

Social selling can help you:

1. Better qualify your prospects
2. Develop more authentic interactions
3. Convert more sales.

According to LinkedIn, the four main pillars of social selling are:

1. **Establishing a professional brand:** A strong brand leads to more inquiries from prospects.
2. **Focusing on the right prospects:** Social selling will help you identify the correct people to engage with.
3. **Engaging with insights:** Buyers respond to salespeople who can provide insight into their problems.
4. **Building trusted relationships:** Have genuine conversations that focus on the need of the prospect first, selling second.

The evolution of social selling

In 2006, salesman Nigel Edelshain coined the term 'Sales 2.0', which soon morphed into the concept of 'social selling'. Sales 2.0 was based on the idea that salespeople used social media and other web 2.0 tools to sell more effectively; Edelshain had identified 'interruption'-based sales approaches, such as cold calls, were becoming increasingly ineffective. In 2009, academics at the University of British Columbia proved the concept that if there are incidental similarities between buyer and seller (supporting the same sports team or sharing a birthday, for example) a purchase is more likely to take place.



Who owns the social media strategy in your organization? Who's responsible for creating social content? Who manages the company's social media accounts?

1.2 What social selling is not

Don't confuse social selling with the similarly named:

Social media marketing: This tactic, which should be familiar to most marketers, uses social media to increase brand awareness, promote products and services, and engage with customers. This is now frequently underpinned by a formal strategy, which is engineered and controlled by marketing.

Social listening: This involves monitoring conversations and mentions of your brand on social media, and gleaning insights from this information. While there is an element of social listening in social selling (listening to what prospects and customers are searching for), social listening does not involve engaging with those talking about your brand.

Automated selling: Social selling is not a form of mass advertising, where you're sending the same messaging to multiple prospects and working on the basis of a sheer weight of numbers strategy. Social selling is a targeted and personalized sales approach.

1.3 Why should marketers care about social selling?

Imagine if you were to stand up in front of your organization's sales force and tell them they were forbidden from making phone calls and having face-to-face meetings with leads for the next week, and that instead they must conduct all their sales conversations on social media. How confident would you be that by the end of the week your brand reputation would remain intact? Or that the sales team would be presenting a consistent message in line with your brand's values? These fears may be as justified when salespeople are talking on the phone or in person – but on social media, the conversation is out there for the whole world to see.

Think about the following questions: who owns the social media strategy in your organization? Who's responsible for creating social content? Who manages the company's social media accounts? If marketing is the answer to the majority of these questions, you need to get up-to-speed on social selling.

These are the four primary reasons marketing has a role to play in social selling:

- **Marketing owns the social media strategy.** In most organizations (particularly those without a separate digital team) marketing is responsible for the brand's voice and tone on social media. If salespeople are representing your brand, you'll want them to follow the brand guidelines.
- **Marketing is the brand guardian.** Use of social media can quickly spiral out of control. As the company's brand guardian, marketing has a responsibility to protect against reputational damage. It can only do this if it knows what's going on, a prime reason for involvement in the social selling process.
- **Social selling is driven by content.** To make social selling work, salespeople need content to feed prospects to support them with their problems. Where does this content come from? Marketing, of course.
- **Social selling is about nurturing relationships.** This sits right in marketing's wheelhouse, and puts them in prime position to offer support and advice to colleagues in sales.



1.4 What's needed from marketing to make social selling a success?

As the company's social media experts, you should be best placed to understand where potential prospects hang out online. You also know how to build a brand – and in particular a personal brand that aligns with the company's tone of voice.

For social selling to work, you need an engaged and motivated sales team. If salespeople aren't bought into the concept, you can provide as many enablement tools as you like – and spend as much time cajoling as possible – and it won't make much of a difference. A social selling strategy must be in line with your corporate goals, and sales and marketing need to work closely together for it to be a success. Marketing's role will be as an enabler, providing tools and support to allow the sales function to execute the joint strategy.

1.5 The challenges of social selling

Social selling is not without its complexity, despite all the benefits it can bring. The approach it requires means it might not be for every organization. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your sales team have a traditional approach to selling, or are they open to new ways of working?
- Are they incentivized on the basis of short-term wins or developing long-term relationships?
- Is your sales team social media-savvy and engaged? (This isn't necessarily an age issue either. LinkedIn data suggests those aged over 45 get better results from social selling because it's not about the tech, but about developing relationships and personal branding.)
- How much freedom do your salespeople have to develop and nurture relationships?
- How receptive will your audience be to being contacted on social media? They'll certainly be on social media, but different industries display different levels of maturity.

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2. Social selling in practice



2.1 How to get started

As with any marketing strategy, your goals should naturally be linked with your overall business objectives – whether they be growing revenue, winning new customers or increasing market share.

The crucial thing when it comes to social selling is your marketing goals must be aligned with the goals of the sales team. It's no good if marketing wants to judge the success of social selling on increased brand awareness when the sales team is being targeted on customer retention.

Understanding who your customers are

Social selling will only be of use if your (potential) customers are using social media. Undoubtedly they are, but can you identify what they are engaging with and looking for? This will be vital if the sales force is going to develop effective relationships.

You'll be pleased to know that this is an area where the marketing team can take the lead. Social media analytics provides detailed information on audience demographics, what's being searched for, trending topics, popular content, and perceived influence, among many others. Social listening tools can also identify relevant conversations and keywords.

Marketing also needs to explain to sales the concept of the customer journey (if they're not already aware), and how content might impact on it at each stage as this is a key part of the nurturing process.

Establish guidelines around how sales and marketing will co-operate

Some points to consider when trying to align your approach:

- **Leads:** Are your leads marketing or sales-qualified? Do you have an agreement in place between the two departments on what a qualified lead looks like? Is marketing being measured on the value of leads provided as well as the volume? Is there agreement on how quickly sales will follow up qualified leads?

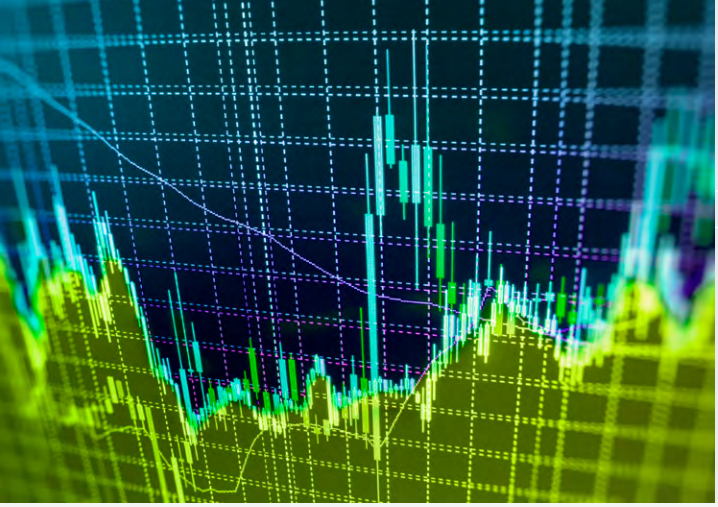
- **New customers/retention/up-sell:** Is there agreement around what represents a new customer, what a cross or up-sell is, and where business is retained?

- **Sales:** Is there agreement over when a closed sale has been reached?

- **Attribution to social selling:** Is there an agreed definition of how much of a sale can be attributed to social media activity as part of the customer journey?

Another fundamental question is that of ownership: who's going to take responsibility for the management and reporting of the social selling program? A joint approach is the most common, although it is dependent on the size and importance of the sales function in your organization; a small marketing function will find it difficult to cope with the demands of a huge sales function, for example.

The other aspect that needs to be established up front is the measurement methodology to establish whether the program is successful. We'll come onto this in section 4.



Some nine out of 10 CEOs don't respond to cold calls or emails, so impress upon your sales team the importance of trying something new to gain greater traction

2.2 How to engage with sales and create buy-in

Provide reassurance

Many sales professionals are resistant to change, so will need to be put at ease around the fact that social selling does not threaten what they know and love doing. They'll still have the opportunity to meet with contacts and prospects face-to-face – it's just another string to their bow.

Explain that it's another way to reach the prospect or lead who isn't responding to emails or phone calls. It's also unfeasible to call or meet with all your contacts every two weeks. Being active on social media is an informal way to keep the relationship ticking over between meetings.

Offer training and education

The worst approach would be to tell the sales team that you're implementing social selling, and just let them get on with it. How would they know where to begin? The program should be outlined, with clear expectations around activity and measures of success. This can be set out in a playbook (see section 3.4.1).

Sell the benefits

Wow your sales colleagues with these statistics from a LinkedIn survey of more than 1500 B2B buyers.

- 92% would engage with a salesperson considered to be a thought leader in the industry.
- 88% would engage with a salesperson introduced by someone in their professional network.
- 86% would engage with a salesperson who could provide professional insights into their business.

Some nine out of 10 CEOs don't respond to cold calls or emails, so impress upon your sales team the importance of trying something new to gain greater traction.

All salespeople have targets to hit, so emphasize how social selling can help them achieve these – they need to see how using social media is going to have an impact on achieving their bonus or commission.

Change the mindset

With the new approach social selling requires, you won't leverage the opportunity without changing the mentality.

When tech firm SAP introduced social selling a key to success was to move the attitude of salespeople away from 'selling' to 'knowing and supporting'.

Gamify the process

This may be a generalization, but salespeople often respond positively to competition. Take a look at this case study from sales tech brand LevelEleven.

Case study: LevelEleven

One of LevelEleven's clients wanted to encourage its sales force to adopt social selling. There would be a $5000 bonus on offer to the salesperson who could earn the most points in a month. They could earn points through:

- **Daily knowledge test.** One true or false question was set by the leadership each day, such as: 'I should write in the third person' (false) or: 'I should reciprocate a recommendation' (true). Answers were followed by a tip from the leaders setting out good practice.
- **Quality profiles.** Having an optimized social media profile (see section 3) could earn in excess of 30 points.
- **Quantity and quality of network:** Valid connections had to fit the profile of the client's ideal buyer. Competitors earned two points per connection if at manager level, and three points if they were an exclusive contact.
- **New appointments:** A sales rep could earn 30 points in one go for each appointment generated as a result of social media.

The competition among the sales team resulted in:

- Half the team generating at least one new appointment within two months (it was zero in the 60 days before the competition).
- 75% of the team optimizing their presence on social media.
- The sales force's total network grew from 5900 to 8700 qualified connections, an increase of more than 50%.

According to LevelEleven, the key to their success was gamification, which in turn encouraged sales to focus on questions related to prospecting like: 'When I attended that meeting, did I connect with the people I met?' and: 'Am I constantly monitoring my network?'.

But don't expect to homogenize the sales force

Like all the best marketing activity, social selling should come across as authentic. If you're too rigid in your approach to what is and isn't acceptable, you'll squeeze the authenticity out of the sales team's social interaction. Many salespeople believe (rightly) their personality is a key source of their success. Try and understand your sales force at an individual level, and show them how social media can be used as an extension of their personality. The personal touch can go a long way with prospects – even if this doesn't always have the same polish as your corporate branding efforts would.

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2.3 How to align with sales

Improving sales and marketing alignment could fill a whole guide on its own (bit.ly/b2balignmentguide), but here are a few recommendations to ensure your social selling efforts are on the same page.

- **Hold regular meetings:** Progress needs to be tracked and shared and – most importantly – the information needs to be acted on to improve. Marketing should share the campaigns and content it's working on, and sales should provide an update on what's popular and what's not working. Once the program is up and running, you may be pleasantly surprised when sales starts feeding ideas from prospects into your plans.

- **Make sure your content plan aligns with social selling priorities:** Marketing needs to provide sales with the content required to make social selling a success. If prospects want information on one topic, there's no point in churning out content on a completely different theme. If sales are sending LinkedIn InMails, it's important to remember they cannot use hyperlinks, and assets must be less than 2MB.

- **Give sales visibility of upcoming content and campaigns:** A 'living document', such as a Google sheet or shared calendar, will also be valued.

- **Alignment starts at the top.** All will come to naught if the head of sales and head of marketing aren't on the same page. As much as it's important to generate buy-in for social selling at junior levels, it will fail if it's not pushed (and acted upon) at the highest levels.

- **Make it easy for sales to do the right thing:** As we'll explore, sales enablement tools are a great way of ensuring consistency of brand and message, as well as being helpful for salespeople looking to make sales. But if they can't be easily accessed, or it's too complicated, people will give up. Salespeople, just like anyone else, will take the path of least resistance.

As much as it's important to generate buy-in for social selling at junior levels, it will fail if it's not pushed (and acted upon) at the highest levels



The three golden rules for social sellers

Kevin Ryan, head of marketing at LinkedIn's sales solutions business, says:

1. **Establish a strong professional brand.** Your social media profile will likely be the first impression a new prospect gets of your business, so think carefully about what it says about you. Complete your LinkedIn profile with the customer in mind, and add rich, meaningful content that addresses challenges they're likely to be facing.

2. **Find the right contacts.** You never know who could come in handy when it comes to building relationships with customers and prospects. That elusive prospect you've been chasing for a meeting could be an old contact of the IT guy or a family friend of the office intern. Social media is a great way of finding out about those coincidental connections.

3. **Pick your moment.** Good relationships take time. You wouldn't ask someone to marry you on a first date, so don't jump in cold with a big ask without learning more about your prospect first. Social media has made it much easier to keep track of relevant decision-makers within companies, so take note of the articles and updates they share in a professional context, and look for opportunities to respond to or check in with them. It doesn't always have to be about business either – how did their beloved football team do at the weekend, for example?

2.4 Sales enablement tools for social selling

There are a number of tools and aids that marketers can create and distribute to make social selling easier for their colleagues in sales.

2.4.1 Social selling playbook

This is essentially a handbook for all sales staff: explaining what social selling is, how they can do it, and how marketing supports the process. The ideal playbook should include:

- Introduction.
- Why the organization practices social selling and its benefits.
- What social selling is, and how to do it. There will be different expectation for sales leaders, managers and more junior reps, so you'll need customized playbooks for different levels of seniority.
- Checklists for managers on expected actions and milestones for staff.
- How to track and measure social selling, and the expected success criteria.
- Information on where sales can find content calendars and assets, along with best practice examples of what good profiles or social media interactions look like.
- Details of social selling 'champions' (experts on the subject either in sales or marketing) who can provide advice and support.

The good news is most of what you need is covered in this very guide! Feel free to take what you need for your playbooks.

2.4.2 Content marketing strategy

You're probably producing one of these already, but you may find it useful to produce one specifically for your social selling strategy that you can share with sales. Your strategy should cover:

- Objectives
- Target audience
- What content your audience wants to consume
- What makes your content different
- The content you already have
- A content schedule for the next 12 months (see section 3.4.3)
- How the content will be promoted
- Reporting metrics and KPIs.

You can find a content marketing strategy template at bit.ly/b2bcmtemplate

2.4.3 Content calendars

A content calendar is a schedule that outlines the content for a specific period (usually 12 months). If sales understands what content is being planned, and what's being produced to tie in with key events across the year, the team can more effectively target prospects through social selling.

A calendar will focus your own thinking on what types of content your audience wants to consume, rather than just creating content for content's sake. You'll need to remain sufficiently flexible to incorporate feedback from sales if there's significant demand for content on certain topics.

2.4.4 Customer journey maps

You've probably mapped customer journeys that track where customers can be influenced along the way, but explaining these to sales in the context of social selling can be helpful.

Point out where at each touchpoint content can help nurture the customer, and where there are opportunities to strengthen the relationship. You can also highlight the actions sales could take at each touchpoint, for example:

Social media	Prospect/customer activity	Sales action
Twitter post	Tweets citing frustration with recent legislative developments	e.g. Directs prospect to a blog on 'Five ways to demonstrate compliance with new law'
LinkedIn post	Asks network if anyone has contacts that manufacture cardboard boxes	e.g. Refers prospect to contact at cardboard box manufacturer
Twitter chat	Tweets that they will be involved in upcoming Twitter chat	Salesperson participates in chat to nurture relationship, giving opinions to build profile as thought leader

2.4.5 Other tools sales professionals will find useful

Grammarly

This is a free desktop extension that automatically checks spelling and grammar. A useful tool for spotting those unintentional mistakes and typos in social posts.

Social listening tools

Understanding what prospects and leads are talking about on social media. Being able to segment the audience, follow discussions and hashtags will be useful for sales professionals. There are a number of free tools to enable this, including: Hootsuite, TweetDeck, TweetReach, Social Mention and Followerwonk.

Social media management tools

While sales are not likely to need the level of detail some of these tools provide for marketers, the ability to schedule posts and track activity can make things easier. You may need to remind them that the purpose of these tools is not to simply automate all their activity, defeating the purpose of social selling. Free tools include Buffer, Hootsuite and TweetDeck.

Crystal Knows

Crystal Knows describes itself as personality detection technology. It analyses social media profiles with its DISC assessment to determine an individual's personality (either dominant, influential, steady or calculating) to help you communicate more effectively with them. It also provides real-time suggestions in email to tailor the communication to match the recipient's personality.

The five common mistakes salespeople make on social media

According to Nicky Kriel, social media speaker and consultant, social selling should be approached in the same way as dating. Would you, she asks, want to continue dating someone who is:

- Pushy – constantly trying to sell you something
- Lazy – all posts and messages appear automated, and involve no interaction
- Selfish – only interested in promoting themselves and their content
- Confused – no consistent message (or idea how social selling works)
- Neglected – profile appears to be dormant.

As advice, she quotes the US author Maya Angelou: "People will forget what you say, forget what you did, but will never forget how you made them feel."

The highly-targeted approach of ABM dovetails with the personalised nurturing of social selling



2.5 Account-based marketing and social selling

Social selling and account-based marketing (ABM) programs are a perfect match. The highly-targeted approach of ABM dovetails with the personalised nurturing of social selling. Both are about engaging prospects and customers on a one-to-one basis with highly-relevant content.

If you're not ready or comfortable launching a social selling program on a large scale across your organization, incorporating it into your ABM strategy would be a great place to start. Doing this will offer a more structured way of working with the sales team, while allowing marketing greater ownership of the process. Marketing will continue to own the relationship, supported by sales. It will require the two functions to work together closely, as key accounts may need content tailored to their individual requirements.

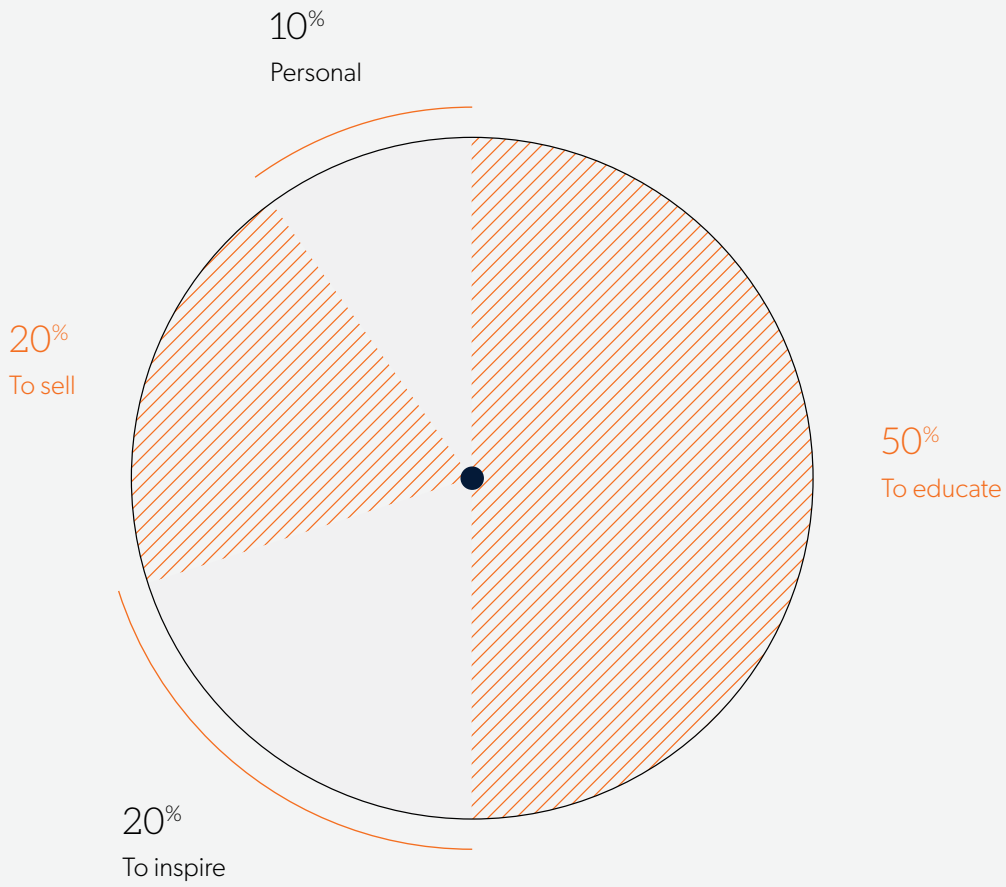
The fundamental principles of social selling (nurturing prospects and customers along the journey toward a sale) remain the same when incorporating it into ABM. It should also generate some practical examples of how social selling can be successful, which will allow you to start ramping up a more nurturing approach to sales within your organization.

3. Social selling approaches by platform

To enable sales to establish a professional presence, marketing will need to offer guidance on what an ideal profile looks like and provide advice on how to use the networks effectively to maximize impact. Use the following chart to highlight examples of best practice to those who'll be carrying out social selling.

Marketing consultant Sorav Jain recommends the following ratio when it comes to posting on social media.

Marketing will need to offer guidance on what an ideal profile looks like and provide advice on how to use the networks effectively



3.1 Twitter



Profile optimization

- **Username:** As a representative of the company, sales should avoid unhelpful names like "salesmonster316" or "salesprincess87". There's a 15-character limit for usernames.
- **Profile picture:** Headshots should look professional (remember: people buy from people). Prospects would rather buy from someone smiling than someone who looks grumpy.
- **Biography:** A headline is better than a job title. Buyers are looking for solutions to their problems, rather than products. Profiles should explain how a salesperson can help people. The bio is searchable, so include the company's username and relevant hashtags – but make it look natural, as no-one wants to see a list of hashtags just for SEO's sake. Including interests outside work will add a personal touch.
- **Location/URL:** These should be included, and if the salesperson doesn't have a personal website they could link to their LinkedIn profile. They should avoid making their birthday public, as fraudsters could use this to steal their identity.
- **Pinned posts:** Twitter allows you to pin one of your tweets to the top of your profile. This can be used to highlight a particular piece of content or insight that shouldn't be missed.

Other Twitter tips

- **Post regularly (but not too often):** It's important to show the user is active and someone who's worth following. Images and animated gifs will also help posts stand out.
- **Use Twitter lists:** Lists are a great way of keeping track of groups of users, so you could set one up for influencers, employees or current customers. They can also be private, so lists of potential prospects could be drawn up. The marketing team could come up with these lists and provide them on a regular basis for the sales team.
- **Who to follow:** Customers (current and potential), industry leaders, experts and influencers (including rivals), as well as colleagues/friends.
- **Engage with your followers/prospects:** Social media is meant to be social. Users should ask questions, point their contacts in the direction of useful information, and respond to and run polls once they've generated a following.

When sending an invitation to connect, salespeople should always use the 'add note' function to personalize the request

3.2 LinkedIn

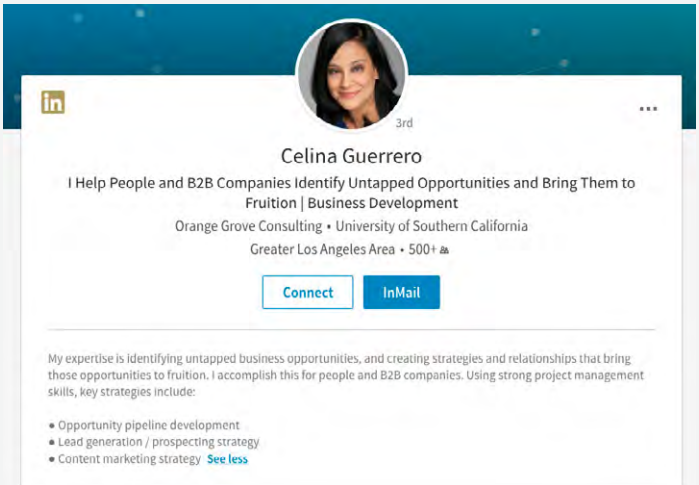
Profile optimization

- **Headline:** As with Twitter, this should be much more than a job title. It appears when people search for your profile. The headline should answer these two questions: who do you help and how do you help them?
- **Picture:** Match this to a Twitter profile to strengthen a personal brand.
- **Custom URL:** LinkedIn allows you to create a custom URL for your profile, so sales professionals should take advantage of this. It can be edited under the 'edit your public profile' option of your profile.
- **Summary:** This should broadly outline the salesperson's expertise and experience, along with what you do. The summary should cover:
  1. The mission of the business
  2. The part of the mission the salesperson feels most passionate about
  3. The journey they have taken to get to that point.

  It's worth including contact info in the summary to make it as easy as possible for people (particularly those who are not connections) to get in touch.
- **Experience:** This is the chance for the salesperson to present themselves as an expert, taking the opportunity to include images and videos highlighting their work or content if appropriate.

Other LinkedIn tips

- **Build your network:** Sales professionals should connect with people they know and have met. But they should be careful when sending unsolicited invitations to people they don't know. Encourage them to use their judgment; how would they respond to such an advance? When sending an invitation to connect, salespeople should always use the 'add note' function to personalize the request (unless the relationship renders it redundant).
- **Join LinkedIn groups:** Groups are a great way to see what prospects and customers are talking about, and what they're looking for. Engage with conversations and respond to questions and comments.
- **Follow influencers and companies:** This is another opportunity to see what influencers are talking about and the hot topics for the industry.
- **Get recommended:** Recommendations are a powerful demonstration of the trust others place in them and their influence.
- **Look at who's viewing their profile.** But be careful not to assume that because they're looking at their profile they want to make a purchase!



Linkedin's top tips

The social network has its own suggestions for sales people to make the most of its network.

- **Be visible.** Your LinkedIn profile should be complete, include relevant keywords for searches, and contain several points of contact. Offer an authentic, human face to your company.
- **Be forward-thinking.** Pick a topic and make yourself a go-to resource through curating, creating and sharing relevant content.
- **Be a curator.** Seek out content to share on your company and personal pages.
- **Be a team player.** Colleagues might have connections whose interests are aligned with your prospect's interests. Use them to make connections.
- **Be a publisher.** Use LinkedIn's publishing platform to post content on your own profile. Tackle common prospect questions and link to your content within group discussions.
- **Be validated.** Get on the radar of a LinkedIn Influencer; eventually they might help promote your content.

Case study: Great day for Everton fans

One Liverpool-based company wanted to boost its business with local organizations, but was struggling to gain traction through cold calling and email. Instead it used LinkedIn to search for people (who were based in the city) who mentioned Everton football club somewhere in their profile (most often in the interests section), and matched these against its customer profiles. It then hired a corporate box at Everton's home ground, Goodison Park, and invited these prospects for a stadium tour followed by a sales presentation. It resulted in more than 20 attendees who were willing to develop a relationship with the business.

3.3 Other social networks

LinkedIn and Twitter are the two most frequently used social networks for social selling. There's nothing to stop you using Instagram or Facebook, but use your best judgement as to whether this will work. These social channels are primarily used for personal not professional networking; consider whether you'd be receptive to someone trying to strike up a professional relationship with you on Facebook? Not everyone would be. Be careful not to intrude on what people consider their 'personal space'.

4. Measuring success

4.1 Which metrics need to be tracked?

Social selling isn't social media marketing, so forget tracking followers, likes and retweets (unless you want to measure the reach and influence of a particular salesperson), as these won't tell you how effectively sales are nurturing and closing deals. This is what you need to pay attention to:

- **Leads generated:** You might need to set up a code or tag in your CRM system to identify the leads generated through social selling.
- **Social pipeline:** This is the estimated value of sales opportunities currently being nurtured through social.
- **Appointments generated:** How many social selling conversations are being turned into face-to-face meetings?
- **Time to close:** How long does it take to close a deal from initial social contact? It's good to track this to see if/where the sales cycle can be sped up.
- **Deals closed/revenue generated:** Ultimately, the purpose of social selling is to generate sales. This is the metric that matters most. For customer journeys with multiple touchpoints, you'll need to work out to what extent social selling can be attributed to each sale (for further detail on this, check out *The B2B marketers guide to tracking and proving ROI*.)

4.2 LinkedIn's Social Selling Index (SSI)

LinkedIn has developed its own metric, the Social Selling Index (SSI), to measure how effectively any of its users (not just salespeople) are meeting the four principles of social selling: establishing a professional brand; finding the right people; engaging with insights, and; building relationships. Based on top performing sales professionals, it provides a combined score out of 100 for these four areas. It also shows you where you stand based on sales professionals in the same industry, and within your own network.

While not perfect – it only measures LinkedIn activity and doesn't differentiate between the quality of content being shared – it's a rough measure for the value of a profile, and could be used in a social selling gamification strategy to compare performance within a sales function, for example.

For more information on LinkedIn's SSI, see: linkedin.com/sales/ssi

5. Key takeaways

1. **Social selling is not about selling:** It's using social media to make connections, nurture relationships and turn prospects into customers.

2. **Marketing's role is to enable the process of social selling:** Although it might not be executing the social selling strategy, marketing has a crucial role to play in enabling success and providing the support, content and tools needed by the sales team.

3. **Social selling requires alignment with sales:** Social selling won't be a success unless the marketing and sales functions are working towards the same objectives and metrics. It also won't work if the sales force doesn't comprehend the benefits of this new way of working.

4. **Provide enablement tools.** Marketing should develop a social selling playbook, and adapt marketing plans, content calendars and customer journey maps to reflect social selling so that sales can see how any upcoming content is relevant for its prospects and customers.

5. **The ultimate metric to track is revenue generated.** The process may not involve selling, but the best way to measure success is to track the revenue that derives from any social selling efforts.





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