The Grande Guide to

Social Selling

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What is a Grande Guide?

Wait, you don't know? We won't tell anyone.

If you're not familiar with our award-winning series, our Grande Guides are designed to bring needed knowledge and the hot topics impacting modern marketing and sales – all in the time it takes to swallow down your breakfast. Inside you'll find tips, firsthand expertise and tools.

Today, we tackle social selling and, more importantly, how to do it. Leading us on our adventure is sales aficionado, Craig Rosenberg – aka, **The Funnelholic**. We'll also be helped along the way by leading social seller, **S. Anthony Iannarino**, and many other social selling pros. So grab a bagel and let's get started!

What is Social Selling?

The other day I was on the phone with my buddy, an "old-school" direct sales rep, who asked me why he should adopt social selling. My answer: "You can't afford not to."

Unless you work under a rock, you've probably witnessed how the Internet upended the sales cycle. Buyers are able to do the vast majority of their research online with a simple Google search. Social media fundamentally changed the way people bought again as potential buyers could reach out to peers in the industry, accessing a tremendous amount of "street knowledge" without ever having to "deal with" a sales rep.

In this new environment a new discipline has emerged among sales professionals. Social selling is the practice of leveraging social networks and the associated tools in the overall sales function from lead generation, to closed deal to account management.

The best part is social media is changing the way we sell *for the better.*

Social media has fostered an environment where our target buyers, prospects, and customers are actually publicly providing information about themselves in real time – their roles, their preferences, what they're buying, even what they're reading. Furthermore, social media provides sales people the ability to engage with future customers directly without picking up the phone.

This isn't a setback but an opportunity for sales people *and* buyers. Sales people are more relevant than ever. They have the tools and access to truly understand their buyers' needs, deliver relevant, compelling messages, find real opportunities from motivated buyers, and create more meaningful one-to-one relationships with customers. For the buyer, sales people are under constant pressure to provide value, not just a pitch.

In short, social selling is creating a sales environment where everyone wins.

Why Should I Care About Social Selling?

The number one sales rule in today's world is to understand your buyer's digital footprint: what they're interested in, what they need, whom they trust and where they congregate. Chances are social media is a popular hangout.

According to ComScore, 82% of the world's online population is reached by social networking sites. Nearly one of every five minutes spent online is dedicated to social networking sites.

75% of B2B buyers claimed social media would likely have influence on a future purchase

But it's not just the reach of social media that makes it so important. It's the quality of the data prospects and customers voluntarily offer on the social Web. LinkedIn has 175 million members, adding another two every second. That means millions of prospects are updating their job status, sharing their connections as well as asking and answering questions every day.

Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of tweets are put out on Twitter every day. While some of the talk is around what you had for lunch, prospects and customers are also sharing what content they are consuming, who is influencing their thinking and what products they are considering purchasing. This is the kind of data that can make or break a sale.

That's because most prospects aren't just starting their research online, they're practically at the finish line. 70% of the buyers' journey is completed before they talk to a sales person, according to SiriusDecisions. Conversing with leads early with timely, valuable insights is the best way to stay on the tip of their tongue. Social selling offers the best way to do just that. 75% of B2B buyers claimed social media would likely have influence on a future purchase **decision in one recent survey**.

If that's not enough to convince you, consider this: your competitors will probably embrace social selling – if they haven't already. 65% of businesses are already using **social media in their sales efforts**. And 55% believe their sales organization would be more productive if they had a larger social presence, **according to The Sales Management Association**.

If you don't adopt social selling, the competition will.

The Basics of Social Selling

Social selling doesn't replace the fundamentals. Instead, it enhances good sales people, making them more effective and efficient. While it may sound like a lot of work, it actually makes the job easier and more fun.

A Personal Brand
I'll never forget the words of my first sales instructor: "The most unique thing you have to sell is yourself."

In social selling, there are three key elements to your personal brand: your social profiles, your contributions to relevant social communities, and the content you share. You have the opportunity to build trust with your customers before you even meet, letting your social persona show your understanding of the market and the needs of buyers. If done well, you might find prospects seeking you out!

A Deep Network of Relationships
Sales people have always built networks. In the past we used business cards, events and personal referrals. We did our best with a phone, expense account and email.

Social selling makes it possible to grow your network into the thousands. And it's not just a list. You can follow, communicate and engage this network continuously. Those with deep networks can identify connections with potential buyers and ask for referrals from customers, friends, and fellow employees. And we all know a referral is worth more than a 100 cold calls.

Sales Intelligence
The best sales teams bake call planning into their day-to-day activities. Social media should get the same treatment. As you sell to an account, you can discover key decision-makers, influencers and what's on their mind. "Effective use of sales intelligence increases revenue productivity per sales rep by 17%," **according to CSO Insights**. With social sales intelligence you can reach buyers at exactly the right moment.

Social Listening
There are all kinds of monitoring tools sales people can use to listen in on their market in real time. These range from free apps like TweetDeck and Hootsuite to more advanced subscription platforms like Radian6 and Vocus. This is an opportunity to "eavesdrop" on prospects as they share their challenges and frustrations with their jobs and even their current vendors. Social selling begins and ends with listening. It's not about bragging; it's about comprehending your buyers' wants and needs.

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6 Steps for Getting Started with Social Selling

If I've done a good job pitching you on social selling, then you're probably eager to get started. But how?

Glad you asked.

Proficiency in social selling doesn't happen overnight, but there are steps you can take today. If you put time and energy into these steps, you'll see a social boost to your sales technique.

1. Pick a Channel

Start your social journey by understanding which social channels your buyers are conversing on. Once you know where prospects are, you need to examine what it takes to be effective before you dive in. For example, buyers are wary of people with 10 followers and no tweets, or just a few check-ins on Foursquare. And if you sell in B2B, LinkedIn is likely a smart platform for you.

2. Build Your Profile

You know where to be. Now you need to build a brand. The ultimate goal is to become a trusted advisor so keep that in mind as you craft a bio or profile. Whether on LinkedIn, Twitter or even Facebook – if you choose to go that route – create a complete, compelling profile with your photo, skills and experience.

3. Build Your Network

Regardless of the platform, reach out to peers, friends, customers, co-workers, and ex-coworkers. Ask folks you trust on LinkedIn to write up a recommendation. Start a conversation on Twitter with your real life connections. Add a +1 or share their posts. This will help amplify your voice among their network.

4. Connect with Influencers

Who are the figures that drive conversation around the topics that matter most to your customers? Don't immediately bombard them on LinkedIn. If you don't know an influencer, you should follow them on Twitter, Google Plus or even Quora. Get their attention by spreading their content.

5. Create Your Own Content

Creating content scares people. It shouldn't. There are a three predominant ways to get started.

I often tell sales people not to start a blog, but if you find writing 300 to 400 words comes easy, then do it! It's a fantastic way to demonstrate thought leadership. If that's too much of a commitment, start commenting on others' blog posts and articles. You can show off your wisdom without lengthy prose.

Definitely share others' content, especially influencers. Your network will gain insight and the author will love it. And be sure to join discussions such as LinkedIn groups organized around relevant topics, Twitter chats and on Q&A forums like Quora.

6. Keep Listening

A fundamental aspect of social selling is listening. Social media offers unprecedented insight into what the market is saying about their needs, wants, you and your competitors.

An easy way to get started is to download a free listening tool like Hootsuite or TweetDeck to organize your social profiles and followers. Hashtags are like keywords. Follow the relevant ones on Twitter to access up-to-the-minute info. Be sure to check in regularly on the groups you've joined. Sign up for weekly email updates on the conversations taking place there. And follow your competitors so you see what they're saying, and how it's resonating.

What Your Surrogate Salesperson Must Do



S. Anthony Iannarino

Your social media presence and your digital footprint are your online surrogate sales rep. You may not always be around, but the digital version of you is. It's there to help your clients and dream clients even when you aren't.

If you use social media to sell, you need to take a thoughtful approach to what your online surrogate looks like and what she does.

Does Your Surrogate Create Value?

Social media is fun. It's great to engage people all around the world. But, when it comes to selling, that's not what your social presence is all about. It's about helping your clients and dream clients.

If you create value through social media, your online surrogate salesperson has to create that value too. This means your digital identity needs to point people to the answers to their questions. It should direct them towards resources that can move their business forward. It must offer more than a pitch to contact you.

If your dream clients are just wrapping their heads around their needs, your online surrogate should offer viewpoints on these challenges, suggesting new ideas. If they're prioritizing needs, your surrogate should explain how to make tradeoffs. If they're close to buying but worried about risk, provide resources that inspire confidence.

Take a Look at Your Digital Self

Take a look at your digital self, your online surrogate. What message does he or she send? Would a prospective client be able to find your surrogate easily?

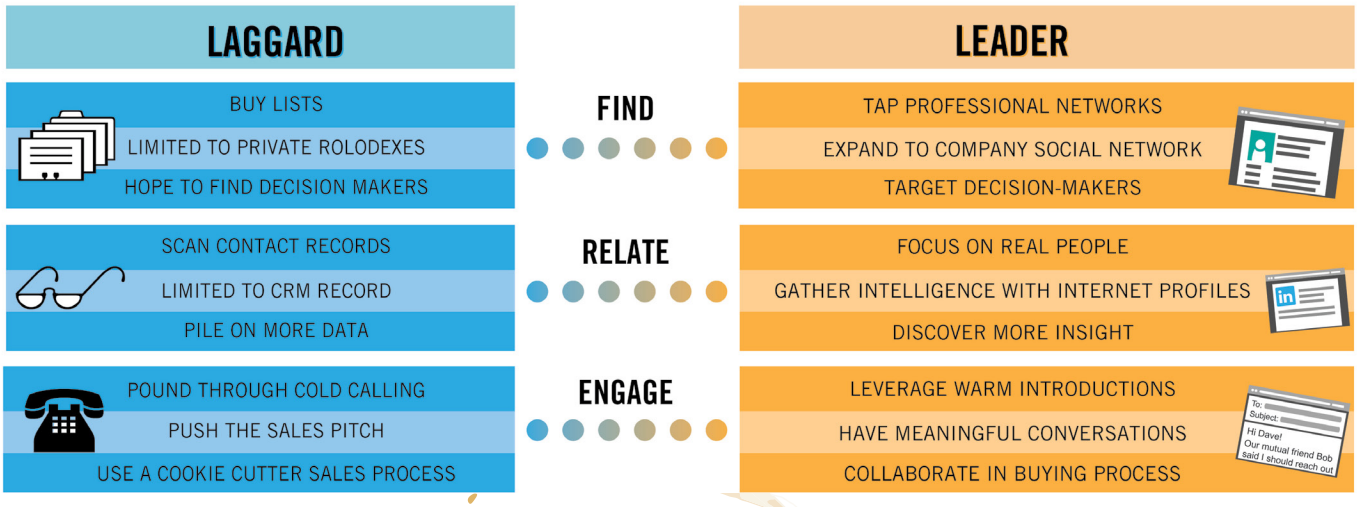
You can—and should—have a personality. You can share some of your private life with the world on social media. We buy from *people*.

But personality alone isn't enough. An online surrogate provides value at every step.

Your prospects and clients are always asking questions. But you may not always be around. Your online surrogate is. So make sure what she or he has to say is valuable.

WHERE IS YOUR SOCIAL SELLING?

You can buy into social selling, but you can't just buy your way to social selling. It's a process involving several steps and re-defined objectives. Where do you and your organization land on a social selling spectrum? Luckily, some friends at LinkedIn helped chart a path from Laggard to Leader.



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Tools of the Trade

There are three categories of social selling tools: the social channels, social intelligence applications, and social monitoring applications. Each day, new applications are hitting the market so the list keeps growing. But here are some of the most indispensable tools available.

Linkedin: Linkedin is *the* destination for business professionals. Executives from every Fortune 500 company can be found there. In most cases, it should be the foundation for your social selling efforts. Give your profile and activity on LinkedIn regular maintenance, proactively build connections, feed content through updates, follow both people and brands, and participate in groups.

Twitter: With **over 140 million users and 340 million tweets per day**, sales people shouldn't neglect Twitter. Find customers, prospects and influencers. Share content, advice and re-tweet. It's a great forum for not only discovering leads, but nurturing them as well.

Google Plus: Google boasts that 170 million people have upgraded to Google Plus, it's young social network. It can be a valuable place to spend time if your leads are on it. Content is easily shareable, updates can go beyond a 140 character limit, and Hangouts, which allows several users to video conference at once, could be a valuable lead nurturing function.

Facebook: When it comes to sheer size, Facebook can't be beat. It has over 850 million users, but features a more consumer look and feel. But there are business-oriented groups to be found and professional apps like BranchOut are taking root. As Facebook expands into more foreign markets, business groups may proliferate. If your customers are there, it could be worth your time. But be careful. Many people simply want to connect with friends and family.

SlideShare: Every sales pro has a deck…or two… or twenty. SlideShare is a simple way to get long tail benefit from your presentations. Now owned by LinkedIn, the site is like YouTube for slides. It's easy to create your own channel, upload presentations and let people download them. You can even insert a form, if you're so inclined. This is largely to demonstrate creativity and expertise, though. Be careful with the overt product pitches.

Quora: Quora is a popular question and answer forum for the business community. There are two important activities for the social sales person here: establishing credibility by taking part in relevant discussions, and "listening" in on conversations to identify potential buyers as they ask and answer questions.

Linkedin Sales Navigator: Sales Navigator is LinkedIn's paid service that allows you to take supercharge of your Linkedin usage. It allows sales people to build relevant prospect lists through targeted searches, retrieve full profiles of third-degree contacts and leverage co-worker connections for warm introductions. It also gives you the ability to send messages to anyone on the network, not just those you're personally connected to.

InsideView: InsideView's intelligence tool collects and analyzes information from 30,000 data, news and social media sources. It then presents it in a single, unified view so sales pros know which leads and clients to target, and understand what offers they'll find compelling.

Hootsuite & TweetDeck: Sales people should test their preference for one application over the other, but both work extremely well, can be leveraged for free and are massive time savers. Both have similar features but provide different user experiences. (Twitter owns TweetDeck. Hootsuite is independent.) These applications allow you to create groups of contacts, content types, and hashtags so you can easily follow the content feeds that matter to you. Both allow for management of several social channels in one place.

TwitHawk: Lets face it; Twitter is daunting. Watching a Twitter feed is like watching the stock market quote screen. While Hootsuite and TweetDeck lets you search and monitor, TwitHawk pushes alerts based on the parameters you self select. If you want to know when someone asks about endpoint security, TwitHawk will alert you and provides the ability to respond.

Google Alerts: Many sales people have been using Google Alerts for years, and it's worth it. Sales people typically prefer to have information pushed them versus having to find it. TwitHawk and Google Alerts both push information to you. You input specific keywords into Google Alerts, Google searches the web (web pages, articles, blogs), and emails you new results.

How Marketing Can Boost Your Social Mojo

You've heard a lot about how sales can use social media to build stronger, longer lasting relationships with leads. But how can marketing give its friends in sales an edge?

The short answer is "plenty." Just like sales, modern marketers can ignore social and it's impact on the buying process. Their goal is not just to smooth the road for leads, but also to support sales' efforts in following up, engaging and sniffing out opportunities. When it comes to social, marketing can help in several ways. Here are a few ideas to get started.

Provide a Platform

A major aspect of successful social selling is developing a personal brand. Marketers can provide a springboard for sales pros branding efforts. Chances are they've got a blog, newsletter, and guides. They usually hold the keys to the corporate Twitter handle, Facebook page, LinkedIn group, and more.

Marketers can advance individuals' social selling efforts by giving them guidance on how to engage on social media, how to craft great blog posts and articles, and by providing a platform for publishing and sharing this content. The brand's network may be larger and more diverse, so marketing can offer a shot in the arm for sales.

Key Them In

When it comes to any branding initiative, keywords play a big role. Marketing should share the specific keywords and terms it's trying to own. This will allow sales to refine its own social selling efforts, pairing down to the Twitter hashtags, LinkedIn groups and Q&A pages that really matter.

Also, these terms can enable sales to get an early jump on potential deals. For instance, sales people can start up Google Alerts for top targets, getting real-time notifications of big changes that result in new investments like changes in leadership or added funding.

Make it in Miniature

Marketers love giant campaigns, but when it comes to enabling sales, bite-size is often better. Give sales an arsenal by breaking out your campaigns into smaller pieces. You could create mini campaigns around key themes in a central place or in a collaborative sales tool, stocking it with relevant graphics, guides, how-tos, videos, analyst reports and more. When a sales rep sees one of her followers ask a question or for resources on the social Web, she can follow up with lightening speed thanks to marketing's forethought.

Turn Over Templates

Here's a real secret about social selling: To do it right, you need traditional tools.

Say a sales person finds a connection on LinkedIn is looking to learn more about your company's space. The rep could send a personal email on their own inviting them to a local event. But if marketing creates custom templates for these occasions ahead of time, you'll maintain the look, feel and messaging without sacrificing the personal touch. Plus, sales saves time!

Dazzle with Data

Sales pros need to understand the context for all the social activity they monitor. If you use sales intelligence tools, you can clue sales reps into individual leads' online activities (i.e. what pages on your site they visit, what they've downloaded, how often they come back, etc.). With this data in hand, social sellers can truly understand what a lead wants and needs, resulting in more direct and relevant conversations on the social Web.

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Do's and Don'ts of Social Selling

DO...

...Be a Trusted Advisor. In today's modern era, helping is selling. Try to add value and build trust within your buying community. They'll turn to you when the time is right.

...Do Research. When I take sales calls and the person on the other end hasn't done their research, I start looking at my watch. You have the data. Use it. With a combination of social monitoring and intelligence, find out what interests buyers before engaging.

...Be Authentic. Don't be fake or sneaky. Social media has no governing body. Instead the users rule social and they'll do everything to create a "safe" place to engage. Authenticity is a big deal in social. Violators of this rule are unwelcome.

...Incorporate Social Into Your Day. Social should be part of your daily activity. Set aside time to research, curate, and share content. Connect with people you meet as part of your process.

...Nurture Prospects and Clients. Social allows you to stay in the hearts and minds of your buying community without having to do the dreaded "check in" call or send a thousand emails. Buyers will follow people that add value.

DON'T...

...Talk About Yourself All the Time. Bragging on yourself or your company all the time is a turn off. Talk about, and share, other's content – not just yours.

...Over Push Product. You can't be a trusted advisor if you can't hold a conversation without pitching. Social communities don't want people pitching their products unless asked to. Being pitchy is unwelcome.

...Bombard Leads. You want to be where your leads are, but don't immediately message them on every platform begging to give a demo or to visit your site. Build a relationship first.

...Be Nasty. Social media is not the place to bad mouth competitors. It's not about ragging on the competition, but sharing how you can help followers succeed. Stay classy.

Resources:

Heinz Marketing Blog

Fill the Funnel Blog

A Sales Guy

The Sales Blog

Nimble Blog

Social Selling Best Practices

The Future of Selling

LinkedIn Sales Navigator

InsideView

TwitHawk

TweetDeck

HootSuite

Eloqua Sales Enablement Tools

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