

THE SEVEN HABITS OF SOCIAL SELLERS

by Dale Roberts



Habit #1 Be Proactive

Understand your customers and their markets and use social channels to engage well before they become leads or prospects.

Habit #2 Build a Network

The time to grow your connections with thought leaders, commentators, customers and prospects is now.

Habit #3 Listen

Buyers are increasingly social which means their needs are increasingly transparent. But only to those who listen first.

Habit #4 Become a Brand

Build a reputation through your professional social profile, your content, conversation and contribution.

Habit #5 Practice 360° Networking

Approach your prospects through common connections.

Habit #6 Nurture your Network

Find reasons to connect each and every day. A comment in a forum, a tweet or something to share is the perfect way to stay top of mind.

Habit #7 Be in Service to Your Customers

Smart sellers have always known that their personal success is an outcome of being focused entirely on their customer and their needs.

The Seven Habits of Social Sellers

Business Buyer Preferences

When I speak at sales conferences and workshops, I often ask the question ‘Who actually enjoys cold calling?’ Inevitably, I will see one defiant hand reaching high and I have made it a habit to seek them out during a break to find out more. Of course, I am asking the wrong question of the wrong audience. If I asked a room full of business buyers ‘how many of you enjoy receiving a cold call?’ then I suspect I would see a similar number of hands. In fact a study on buyer preferences commissioned by IBM revealed that cold calling is 97% ineffective. It is difficult to believe that businesses would continue with any activity that only works three times in a hundred.

Doing more of what does not work, will still not work

In spite of this, sales professionals still adopt the old school approach and attempt to get through call screening, caller identification and unreturned voice messages. A common approach is just to increase the number of dials per day. The reality though is that business buyers have changed and traditional selling approaches, including cold calling, are becoming increasingly irrelevant.

Changing Business Buyer Behaviour

Instead of doing more of the same, sales professionals need to change their approach because buyers already have. We are in the middle of an online and social revolution that not only changes the way we buy a holiday, restaurant or airline but how we buy for our businesses too. Three quarters of business buyers use social media to make purchasing decisions according to IDC* and it is higher for senior decision makers. The wave of cultural change is being felt way beyond consumer decisions, business buyers connect on professional social platforms such as LinkedIn as part of their decision making process. Even more so, are those that check rating sites before making a decision on electronic goods, these are the same people buying employer liability insurance, exhibition space and CRM software.

The Digital Buying Process

The pace of change is dramatic, with business buyers (B2B) opting to delay their first engagement with a seller until they are more than half way through the purchasing process. According to the Corporate Executive Board, the buyer is 57% through their purchase process at the point they first engage sales. In a similar study, Sirius Decisions, suggest that 67% of the buyers journey is digital.

The significance of this cannot be underestimated – more than half of the sales process has disappeared taking with it the influence and control that professional sellers previously had.

The Rise of Social Selling

Many have recognised this change and sales and marketing teams are transforming the way they engage with their customers in this new reality. According to an IBM Institute of Business Value Study, sixty percent of businesses will have adopted a social strategy by the end of 2014 in their sales department. A new breed of seller is emerging, one that has embraced the transformation and is seizing the opportunity to engage with customers using social media in an approach that is referred to as social selling.

Social sellers stand out to the new connected buyer. They stand out not because they are using social platforms – although they are, but mostly because they have adopted a set of behaviours that set them apart. They are proactive, customer-centered, productive and smart. These are the new habits of the social seller.

Habit #1 Be Proactive

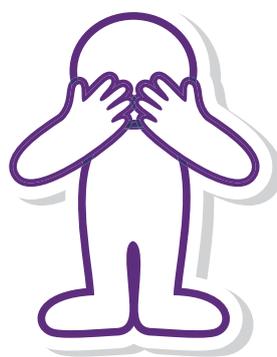
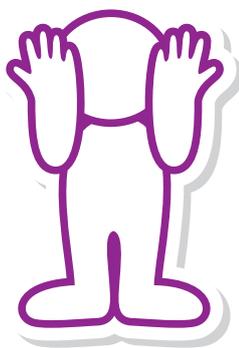
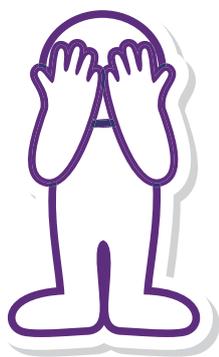
This will be one of many whitepapers or articles bold enough to borrow the concept of the seven habits from the seminal *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* from the late Stephen R. Covey. As a tribute to one of the most important works on personal and professional effectiveness, our first habit is shared by Covey – Be Proactive.

The lines of responsibility between marketing and sales are blurring.

Sellers that wait for compelling content, customer references, and competitive intelligence, or even leads from the marketers are simply not keeping up. There were 364 million users on LinkedIn at the beginning of 2015; your customers, prospective customers and competitors are all using it. There are 500 million tweets each day with micro bloggers commenting on your company, your competitors and the problems you solve.

All of this represents an opportunity to understand your customer and for them to become aware. A little research each day gives you greater understanding which coupled with a little sharing means that you are growing your own social profile.

If you advise on compliance, you should be keeping on top of legislative changes, if you sell budgeting applications then there should be no mysteries when it comes to best practices in business planning. Even in a complex sale requiring a team and deep domain knowledge, understanding the problem you solve for your customer cannot be left to anyone else. The way we communicate is changing in the digital age, make sure you don't get left behind.



Are you missing out on conversations?



364 million LinkedIn users



500 million tweets each day



37.5 million Artesian insights a month

Habit #2 Build a Network

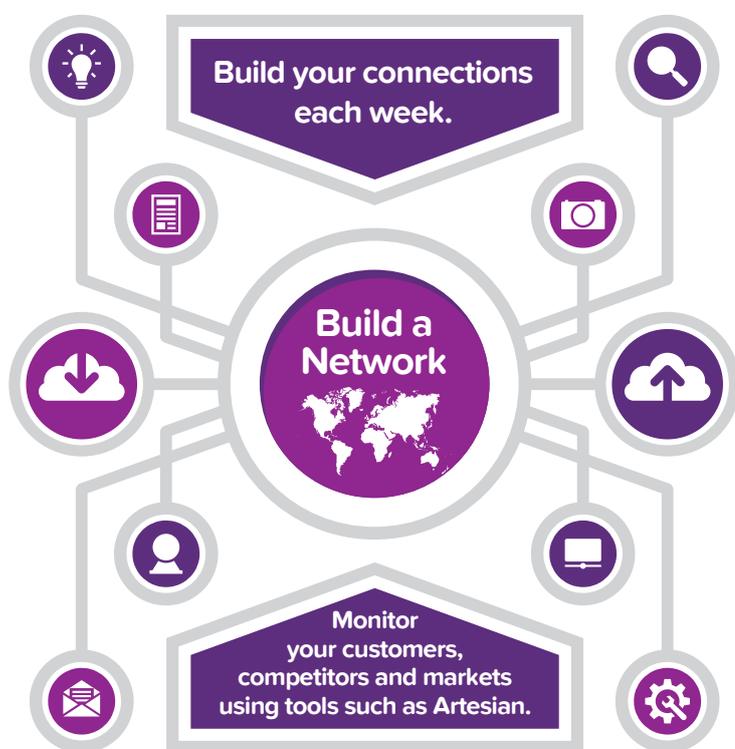
Building a network must become deeply ingrained and of all the seven habits, will be the one that practiced universally will ultimately end the need for cold calls. This is not something that began with Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn either, it has been practiced by successful sellers for decades.

A great example of this is businessman Harvey Mackay, who turned around a failing envelope business in 1959 and is still manufacturing 4 billion of them each year in an age where envelopes are mostly thought of as the icon for accessing email. He is also a New York Times best selling author. However, his business card does not read CEO, Chairman or Author. Instead it reads simply 'Envelope Salesman'. Mackay has built a hugely successful career through being in service to his customers and by building a network of people that trust and value him. Each of Mackay's connections started with Mackay considering what he could do for them and not the other way around, and this wasn't just an initiative Mackay employed when he was at the end of a quarter, a tactic that some people tend to fall back on . Instead, he built his

network continuously in a way that is elegantly summed up in the title of one of his best sellers *Dig Your Well Before You are Thirsty*.

Connect Often

Build your connections each week. Monitor your customers, competitors and markets using tools such as Artesian. Connect on LinkedIn with those people you meet, find people on Twitter who are talking about the problems you solve for your customers and reach out to thought leaders and commentators known in your industry. Not only do these individuals keep you informed in your field but they will also be influencing your market. It has been noted that most sales people have difficulty with Twitter and after trying it for a few weeks give it up with a handful of followers and tweets. You must persevere. Use tools that not only find relevant insights but will make those insights easily sharable across both LinkedIn and Twitter so that you have something to keep the conversation going. Your network will grow, slowly at first, but only if you continue to make a contribution. Don't be tempted to follow too many celebrities either – Twitter is often used for both



personal and professional micro-blogging, but there is a whole new online discussion taking place that you can't find in the traditional media. Use Twitter feature 'who to follow' and free tools to help you select accounts worth following and review it weekly. To ensure your network stays healthy you should also be discerning in your follow-backs. My personal rule is that if we are interested in the same things, I follow-back without question. If I can't work out what it is they are going to share or they want to sell me followers or pharmaceuticals, they get blocked!

Personal Conversations from Public Ones

Smaller, closed conversations can follow larger, open ones. Occasionally, someone makes a comment that resonates with our own views and we end up in a sidebar, leaving the wider discussion and comparing notes. This happens on Twitter and LinkedIn too and there are occasions where there is a brief exchange of direct messages after which there will be the equivalent of a business card exchange. They will exchange email addresses or connect on LinkedIn, these open conversations on Twitter can be every bit as meaningful as those we have at conferences, expos and any other physical networking events.

Habit #3 Listen Before Everything

Stephen Covey illustrated the habit 'Seek First to Understand' with the use of a Native American talking stick. In tribal circles, holding the stick meant you spoke and everyone else heeded. It was a way of reinforcing the need to listen without interrupting, to hear before speaking. On more than one occasion I have heard Sales Managers deliver a more direct version. They point out that we were born with two ears and one mouth and they should be used in proportion. Listening is a universal social skill, it is the subject of hundreds of books, the fourth of Dale Carnegie's *Ways to Win Friends and Influence People* as well as an effective habit; its importance is only equaled by the level to which it is underestimated.

Conversations on social networks follow the etiquette of any group social conversation, if you joined a group holding drinks and sandwiches at a conference you would listen first. You would try to understand what the conversation was about, the prevailing opinion and even discern something about those that were already talking before jumping in. This is true of online social gatherings too.

Listen at Scale

It is not easy to do this as there are almost 100,000 tweets, 100 LinkedIn accounts and 1,500 new blog posts created every minute. Sitting in front of a search engine is not going to be nearly efficient enough to stay on top of existing customers let alone prospective ones. Those that use the right tools will be rewarded though, in an online and social world our needs are transparent and so are those of our customers.



There is an ocean of information, but if it is filtered carefully and routinely ranked with automatic triggers, we can discover relevant insights about such events as; senior management changes, awards, new products and periods of either rapid growth or decline. These are social signals that tell us what is happening to customers, partners, competitors and markets. Social sellers listen to these, using tools such as Artesian to understand their customers. Identifiable types that Artesian can discern include; organisational change (e.g. new geography); leadership change; market change; external change (e.g. legislation); relationship change (customers, partners); strategic; tactical (initiatives, reviews); events.

Customer Interaction in Context

These insights inform the relationship with your customer or prospect and are at the core of changing the conversation from a vendor or product focus to a customer focus. Listening is a habit that allows Social Sellers to understand, to bring customer context to every interaction, to nurture existing relationships and create new ones. Some of these signals are events, situations and circumstances that cause companies to consider buying your product or service. These signals are so strong, that the buyer need is evident but only sellers that have been listening are rewarded with these signals that trigger an opportunity to help start or progress a commercial discussion.

Habit #4 Become a Brand

The customer no longer starts their buying process by engaging with a seller. Instead, they are researching through search engines, seeking opinions from their professional network and looking to online content as their guide. A personal brand is how buyers will find you in a world where B2B buyers are completing more and more of the buying decision before involving a seller.

Many have not been forced to think in these terms before, a LinkedIn profile was only a mirror of their curriculum vitae, but today the need for a clear brand will enrich careers and build businesses.

Be more than a Job Title

It starts with thinking about the value you add rather than job titles, responsibilities and a list of verbs such as proven, strategic and effective that everyone else is using anyway. To create your personal brand you should focus on achievements, this is not bragging but is, instead, the intersection between the value your customer or business has received and the contribution you made to it.

‘To create your personal brand you should focus on achievements.’

Think about a problem you have solved or an opportunity that you have exploited and then think about the actions you personally took and the results. Whilst this has always been good practice for building a resume, focusing on this approach with customers in mind is very different.

Consider the following statements ‘Closed the largest deal in the companies fiscal year and delivered 150% of quota’ and ‘Worked with a leading retailer to implement an on-line virtual fitting room which reduced returns by 5% in the first year of implementation’, both of these statements describe the same achievement but the latter is going to build brand and reputation.

Your online reputation spreads beyond your LinkedIn profile and your corporate website, customers will look for contributions from sellers and their business on Slideshare, YouTube, Scribd and any other content sharing site.

A social seller will have the confidence to ask for recommendations because they are confident that they have acted in the interests of their customers and who would not want to recommend exceptional service to their network.



Habit #5 Practice 360° Networking

Traditionally you might have approached all those connected with a business buying decision individually perhaps through a campaign of cold calling. Once inside the circle, the seller would affect introductions and the extended sales team would work to satisfy the specific needs of each stakeholder. Whilst much of this remains true today, the initial work can be done far more efficiently by aligning your own network and theirs in a way that is referred to as 360 degree networking.

Approaching individuals directly (0°) is only one option. A zero degree approach is, as it sounds, cold and fraught with the risk of an all or nothing outcome.

Alternative Introductions

Alternative approaches include working with professional introducers, analysts or systems integrators (at 90°) or through other sellers (at 270°). Businesses need to buy to operate, to grow, to change. So spend some time working out what your prospective customers business needs are, such as premises, insurances, funding, materials, audit and systems. Then identify suppliers that you could either work with or that might even be currently working with your prospect. Online social and editorial sources are rich sources of information for identifying existing partnerships with your prospect on which you can collaborate.

Naturally, the most effective approach is through warm introductions and you have tools at your disposal that can discover shared connections in what we call 180° prospecting – at 180° are the people that are connected to your prospect. Each of these might already be part of your network, share a common interest, contribute to the same forums or even be a customer that you have already helped. At 180° is a rich network on which common connections can be discovered and introductions made.

Research Over Dialing

Whilst it requires research and social listening it is simply a better use of our time compared with cold calling. At any one time, there are only 3% of companies intending to make a purchase decision in the next 90 days. A further 7% are passive buyers and may respond to a well-timed campaign. At around 5 to 7 dials to even speak to a person, it will take up to 70 dials to find a lead.

Rather than dialing for a virtual needle in a haystack that time could be spent more wisely on developing an indirect, warm, targeted and well-timed approach.



Habit #6 Nurture the Network

So you have built a personal brand, handed out business cards, made connections on LinkedIn and have built up a following on Twitter. Your network is growing steadily and you proactively prune those areas that are overgrown or outdated. Congratulations, you have an abundance of current and active connections.

Dunbar and Meaningful Connections

This is where all the work you have done in building your brand and understanding your market aligns with the network you have carefully constructed. British anthropologist Robin Dunbar suggested that there is a cognitive limit of around one hundred and fifty stable social relationships that we can maintain, this is why we are redefining what words like *friends*, *followers* and *connections* really mean. Online social networks are larger than their traditional equivalent, so inevitably the connections are not as strong. As Dunbar's number would suggest we cannot maintain deep relationships across all of our social networks but they can still be meaningful. You are routinely in possession of insights that you can share, so build a blog if you can. Remember buyers do not switch instantly from not having a need to needing what you do – our needs evolve.

'Demonstrate thought leadership, share insights openly and let customers know that you can help them solve their problems.'

We might be dissatisfied with the status quo, but not feel motivated to change. Your content, including your blog can help buyers understand where they are in their cycle of need and move them along. It is also a permanent record of where they can find someone who has empathy for where they are today.

Many sales professionals find it too difficult to blog, so consider writing very short posts of 200 to 300 words. If blogging is just not something you feel you can do then contribute comments to existing blogs. Add your perspective to the conversation so you can be found by buyers who share it.

Everyone has 140 Characters Inside Them

There is little or no excuse to not microblog. Everyone has 140 characters to share on a daily basis if only to pass on those insights derived as a result of being a good social listener. Comment, mention, retweet and share your opinions on the insights that come your way. Don't be tempted to treat social channels like traditional media though. Your Tweets and LinkedIn updates are not a time to pitch. Instead demonstrate thought leadership, share insights openly and let customers know that you can help them solve their problems. Showcase your experience and build your credibility. Understand and use hash tags and keywords so that your customers and prospects will be able to find your insights at each stage of their buying journey.



Habit #7 Be in Service To Your Customers

The final habit will require you to re-examine your very purpose as a seller. In the 1970's an AT&T executive, Robert Greenleaf, was responsible for creating the Servant as Leader movement. In a brief but profound essay he turned established business thinking on its head. The notion that leaders are in service to their followers is at the core of some of the most disruptive and consistently successful businesses in the world such as Southwest Airlines, Starbucks and WL Gore a business that has never made a loss. To sell today requires this same attitude – it is being in service to the buyer. Each interaction should be driven by the question 'in what way am I going to make a difference, how will I make their life better?'

Selling in the 21st century requires consigning notions of manipulating customers to history and replacing them with a purpose centered on making a difference to the lives of others.



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Adapt or Become Irrelevant

The future for sellers is to deliver a personal experience in service to their customers but to do so at scale. There is no longer a choice. Customers are changing rapidly and the only two options are to adapt to a rapidly evolving buyer or to become irrelevant. Today's customers do not expect to be interrupted, annoyed or bothered by sellers when they are not ready to talk. In spite of this, the moment they are, their expectations are at an all time high. They will expect sellers to have done their research, to be contactable and even to be reaching out at the point their needs are becoming evident.

Improved productivity and effectiveness are only going to come from a permanent change in habits and by making use of the right media, tools and technology. There are simply not enough hours in the day to research prospects so that they are being contacted at the right time and simultaneously nurture each connection even in a light way.

Changing your Habits

Like Covey's original habits, the seven habits of brilliant customer engagement are not easy. New behaviours take time to develop, they feel uncomfortable at first and need to be practiced diligently. It is though, like all good habits, an investment in your future success. You are on a journey to connect with your customers in meaningful ways, to be keenly aware of the difference you make to them and to freely share valuable insights in a way that will attract prospects to engage with you or turn a cold contact into a warm one.

Work on each of these new habits every day.

Proactively discover new leads and insights, grow your network and build your brand. Nurture your network and remember that there is always more than one way to connect. Most of all listen. All of the behaviours' require an understanding of your customers, their markets, their competitors and their issues as they arise. This information is freely available from online and social digital sources but it can get lost in the volume and the noise.

The Artesian social intelligence platform routinely delivers relevant insights about your customers and the market you serve so that you can respond, react and serve your customers at the time they need you most.



To learn more about the art of social selling:

-  Follow us @ArtesianS
-  Connect with us on LinkedIn
-  Like us on Facebook
-  Join our inner circle at Google+
-  Check out our fabulous free resources at www.artesiansolutions.com/resources/

About Artesian Solutions

Artesian is the world's most powerful social selling solution for B2B sellers; it gathers and tracks intelligence on customers, prospects and competitors from millions of online resources including blogs, news sites, editorials and social platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Artesian uses clever science to filter and transform acquired information into commercially valuable insights based on the companies and industries that are important to users. Artesian gives users the ability to, target, connect and share with customers and prospects.

Artesian clients include American Express, Adobe, Aviva, Barclays, Cisco, Lloyds, HSBC, Royal Bank of Scotland, Verizon and many more.



About the Author



Dale Roberts is part of the founding circle of Social CRM Innovator, Artesian Solutions. He is also a keynote speaker, blogger and author of *Decisions Sourcing: Organisational Decision Making for the Agile and Social Enterprise*. Prior to joining Artesian, Dale worked with some of the largest European and US businesses to build analytic and performance management solutions in his role as European Services Director for market leader Cognos, now part of IBM.

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