

Building a Sustainable Competitive Advantage - Salespeople's Linchpin Role

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The criticality of salespeople as linchpins within the buyer-seller relationship cannot be overstated. Given that the development of strong sales representation with customers is key to success for many industrial firms, the unique position of professional salespeople is firmly entrenched within today's global economy. Skilled salespeople are the principal sources of

informational and relational resources to both the firm and its customers as well as being key to nearly every decision and in nearly every industry by helping businesses define their needs, understand and evaluate their options, make effective purchase decisions and forge enduring relationships.

In today's everchanging B2B environment, the competitive landscape and salespeople's role in meeting customer expectations changes rapidly. Given the complexity of the sales role, it is understandable salespeople now face unprecedented pressures in an ever-evolving global market. With increasingly changing customer-salesperson relationships, the boundary-spanning role of salespeople positions them in a precarious balance between satisfying the customer and meeting organizations' performance expectations. According to data from the Sales Education Foundation (2017), "nearly 40% of a customer's decision is based on the added value the salesperson brings to the relationship, far above product quality (21%) and price (18%)".

Salespeople are in a unique position to connect organizational resources between the firm and customer. Salespeople bridge inter-organizational boundaries and increase the connectivity of human resources in each firm. While existing research has discussed the importance of relationship marketing and the growing importance of adding value to the buyer-seller exchange, there is little that examines the critical role of the salesperson as a resource within the buyer-seller relationship. As postulated by Hunt and Morgan (1995), resource-advantage theory categorizes resources as financial, physical, legal, human, organizational, informational, and relational. For an organization, salespeople can be not only a human resource but can provide informational and relational resources through their boundary-spanning role. For firms to build a sustainable competitive advantage, executives and managers must understand the criticality of their salesforce as an informational and relational resource within the buyer-seller exchange.

How do you see firms positioning their salesforce? How can a salesforce add value for a) their firm and b) their customers? Please share your thoughts in the comments

section below.

Sources:

Sales Education Foundation. (2017). Retrieved August 17, 2017, from <http://salesfoundation.org/>.

Hunt, S.D. and Morgan, R.M. (1995). "The Comparative Advantage Theory of Competition," *Journal of Marketing*, 59 (2), 1-15.

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