

Chapter 7

Change in Business to Business Sales

ABSTRACT

Over the past four years, considering the pandemic, many writers have been concerned with whether our world would continue to change or whether we had achieved all that we could and society would stagnate. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to many to bring progress to a halt. As businesses shut down, as sellers struggled to work from home, and as buyers refused face-to-face meetings, it appeared we would take a step back in time regarding B2B sales. Yet, in hindsight, business was resilient and adept at using technology so that many business functions, including B2B sales, continued to work and prosper despite the restrictions and fears that the pandemic brought.

CHANGE AS A CONSTANT

Over the past four years, many writers have been concerned with whether our world would continue to change or whether we had achieved all that we could, and society would stagnate. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to bring progress to a halt. As businesses shut down, struggled to work from home, and buyers and sellers refused face-to-face meetings, it appeared we would take a step back in time regarding B2B sales. Yet, in hindsight, business was resilient and adept at using technology so that many business functions, including B2B sales, continued to work and prosper despite the restrictions

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and fears brought by the pandemic. Mead (2023) concluded that “For all the talk of stagnation, ...our society can expect new waves of both social and economic change as the 21st century proceeds” (p. 5). He further noted that change would continue and that it was inherent in the human condition:

First, from the time of our remote ancestors to the present day, human beings have never stopped developing new tools and thinking up new ways to harness natural objects and forces to achieve human ends. Second, we’ve never ceased weaving thicker and more intricate webs of society, language, and culture. (Mead, 2023, p. 5)

Chapters 1 through 6 reviewed the most important changes to B2B selling that have come into use over the past few hundred years. In particular, the significant changes to selling that resulted from the recent COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how B2B selling continues to change even in times of pandemic and social distancing. Some selling methods, such as value selling, survived. Other selling techniques, such as virtual selling, were strengthened by the pandemic, and resulted in a more widespread and complete adoption of the technology by B2B selling teams. Still other approaches, such as transaction focused selling, are now used less.

Business writers continue to see change in B2B selling as commonplace and expected. As one author said,

When surveys of significant and recent changes impacting sales organizations are taken, it is evident that change is commonplace. Sales force change topics include technology, new ways to conduct business, transforming company culture, outsourcing, globalization, and developing long-term customer relationships. In sales, quotes like, “The sales field is changing,” have become as commonplace as the old adage “find a need and fill it.” With all the emphasis on change and all the strategies and tactics designed to effect change in organizations, why have so many change efforts not lived up to expectations? (Chonko et al., 2006, p. 44)

Common to all these changes is that they were not agreed to or adopted immediately and underwent various stages of development and incorporation before becoming the current approach of any sales organization. In fact, some of these approaches are still in transition and not fully accepted by all B2B sales. The well-known writer Tom Peters (1987) argued quite a while ago that

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