

## How Sales Learning Can Maximize Your Sales Asset Management Investment

Thursday, September 08, 2016 - by *Mark Magnacca*

In recent years, the sales asset management (SAM) market—sales playbooks, sales content management (SCM)—has exploded, and many companies are utilizing SAM to create, manage, package, and distribute customer-facing content to their sales teams. Theoretically, this growth makes perfect sense. Sales reps, and, arguably, most business professionals today, are inundated with data from all sides and from a variety of platforms, meaning that access to the right content at the right time is critical. However, ensuring that this content is understood and internalized is just as important, and often overlooked. This is where SAM investments often fall short.

When provided with content, can your reps articulate the key business value of your product or service? Most reps can't. In a survey by analyst firm SiriusDecisions, sales executives and customers reported that the top inhibitors to sales success are an inability to articulate a value message and a lack of subject matter expertise in the buyer's industry or solution. In fact, the survey found that 85 percent of deals are lost because reps cannot articulate a value proposition to the prospect.

When evaluating the effectiveness of a SAM investment, the question therefore becomes: What strategies can companies use to augment their SAM solutions to ensure that reps not only have the content that they need when they need it, but also fully understand this content and know how to use it to their advantage at deal time?

### How Can You Determine if Your SAM Investment Is Successful?

Your marketing team has worked hard to put together valuable and engaging assets to aid your reps in the sales process. In many ways, this positions you ahead of the pack, as 60 percent of B2B businesses reported in a survey by the Content Marketing Institute that their top challenge in 2016 would be producing engaging content. However, just having the content available doesn't ensure that reps are ready for the field.

Here are a few of the questions to ask when determining the overall impact of a SAM investment:

- Is there a process in place for ensuring that the knowledge pushed out to the sales team is understood, absorbed, and being used with customers?
- If asked, can salespeople deliver a two-minute explanation of the company's value on the spot?
- For the industries that they serve, can the sales rep handle common objections?
- Do the sales reps know which stories are most compelling to customers facing varying business problems? Can they effectively articulate these stories?
- When asked on the spot, can the salespeople adjust their approach based on the competitor they are coming up against? Do they know what the main differentiators of their product are?

For all the investments that have been made in SAM systems, sales reps need to provide consultative value and influence in the buying process to gain trust and commitment from customers. If the assets and technology built for sales and marketing collateral are not coming to life when the sales team communicates, that SAM investment is ineffective. SAM, therefore, is only as good as the learning processes built around it.

A few considerations on the topic of sales learning:

### 91 Percent of Reps Say Learning From Peers Is Helping Them Succeed

As an exercise in your next sales meeting, take a moment to ask reps to share an interesting or challenging question they've received from prospects in the past few months. How did they answer the question, and was their response well received? Chances are, many reps are getting similar questions, so sharing these insights can have a huge benefit.

Find a platform that allows for the sharing of peer-generated content, such as best practices and insights from the field—something that is often overlooked in companies that use a SAM solution alone. Many businesses have found that video content can be key in this area, as it not only captures what field personnel have come to know as the most relevant information, but also helps educate reps on how to effectively deliver that high-impact information. (Read the Allego article for more.)

## Learning Content Must Account for a Shortening Attention Span

Recent research confirms that humans have a shorter attention span than a goldfish. What sales reps are learning in a classroom or formal training session is not being well retained. Instead, make it easy for reps to absorb and retain knowledge about products, customers, competitors, and markets at the point when they are most motivated to learn. (Hint: It's typically when they're about to close a deal.)

Anything that's shared with salespeople in the field should be short, engaging, and easily accessible. Additionally, people are more apt to engage with, respond to, and retain messages from video. Just like you can learn to change a tire by watching a YouTube video, sales reps can learn how to handle common objections by watching a short video created by a peer.

## Mobility and On-the-Go Access Are Non-Negotiable

Given sales teams spend so little time at their desks, having access to relevant content wherever they are is vital. They should not only be able to download information easily from any location—online or offline—but to take advantage of the peer learning factor, they must be able to upload as well. Information sharing should not be relegated to a small group of authors and administrators. Reps should also be able to easily create and share content, ideally categorized by topic, industry, customer story, and so on, so the entire team can find what they're looking for.

## Confidence Is Key: So Is Coaching and Feedback

A star athlete would never head into a competition without practicing. Ditto for salespeople: Practice builds self-confidence in telling customer stories and handling difficult situations. Building confidence is the very first thing every sales rep should do. And confidence is built through practice, practice, and more practice, as well as coaching and feedback from a trusted peer or manager. Video has proven extremely valuable in remote coaching and role play. Reps can record their pitch and share with their manager, who can provide feedback wherever they are. The more reps are able to view themselves delivering their pitch, the more confident they'll become.

## Know How to Adapt

Flexibility is a necessary skill for salespeople. They must be able to tailor the message, style, and plan to address a given customer, business need, or situation. A great salesperson can listen carefully to a customer and craft the best response or approach based on what that customer is both saying and not saying. It's a company's responsibility to provide sales reps with peer learning opportunities, shared stories from the field, winning strategies, and "what's worked for me" videos so that they can hone the art of listening, interpreting, and developing a cohesive story for their customers.

This again is a talent that is more easily developed through peer-to-peer communication. Leveraging the know-how of successful peers—for example, how they handled a certain objection, and which assets they found most valuable in a specific situation—can help reps see firsthand the strategies that work. Consider building a process around a SAM platform that would promote this style of learning.

## Putting It All Together

While SAM is a powerful way to enable your sales team, it only brings them so far. The addition of powerful learning tools that feature peer-generated content, on-the-go mobile access, video-recording capabilities, and efficient sharing of content can make all the difference in achieving long-term sales productivity.



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Mark Magnacca, president and co-founder of Allego, has spent the last 15 years helping sales leaders shorten the sales cycle and distribute their best ideas faster. Over the last five years, Mark has been instrumental in coaching leading sales teams to deliver a consistent message in the marketplace by integrating mobile technology into their sales process. He has worked as a presentation coach with a wide range of financial service companies by delivering innovative, practice-development and business-building strategies. Mark is the author of *So What? How To Communicate What Really Matters to Your Audience*. His work has been featured in numerous media outlets including Fox TV, *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*.

Prior to co-founding Allego, Mark founded Insight Development Group, Inc., a leading Sales and Presentation training firm specializing in the Financial Services industry. As a former financial advisor, Mark brings a unique perspective to the world of consultative selling. Mark is a graduate of Babson College and resides in the Boston area.