



eBook by
**STEVEN
WOODS**

DIGITAL



LANGUAGE

Deciphering Customer Intentions in an Online World

Excerpt: Chapter 1
A Transformed Buying Process



DIGITAL BODY LANGUAGE

by Steven Woods

Published by:
New Year Publishing LLC
144 Diablo Ranch Ct.
Danville, CA 94506 USA

orders@newyearpublishing.com

<http://www.newyearpublishing.com>

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

© 2009 by New Year Publishing LLC

ISBN: 978-0-9799885-5-4

CHAPTER 1

A Transformed Buying Process

WITH THE ADVENT OF MANY NEW TECHNOLOGIES, THERE ARE OFTEN TWO DISTINCT PHASES TO THEIR IMPACT ON THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE.

First, the technology is adopted, but it is used in a similar manner to the prior solution, although often with significant incremental improvements. Then, as a second wave of change, the new capabilities are thought about in entirely novel ways, and the original problem is framed in a fundamentally different manner, leading to sweeping innovations in business practice.

As examples of this phenomenon, we can look at a few technology changes that have shaped the last few decades. Typewriters were replaced with word processors, printed encyclopedia sets were replaced with CD ROM versions, paper maps were replaced with online mapping software. In each of these examples, the initial technology transition added significant value. However, it was the second phase of the transition that ultimately had the broadest impact.

Rather than just easier editing and spell checking, the move of documents to digital format fundamentally changed the way we collaborate and share information. Beyond just richer media and a more portable format, the transition of encyclopedias to digital format caused us as a society to rethink the way we create and share knowledge, and led to innovations such as Wikipedia. The move of maps from paper to digital format enabled a major shift in the way we think about location and interact with maps of the world around us through our cars and cell phones.

Marketing is currently in the middle of a similar shift in thinking. Over the past decade, marketers have seen a tremendous shift in the media types with which they communicate with prospects. Search, email, web, blogs, and video have become common place in marketing campaigns, often more common than television and print. This shift, in itself, has led to many improvements in marketing.

However, the fundamental shift in how marketers think about their role in communicating with prospects is just beginning. As prospective buyers use these

online resources to gather the information they require to educate themselves, explore ideas, discover solutions, and form opinions, they do so without any interaction from sales professionals.

The change in how information is gathered is leading to a fundamental change in the nature of marketing and the nature of marketing's relationship with sales. This revolutionary change is even more pronounced and far-reaching when marketing goods and services that are not commodities. In fact, it is a transition that promises to be the dominant force in the reinvention of marketing over the next decade. Marketers who recognize this shifting paradigm and realign their posture to reflect this new reality will regain the strategic relevance that has been threatened in recent years.

THE CONSULTATIVE SALE

Some products and services, of course, elude easy specification. They are neither simple to understand nor generically available. Instead of books or music, the buyer might be seeking to purchase enterprise software, wealth management services, corporate insurance, or even season tickets to a sports event. Typically, the complex sales process carries a high price tag, reflecting both the sophistication of the product/service (whether it's a tangible asset or intellectual property of a unique/specialized service) as well as the more involved sales process associated with identifying customers and explaining the product/service's value.

For instance, the uniqueness of a product or service means that many buyers may not even be aware they have the problem that it solves. They may not believe the pain is solvable. And, of course, they may not be aware of the vendor's solution. In such a scenario, it might be tempting for marketers to think that the Internet has no significant impact on the consultative sale. But is there really no

risk to that process? Can greater access to information compete with the value that a trained sales professional brings to a complex sale for highly customized products and services? Some skepticism is probably in order.

THE SALES PROFESSIONAL

Using a lifetime of relationships and business/social networks to make important contacts and stay abreast of key vertical markets, the consultative sales process is where the sales professional thrives by engaging prospects in trusted conversations and guiding the buyer's thinking on relevant aspects of the buying decision.

It starts with buyer education. Typically, buyers don't enter a complex sales process with the right (or enough) information to understand the scope of the decision. The salesperson must first take the time to understand the buyer's pain points and challenges, painting them in the light of the solution he or she offers.

Through conversations and consultations, the salesperson can educate, guide, and lead a prospective customer through a variety of phases. He uses collateral materials, studies, research, case studies, white papers, anecdotes, references, and events, to ensure the buyer is aware of the pain point and that a viable solution exists and that it can alleviate the pain.

Once convinced that both a pain and solution exist, the buyer starts to evaluate various alternatives. Naturally, there may be a variety of vendors offering competing (though non-identical) solutions, and the buyer begins to weed through the offerings and make comparisons of capabilities. The professional salesperson plays an instrumental role in this process—and pivots from consultant to advisor to seller, positioning his offerings in a way that highlights their ability to solve the prospect's needs. Assuming that the salesperson successfully emerges from this evaluation as the preferred choice of the buyer, he negotiates and closes a contract with the buyer who executes the purchase transaction.

Throughout this process—which can span many months for big-ticket items—the sales professional plays an indispensable role. At every step, he provides the buyer with the right information and the right messages in the right format at the right time. Without someone playing that role as trusted advisor, the buyer may fail to see the seller’s advantages and fall sway to another seller’s competing solution—or no solution at all.

READING BODY LANGUAGE

A true sales professional develops an innate ability to “read” the nuances of the buyer—an ability that often separates the top performers from the pack of “order-takers.” Who is digging in their heels? Who’s a motivated buyer? Who is interested in the product? Who is the ultimate economic buyer and what does he need to be convinced?

The ability to “read the room” and identify the right influencers and coaches depends on the ability to identify and interpret body language—non-verbal communication such as crossed arms, head-nodding, a raised eyebrow, shared glances, and other dynamics. Even the most trivial gesture can reveal critical information that a sales professional can use to his advantage.

Understanding the body language enables the salesperson to understand what message is appropriate—right there and then—and adjust on the fly. A buyer squinting in disbelief with a tilted head is asking for more proof points. A buyer who’s reluctant to make eye contact may be worried that a new solution can have a negative personal impact and harbors objections that the salesperson must uncover and overcome. A buyer who’s nodding his head is someone who wants to accelerate the presentation—and who may be a valuable coach in identifying other internal advocates.

THE INTERNET AND THE **COMPLEX SALE**: NEW DYNAMICS

Today, this classic model is changing. **With the advent of the Internet, the behavior of buyers—the way they identify, understand, evaluate, and buy products—has fundamentally changed.**

Market Education and Awareness

The markets in which today's executives operate are dynamic and competitive. Buyers must remain vigilant to stay abreast of fast-changing developments in their industries, ranging from shifting regulatory environments to trends in consumer behavior. Globalization creates new markets—and new competitors. New supply chains and ecosystems of partners, suppliers, and distributors shift constantly, and, of course, technological advances can quickly rewrite the rules for capabilities, costs, and timeframes.

GET STARTED NOW

BE FINDABLE

Before you even get outbound campaigns underway, before you rent lists, before you start writing clever copy—think about the buyer's first step. Think about where future buyers go to educate themselves, discover solutions, or make comparisons. That's where you want to be. And that means making sure you're easily findable and prominent on major search engines using the key phrases that are likely to be in buyers' minds.

It's a daunting challenge for buyers who have quickly embraced the power of the Internet to aggregate diverse and valuable resources. Industry Web sites

and e-newsletters (most of which are free of charge), for example, offer detailed and up-to-date information on trends and developments in concise and convenient formats. Vendors, too, are stepping up to the plate with their own specific Web sites, focused micro-sites, downloadable information, views from selected industry analysts, and other resources that reinforce their views of the important trends.



Finding Possible Solutions

As all of these resources and capabilities become increasingly ubiquitous, buyers must ensure these trends and information align with their business needs in order to narrow their explorations. After all, resources and expertise are perennially in short supply—addressing the appropriate business pain in the right manner is key.

Hand-in-hand, globalization and the Internet are also dismantling some of the traditional constraints of geography and time—software can be downloaded, hardware can be ordered and express-shipped, services can be outsourced offshore, and consultants can be flown in. Today's markets for sophisticated solutions are reaching a level of global availability that is, in many respects, breathtaking to contemplate.

The Internet—and especially Web 2.0 technologies—have emerged to facilitate this important process. Podcasts and on-demand webinars, for example, bring a variety of information to busy buyers. Blogs, in particular, are connecting buyer communities across the world and enabling a level of information sharing and product comparison that was unthinkable even a few years ago. Colleagues and peers can share their insights and experiences in detail—without the mediation of a vendor.

The rise of search giants has also fundamentally reformed the process of discovering solutions and potential vendor options. A quick search of Google or Yahoo! yields a very useful list of vendor options and resources of varying depth and perspectives.

Of course, vendors also play a role here as well, offering tools for detecting and analyzing the existence and scope of a business pain as well as assessing the potential economic impact associated with various steps to address the pain. Ensuring the right options have been considered is critical to selecting the right solution.



New Sources of Validation

Buying a complex product or service is a particularly challenging process of sorting through a range of competing claims and promises from vendors of carrying credibility and trustworthiness. Will there be cost overruns? Will schedules slip? Is there a pattern of missed expectations? Buyers historically have been in the dark—often relying on the references and assurances of the vendor's hand-picked customers. This is not to say that vendor malfeasance is the reason (although it certainly can be one cause). An improper selection can often be related to mismatched objectives and capabilities—a mismatch that can be difficult to identify early in the process of validating a solution. Given the investments typically involved, that's a risky proposition that can have disastrous implications if things go wrong.

Perhaps more than any other phase of the complex sale, this validation aspect has felt the most profound impact. A basic download of a solution can provide prompt and simple validation while community sites can show the good and bad of the entire customer experience for potential buyers to review. Interactive videos and images provide detailed presentations, models, and simulations of products, helping the buyer see a clearer picture of the proposed solution.

THE VANISHING SALES REP?

The sources of information available to buyers of complex products—that have traditionally required a consultative sales process—continue to grow in volume and quality. In the past decade, a buyer has achieved new capabilities to understand an industry’s trends, translate that into business pain/opportunity that can be addressed, assemble a list of potential vendors, and analyze the best solution for their specific needs. The point to note: not one of these new sources has required the involvement of a sales professional.

Buyers are leveraging these new information sources, rendering the salesperson to a secondary role (or even a non-presence)—particularly early in the process. As the professional salesperson somewhat fades from view, so, too, does his ability to observe and understand the buyer. Because of his absence, he cannot read the room by carefully watching the buyer’s body language. He is unaware who holds the purse, who has the objections, and who is an advocate.

This lack of awareness puts him in a very precarious position—unable to effectively guide the sales process. Advocates can’t be cultivated. Decision-makers can’t be identified. Blockers can’t be discovered and pre-emptively handled. Without these key insights and responsive strategies, the sales professional is blind to the true motivations and agendas of the buyer participants—and significantly hamstrung in his ability to shape and influence the purchase process.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING?

In this environment, it is far more challenging to align the prospect’s buying process with the company’s selling process—which are no longer synonymous. And that carries significant implications for lead qualification and hand-off. When a prospect appears on the corporate Web site—perhaps to download a white paper—he is most likely merely “kicking the tires” and is not ready to buy. As a result, the sales rep disqualifies the lead and ejects the prospect from the funnel. It’s not that the prospect isn’t going to buy—he’s just not going to buy right now.

This creates the “leaky funnel” with which most marketers are painfully familiar. They devote huge efforts to generating raw leads, but if those leads aren’t in a perfectly synchronized phase of their buying process, the sales team will waste marketing’s efforts by ignoring the lead.

SIRIUS DECISIONS FOUND THAT, OF THE LEADS PASSED OVER TO SALES, ONLY A SHOCKINGLY LOW 20 PERCENT ACTUALLY RECEIVED FOLLOW-UP FROM THE REP.

Of that 20 percent, the rep sets aside 70 percent of them as “disqualified”—even though subsequent objective analysis shows that 80 percent of them eventually buy a solution (usually from another company). They were good leads—just early leads.

As this transition happens, marketers who understand, guide, and facilitate the buying process are able to have a real and measurable impact on both revenue and sales effectiveness. By ensuring that the message for each potential buyer maps to their interests and stage in the buying process, more inquiries can be generated. By focusing on passing leads to sales that are in an active buying stage, rather than tire kicking, the number of leads qualified by sales will increase, even as raw numbers of leads passed decreases.

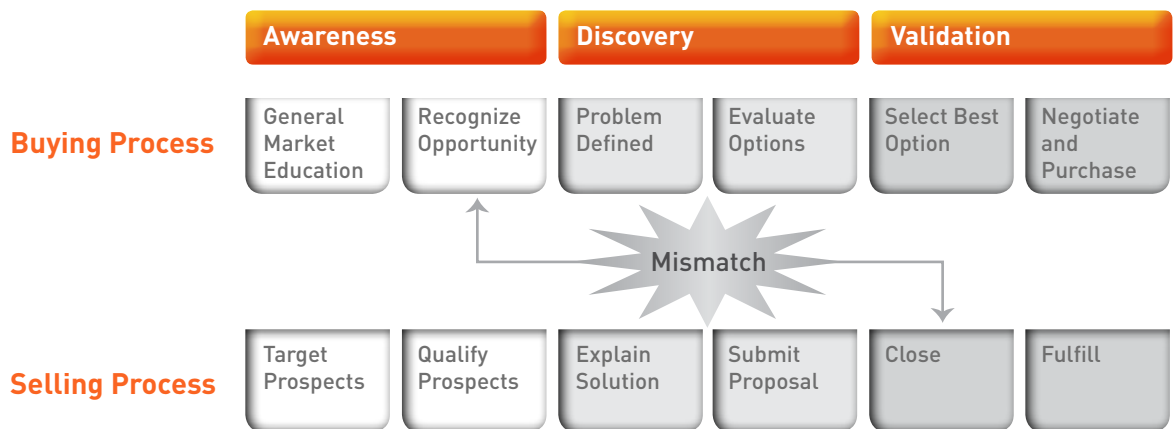


Figure 1: The mismatch between buying and selling processes often leads to salespeople attempting to close deals with prospects that are early in their buying process, leading to funnel leakage.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING

Historically, marketers in organizations using a consultative sales process have had somewhat more limited roles than in, say, CPG industries. In these companies, the direct sales force in the field has been the center of power while marketing has focused on generating awareness and brand management. Marketing provides a tactical level of support through collateral, case studies, demand management, and events.

However, as the dynamics among buyers continue to shift—with new and trusted sources of information enabling buyers to self-educate—the role of the marketer must also shift. Today's marketers are keenly aware of these new information sources and extra-company conversations, of course. The overriding question is: what should they do about it? What are the new communications vehicles—and which ones are right for the organization's industry and market? What marketing-infrastructure investments make the most sense? What is the right media mix?

Unless marketers fundamentally alter their thinking about marketing and forego traditional approaches, they will completely miss the tectonic shifts that are taking place in buyers' worlds. Online marketing is more than search-engine optimization. A video blog isn't like a TV channel. A downloadable trial version of software is not merely a free sample—any more than a computer is a paperless typewriter. Such perceptions miss the fundamentally revolutionary nature of the changes.

The complex, consultative process is experiencing dramatic shifts that are transforming the very way in which buyers conduct transactions as they accrue and exercise new power. Marketers who adapt to this new buying reality will thrive. Those who don't will find themselves consigned to a steady erosion of relevance, influence, and value.



About the Author

Steven Woods has been a leader in the current transformation of marketing since 1999 when he co-founded [Eloqua](#). Through his work with hundreds of today's most innovative marketers, he has guided, been involved with, and written about many aspects of the changes currently under way in business to business and considered purchase marketing. Through both his writing and his leadership in creating the technology platform that today's best marketers require, Steven has been recognized as one of the top influencers in the CRM field. In this book, Steven distills his insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by today's marketers into a framework for thinking about their audience, and their role, in a new way. Steven holds a degree in *Engineering Physics* from **Queen's University**.