

Student Perspective on the Significance of Social Media On Sales Prospects: The Antithesis of Sales Professionals

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Abstract

The acceptance and use of social media has transformed the globe, by penetrating and flourishing virtually everywhere and with everyone. Poised to impact the professional sales community with the force of a tsunami, social media has almost flat-lined with sales management. Researchers and scholars predicted sales practitioners would reap major benefits from social media through a wide number of sales performance improvements including; constant contact and communication; enhanced service; customer engagement; flexibility; and the potential to fundamentally advance every aspect of the sales process (Christ & Anderson, 2011; Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012; Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishman, 2012; Rodriguez & Peltier 2014).

Sharing information and networking with business contacts are the crux of social media practice in sales. The use of social media platforms (e.g., Snapchat, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter) for all phases of the sales cycle is a relatively new concept, and its assimilation by sales professionals has encountered significant reluctance. Almost all of the relevant research recognizes the importance of social media to the sales industry and several have suggestions on how to include the technology into their activities. Practical application councils that the reality of social media use seems to reside in sales management activities and the early stages of the sales cycle. Research to measure the impact of social media on the sales cycle time is limited and not adequately addressed in the current literature.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the sales student perspective of social media and its effect on the sales cycle and prospecting time, in an effort to determine if there was a significant difference between their expectations and reality of the sales professional. The findings of the investigation produced interesting results, especially when comparing professional salespersons to sales students. The startling results specify a complete disconnect between reality and

student expectations regarding the application of social media activities in the sales cycle. The student perspective on the significance of social media the amount of time required to cultivate sales prospects is much grander and basically the antithesis of actual practice by the sales professional.

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Keywords: *Social Media, Sales, Sales Cycle, Professional Sales*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

Research has shown social media to be an extremely viable media channel for professional sales. This study is the only investigation that has compared a sales students expectations on the time required to invest on social media and its relationship to the various components of the sales cycle, and to then determine if the actual time devoted by sales professionals was the same.

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TRACK: Internet / Social Media Marketing