

A hand holding a smartphone is the central focus, with various icons floating around it. The icons include a blue thumbs-up, a red heart, a red play button, a white speech bubble with dots, a blue globe, a red location pin, a blue thumbs-up, a white envelope, a white shopping cart with a blue checkmark, and a grey button with a dollar sign. The background is a purple gradient with a faint world map silhouette.

**Integrating
social selling
into a company's
sales strategy**

Understanding how social selling works is crucial to guaranteeing future commercial success, especially in the business world today, where we can easily become an irrelevant, overlooked voice among millions of others. How can we disrupt and reinvent our sales model before a competitor does?

Although social media were born as simple sites and apps to share photos, connect with friends, acquaintances and work colleagues, or inspire through different images, today they have become one of the most important sales channels for companies since they can turn followers into customers and customers into referrers.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on this process, since many companies were forced to close their physical outlets. During those long months of lockdown and boredom, many people turned to social media, firstly for entertainment and then to buy products and services. And now, 58.7% of the world's population is active on social media. Last year alone, this figure grew by 7.5% on the previous year.

Basically, social commerce allows companies to engage their users wherever they may be and to turn their participation in social media directly into sales. So, these apps went from being a simple platform to share photos or have fun to a large-scale sales channel. Buyers stop browsing and start buying in a matter of seconds all within the same app. It is the perfect recipe for impulse buying.

In this context, marketing and sales managers have started to incorporate social selling plans into their commercial strategy to develop new commercial intelligence protocols, generate value added content, and apply new sales tools that complement traditional approaches. Today, it is a valuable source of revenue, especially for smaller



retailers and brands around the world, allowing them to share the same stage as big brands and to some extent leveling out the playing field. But competition is fierce, and we need to find new ways to stand out from the crowd and stay ahead of the game. Today, finding creative strategies to reach an audience without saturating them and without getting left behind is a major challenge.

New sales strategy

According to Business Insider, by 2024, social selling is expected to account for 7.8% of all online sales in the US. In turn, a survey conduct-

ed by Statista – leading provider of market and consumer data worldwide – states that 48% of all Americans aged 18 to 34 have made at least one purchase via social media over the past year.

For Mark Roberge – a professor at Harvard business School and co-founder of Stage 2 Capital – with almost half the world's population currently active on social media, social selling is more relevant than ever. Sales leaders who wish to remain at the cutting edge must start to systematize this practice in their sales forces so as to set themselves apart from the competition.

According to Roberge, social selling “is like raising a child. So it is not ideal for companies looking for quick earnings or a magic silver bullet. Sellers must be willing to spend time and effort interacting continually with their buyers.”

But as well as the patience required to create a loyal community, each brand needs to stand out from the competition, to contact decision-makers, to reach high quality potential customers through their content, and once engaged, keep prospective customers committed throughout the entire sales process on and offline. This is no mean feat for the traditional sales force model, accustomed to putting out advertising and then sitting back and waiting for customers to arrive.

How can a commercial strategy be redefined in the light of social selling? One of the most effective strategies to increase sales through social platforms is somewhat “text-book”: understanding the needs and goals of these new consumers and building trust and a relationship within the medium where their everyday actions and relationships play out. But to do this, we must first understand how the brand can bring value on that social media channel and become a part of its users’ conversation. We must also investigate what people are saying and what they know about the business and reroute the pathway of each customer from prospecting to sales, taking into account that this will certainly involve interacting with other commercial channels. For example, the conversation might start on Twitter, continue on WhatsApp and then conclude with digital onboarding on the company’s webpage. Therefore, thinking about a social selling strategy from an omni-channel perspective is important, even if it is just being trialed at the moment and the different channels are not yet taken into consideration.



According to different studies, 56% of sales professionals use social media to engage new customers. 75% of sellers use Facebook to find potential customers, followed by Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. As well as finding prospects, 55% also use social media to stalk their target customer: investigating them and their businesses. This type of research is a key strategy to establish a good relationship subsequently. LinkedIn is the most widely used channel for this purpose, followed by Facebook and Instagram.

Managing influence

Influencers are a key element in the social selling pathway. Bringing them into the marketing strategy is very effective, and more and more brands are doing it. Especially if the target audience is young. Influencers are good catalysts to help brands connect to online consumers.

According to a survey by Influencer Marketing Hub, 90% of marketing professionals now have a budget for such actions, and 62% will increase their current budget. The same study notes that companies that work with influencers were very satisfied with the results in

terms of conversion rates and sales achieved.

In fact, companies that hired micro-influencers (with 15,000 or fewer followers) also achieved strong results. And this is an important point because these kinds of actions are costly, and brands, particularly small ones, cannot always access the hottest celebrities. Following a strong strategy with influencers who are only known within their field and in smaller communities (in the world of decoration, cooking, healthy lifestyle, to name a few) can generate the same or greater engagement without the need to invest exorbitant sums of money.

There must be an affinity between the influencer and what the company wishes to divulge. The influencer must connect with the content they are promoting so that the brand can connect to their audience and vice versa. Although this is essential, it is also super effective to recruit someone who is very hot right now and has a great deal of exposure. But clearly this is not within everyone’s budget.

The TikTok phenomenon

A few years ago, Instagram was undeniably the leading social



media channel preferred by brands. It was the fastest growing platform, delivering the highest investment returns, and it was also aesthetically pleasing and interesting.

It was like a fairytale for Instagram until September 2021 when TikTok notched up more than 1 trillion users and became the seventh most popular social media channel in the world, changing one major trend: we moved from the long video to the short video.

Short videos became a popular phenomenon among younger users (Generation Z) which represents the largest demographic for this platform. This trend requires videos of no more than two or three minutes, which are attractive enough to engage users' attention. In other words, brands have only a few seconds to convince audiences about their content. That's quite a challenge! But all platforms have come on board, even YouTube with its Shorts.

One study by Kantar – an English company and global leader in data, insights, and consultancy – commissioned by TikTok discovered that consumers felt the adverts on this app were more inspiring and fun

than those made available on other platforms. In fact, many regard TikTok as a fun, uninhibited friend compared to the more serious Instagram. Therefore, being successful on this platform involves using special effects, dubbing over trending sounds, adding popular music, and participating in challenges and dances. Of course, the key is to take great care of the brand's reputation and credibility, and not to expose it to ridicule.

Customer service, the great ally

One fundamental aspect that can help to boost sales and promote positive brand experiences is to incorporate customer service into the social strategy. Customers today are increasingly moving their service interactions onto social media. So, companies have the opportunity to use these channels to differentiate their service experience.

Companies have much to gain from the effective and efficient use of their customer service channels on social media. According to the consultancy firm McKinsey, customers spend between 20% and 40% more in companies that respond to customer service requests on social media. Those that do not respond have a 15% higher churn rate than those that do.

The visibility of these platforms allows companies to create good experiences for customers and improve their brand reputation. It is vital for companies to see the value and tremendous potential of social media to create user and customer commitment to the brand.

More human

Many brands also decided to move their discourse about social justice and the environment over to these platforms. Because half of all social media users, especially younger audiences, support business activ-

ism and they like to see their brand participating actively in matters that interest them.

Nike for example is tackling problems of inequality as part of its marketing strategy. They know their audience perfectly and create attractive content for them. The results speak for themselves: their posts go viral with a huge positive response, which turns into sales. Sharing content and showing a commitment to a cause that customers are passionate about is an excellent way to humanize the brand and generate loyalty and a positive vision among users.

In conclusion, the term social media encompasses different platforms, each with its own unique characteristics in terms of population, expectations, culture and codes. It is crucial for companies to adapt their tone and content to these differences in order to meet the expectations of the main users of each platform. And to understand right away which platforms are more in keeping with each brand.

In the world today, the most popular trends start out small. So, companies must keep their eyes and ears wide open on social media to spot any potential opportunities. They do not have to jump on every band wagon. Not all trends will work for all brands in the same way. What does work is paying attention to their own audiences, to their needs and expectations.

Social media are in constant flux. In a short period of time, new ones appear and the old ones experience demographic shifts. One clear example of this is Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Therefore, a social media sales strategy must be flexible enough to reshuffle and deal again if required, and not to be married to any action that might become prematurely obsolete. ▀