

Jochen Roef, Jozefien De Feyter & Carolien Boom

RIO

# Less Contact

How to win buyers' trust in a turbulent digital world

# More Impact

Lannoo  
Campus

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# Foreword

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By Pieterjan Bouten, CEO Showpad

As founder and CEO of Showpad, I have spent a great deal of time in recent years with the vendors and leaders of many of the world's most successful companies. From large multinationals such as Johnson & Johnson, Coca-Cola and Atlas Copco to successful family businesses and SMEs.

There is one constant that unites successful companies today. They have realized that it is no longer just about the best product or the sharpest price, and instead fully commit to the sales experience. It is the vision of Showpad and the authors of this book that the sales experience is the ultimate differentiator.

A few years ago, an analyst from a reputable research agency wrote a blogpost entitled 'The Death of the Salesperson'. This blogpost initiated a remarkably interesting debate about the future of the sales professional.

At a time when the Amazons of this world reign, and automation and artificial intelligence are the new normal, there are many voices emerging that question the future of the salesperson. To the point that some people are convinced that algorithms and bots will eventually render the role of the salesperson superfluous.

Technological advancements have given today's customer superpowers. They are better informed and have higher expectations. They have all the information they need – literally – at their fingertips and have become much more articulate. The days of the classic salesman whose focus is exclusively on price, product and, with the help of classic sales techniques, 'forcing' the customer into a decision are numbered.

Few people enjoy having a product or service forced onto them. However, people do like to buy products and services. Nobody wants to be sold to, yet most people like to buy. The big shift in sales is that nowadays the customer

and his needs are central. This offers incredible opportunities for all organizations to create value. It also ensures that everyone who comes into contact with customers in their role can have a much greater impact and bring a much more valuable interpretation to a commercial function.

For most companies, the human factor will continue to be decisive in achieving that sales experience. That is where RIO as a model offers added value. I do not believe that algorithms, bots and automation will take over everything. On the contrary: it is only people who can really listen, surprise and bring that extra bit of magic into the sales process.

Technology will play an increasingly important role in ensuring that salespeople are better informed and that they can be coached. That is a good thing, because the role of the salesperson will not only become broader and more interesting, but also much more challenging.

Putting the customer first also means investing in your people. Sales training and coaching, as well as a better understanding of the sales process, all play an incredibly important role in this. That is why this book is such a pleasure to read. The RIO model is based on the human model. It provides insight into the undercurrent of commercial interactions and transactions. It clarifies the experience customers are looking for as individuals. The many practical examples and stories from the field are also enriching.

So, the salesperson is far from dead. Long may he live!



# Introduction

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We are living in special times. Both the commercial profession and our planet have come under pressure. If we do not change catastrophe lurks around the corner.

Are you wondering what these subjects have to do with each other? On the surface, nothing; in essence, everything. A book today that only talks about 'selling more' is no longer relevant. 'Selling more' of what? 'Selling more' to whom? Selling more worthless stuff to people who do not need it?

It is time for a paradigm shift: in this book, we call it 'RIO-integrated selling'.

RIO-integrated selling is based on two or more businesspeople meeting each other with conscious intention. Two parties who use their heads, hearts and guts to trade products and services that are worthwhile, not only for the direct stakeholders, but also for the greater good.

*'Becoming a great sales person,  
implies becoming a great person.'*

Our promise to you is ambitious: integrate the knowledge from this book and you will become a richer person, not only materially but intrinsically. Not only will your revenue increase, but also your self-esteem and the positive influence on the people around you.

Bold statement? You bet! But we're going for shared responsibility here. We're providing you with a book full of practical tips, valuable insights and far-reaching inspiration. What we ask of you is a close reading and daily application. The full impact of RIO will only show itself after integration into your knowing, feeling and acting.

Customer typology is nothing new. There are many psychological models that offer insight into how customers think and how to deal with them. But

this book goes a step further than that. Typology is the starting point for a deeper connection with the customer and yourself. Because what is the use of pretending to have the same hobbies as our customer if he can check our Facebook? What good will come from imitating the style of the customer when the true quality of our product can be read online?

We are entering the age of true sales. Of genuine connection. Connection creates energy; there is nothing woolly about it. Real connection shines a light on the true concerns of the organization, society and the planet. With a global 'army' of 21 million salespeople, companies have the ability to generate a positive impact like no other. The time is ripe for organizations that create valuable products and for sales professionals who bring them to their customers with pure intentions.

You can see RIO as a behavioral method, however, this book is not a manual for actors. 'Fake it until you make it' is a thing of the past. RIO is a sincere invitation to look at yourself in relation to your customer and to grow as a person and a professional.

Are you ready to make a difference? *Join us #wearerio!*



# 1. Sales today



*What makes  
sales different today  
than before?*

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*What are crucial skills  
for the modern  
salesperson?*

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*What added value  
does RIO have for the  
modern salesperson  
and marketer?*

## 1 THE EVOLUTION OF SALES

Will there still be salespeople in 2030? Opinions are divided. Believers say that the mix of empathy, know-how and solution-orientation will always give people a head start on machines. Non-believers predict that artificially intelligent chat-bots will take over the conversation with customers and drones will be delivering products ordered online to our homes, day and night.

No one knows who will be right. What is certain, however, is that human salespeople have to develop themselves because the sales profession is evolving. The more than 50,000 sales-related books on Amazon are a case in point. Yet the profession has only made a handful of growth spurts throughout history and only recently undergone a radical shift. We have now reached a point of no return. What follows is a quick sketch of the evolution of sales, as well as an interpretation of what makes sales in 2020 fundamentally different than before.

### *Pitching USPs: unique selling points*

Before the 1970s, sales was straightforward. Whoever exhibited his product most convincingly won the customer over. Sellers went from door to door armed with suitcases full of pots, pans, perfumes, shoes and lingerie. Even less obvious products such as telephones, coffins, Persian carpets, pool tables and swimming pools were dragged around the country in miniature.

During this period, vendors were drilled on how to energetically pitch to customers, cleverly devising storylines with the aim of convincing them of an *offer they couldn't refuse*. The scripts were produced behind closed doors and were full of USPs, unique selling points, or the product's most impressive features. The purpose of the sales pitch was to unobtrusively drive the customer into a corner that he would be unable to leave unless he continued buying. Storylines played on pain and pleasure, while a highly sophisticated carrot-and-stick strategy would cause the 'dazed' prospect to crack under so much sales violence. During this period, sellers were masters in overcoming objections and employed a wide range of *closing techniques*. The well-known expression 'always be closing' dates from this period.

What did the salesperson look like in the USP era? Characteristic of top sellers was an outspoken winner's mentality. Resilience, perseverance and flexibility were indispensable qualities. In order to succeed you had to be a powerhouse that could arouse enough sympathy to get in past the front door. Moreover,

the salesperson had to have a 'thick skin', and 'selective hearing' came in handy, given that the intention was to tell the rehearsed story despite the prospect's resistance.

Nowadays this form of sales is called 'transactional' and it occurs sporadically in sectors where the customer and the seller only have one sales conversation. Sectors that sell by phone typically use more scripts and sales pitches, with *The Wolf of Wall Street* as the best-known cinematic example.

### *Discovering UBRs: unique buying reasons*

Mack Hanan's 1970 book *Consultative Selling* was to sales what Elvis was to music: a swinging alternative to the way things were done at the time. For the first time ever, the focus was not on the salesman's product or service, but on the customer and his needs. Top salespeople acted as consultants who delved into the customer's challenges before offering a solution.

In this period the term UBR was born, unique buying reasons. From then on, the customer's situation was the focus, and the sales professional would search for the unique reasons the prospect should buy the product or service. UBRs consisted of two categories: problems the customer had to solve and ambitions he wanted to realize. The sales professional's first objective was to discover the customer's needs and desires through thoughtful questioning. The next step was a bespoke product presentation. For the first time in sales, the product was 'king' and the product's specific fit 'emperor'! Customers no longer wanted generic presentations of the product's features; they wanted the specific benefits with regards to their needs and ambitions.

The shift from product sales to consultative sales would result in a huge about-turn in sales professionals' skills. Perhaps the biggest change was the leap from 80% speaking to 80% listening. Consultative sales was a dialogue with the customer that sought to apply the principle 'first seek to understand, then to be understood'. From now on, salespeople were expected to be 'gentlemen and gentlewomen' who gallantly put the customer first. Nevertheless, relinquishing the control that a script offered proved to be a struggle for product sellers during retraining. After all, that control had been the key to success in the previous era. Asking open-ended questions meant opening the door to unwanted answers that reduced the chance of success, a risk the *hard seller* was unwilling to take. From now on, the consultative seller would seek the richness of unfiltered customer information, which he then grate-

fully used to create a bespoke presentation. In consultative selling, testosterone gave way to listening skills, domination to dialogue. Vendors were still trained in overcoming objections, but these became less common as a result of the now highly relevant argumentation.

Consultative selling in its derivative forms (*SPIN selling*, *solution selling*, *customer-centric selling*, *insight selling*, etc.) is still the most widely used sales methodology in value-added contexts. Modern sales organizations such as Showpad further facilitate their sales team's consultative sales process with:

- » ICPs (Ideal Customer Profiles): The profiles of 'ideal customers', who are targeted as prospects.
- » Persona: A detailed character description of the targeted contact person. Who is this person? What interests him? How does he make decisions?
- » Sector trends: Developments that influence companies in specific sectors and serve as a starting point for commercial discussions.
- » 'Use cases': Reference projects from certain sectors in which the original need and delivered solution are described. These are used as guidelines during the sales process with similar customers.
- » 'Customer journeys': Road maps detailing the process that the customer goes through with his needs and how the sales rep can respond to them.

The targeted use of this documentation, often brought together in a 'sales playbook', enables consultative salespeople to both look for pain points with their prospect and maintain control of the conversation. This advanced variant of consultative sales is known as 'guided selling'.

### *Offering UDEs: unique desired experiences*

And that brings us to today. How different are today's sales and what are the gamechangers that modern sales professionals must take into account?

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#### **KNOWLEDGE IS POWER**

Constant connectivity has irrevocably rearranged the power relationship between buyer and seller. Whereas the seller used to derive part of his right to speak from product knowledge, the buyer now no longer needs the sales professional in order to be informed. The figures do not lie. Research by Gartner has shown that the modern buyer now spends only 17% of his time

meeting potential suppliers, while investing three times as much time (45%) in reading independent reviews. As a result, the average prospect will have completed 57% of his buying process before meeting a sales professional.

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### **HYPER-PERSONALIZATION AND CO-CREATION**

The time when everyone could buy a Ford in the color of their choice, as long as it was black (Henry Ford's statement in 1909), is long gone. Advertising leaflets are composed on the basis of recent purchases, cola cans are printed with first names, text messages come to life with a personal emoji, and algorithms determine which film will be playing tonight. Buyers can be as authentic as they desire, while sales and marketing respond by analyzing millions of bytes of behavioral data to make the right offer at the right moment. If the desired product does not yet exist, it will be developed with the customer. Standard products are out, co-creation is in!

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### **HYPER-CONVENIENCE**

Today, more than ever, the customer is being pampered. Orders placed before 11:59 PM will be delivered the next day to the address of your choice. For a few euros extra, delivery can be made the same day, even on Sunday if necessary. The customer does not have to bother searching because global giants like Amazon and Alibaba have made sure that everything can be found under one roof. The one-stop shop DELUXE. Can you imagine a customer having to visit two webshops? We are becoming lazy buyers and *we like it a lot!*

With their own *hyper-convenience* concepts, the following companies have understood that the modern customer has neither time nor energy to lose:

- » Partena Health Insurance Fund makes use of an online counter. As a client, you no longer have to physically go to the office to submit doctor's notes. You simply scan them in via your smartphone and a refund is automatically made to your account.
- » The British laundry service Dropwash picks up baskets of dirty laundry at home and delivers them back, washed and ironed, within two days. Payment is done via a PayPal account.
- » Who Gives A Crap delivers packages of high-quality toilet paper made from bamboo fibers to your home so that you will never run out of it again.
- » Dollar Shave Club does the same with razor blades and was recently sold to Unilever for 1 billion (!) dollars.



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## HYPER-COMPLEXITY

In stark contrast to the ease of use and tailored products stands the increased complexity of the purchase decision. The main culprit: choice overload. Both private and professional purchasers are being bombarded with an endless flow of information whose truthfulness varies between fake news and sincere user reviews. Everyone knows that the internet can be manipulated, and that the new generation of scammers are online. Who or what can be trusted becomes the key question. There is now a great need for reliable guides to accompany the buyer through this treacherous jungle.

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## THE IMPULSE TO SHARE

In the midst of hyper-connectivity, a phenomenon has arisen with an enormous impact on the way we influence and are influenced during the purchase process: the impulse to share. This trend has different origins. More than ever before, we now have the opportunity as individuals to make our unique mark. The impact of a bad review can be huge, which means that we, as affected customers, are suddenly taken seriously.

A second important reason for sharing appears to be the desire to improve the lives of others. When a fundamental need is not met during the purchase, the buyer wants to spare others this experience and sends out a warning.

The influence of the 'sharing impulse' on commercial interactions cannot be overestimated. The popularity of professional peer-review websites such as G2Crowd, which will soon exceed 1 million reviews, proves that the seller is by no means the only source of information that the modern prospect turns to.

## *Unique desired experience*

The traditional customer relationship has been turned upside down. Research shows that customers expect ever shorter, but nevertheless deeper, contacts. Furthermore, customers demand that the vendor remain involved in the long term, at least until the solution is implemented and the impact visible. Where the sales rep used to close the door after the transaction, he is now responsible for the effectiveness of the solution and the customer's feelings about it.

Now, customers want a unique purchasing experience that goes beyond price, quality and product features in the decision-making process. For sellers, it is impossible to simply promise and not deliver. If they do, reality will overtake them through customer reviews.

Today, sales professionals no longer sell products, but a total experience or a *unique desired experience*. This experience is personal, tailored and effortless. The selling organization offers added value during every step of the process. The customer is king and expects generous treatment. When everything is finished, he will let the world know whether it was good or not.

## 2 CRUCIAL SKILLS FOR THE MODERN SALESPERSON

### *Every crisis is an opportunity*

The facts are what they are, digitalization and hyper-personalization are here to stay. Selling will never be what it used to be and neither panic nor nostalgia is going to help us. The key questions become: Where is the opportunity in this seemingly hopeless situation? How can the modern sales professional remain standing in an era of relentless change? What are the skills that make the difference and create undeniable value?

### *Guides*

In a recent Gartner study, 77% of B2B buyers indicated that their last purchase decision was extremely complex. As difficult as selling has become in 2020, the purchasing process has become even more complex, says Gartner's VP Advisory, Brent Adamson.<sup>1</sup>

First of all, customers need to get a clear picture of their needs and requirements. Some are visible and others hidden. Then the buyer has to work his way through an unlimited number of information sources in order to arrive at a list of potential suppliers. Discussions with these suppliers, who usually promote their product unilaterally, should lead to a list of clear pros and cons that can be weighed against each other to come to the right decision. Then, internal stakeholders must be informed, consulted and convinced and the return on investment must be tangible in order to free up a budget. After the negotiation and purchase, the solution has to be implemented, which often means selling internally to a colleague who is not expecting change. Continuous follow-up at the end of the journey will ensure whether the anticipated added value is realized or not.

Looking at this process, we might almost feel sorry for the buyer. It is clear that the customer needs a reliable partner who knows the concerns and challenges at every stage and provides targeted support. This is the only way for the salesperson to assure his customer that he will get through the purchase process in one piece.

## Challenging and offering perspectives

Recent sales methodologies such as *challenger sales* and *RAIN selling* argue that sellers need to excel in two competences: challenging customers and offering a positive perspective. Just as a doctor protects his patient from internet diagnoses and self-medication, a sales rep should vigorously remind his customer of the dangers of online information and poor business choices. The sales professional bases his statements on business acumen: research and know-how based on the market. Additionally, practical examples, use cases, references and testimonials offer the customer the necessary positive perspective to take a step forward. Being able to respectfully yet vigorously challenge the customer to look at his situation from a broader perspective is a crucial competence for modern sales professionals.

## Co-creation through 'design thinking'

In their recent book *From Selling to Co-Creating*, authors Régis Lemmens, Bill Donaldson and Javier Marcos develop the argument that standard products and services in B2B sales are a thing of the past. Each business customer's context is so specific that seller and customer are now obliged to co-create a unique product as part of a long-term partnership. The customer brings in the knowledge of his company; the vendor of his product, market and his technical know-how.

According to *Forbes* magazine, co-creation, the process in which customer-oriented innovation is central, goes hand in hand with *design thinking*, a methodology used in creative product development. Through a thorough needs analysis, a clear problem definition is achieved. This is then followed by an *ideation phase* in which out-of-the-box solutions are encouraged. After selecting the most valuable idea, a prototype is built and tested.

It should be clear that in the co-creative sales process the customer makes an active contribution and becomes co-responsible for the end result. Customer and seller are equal partners. This situation then calls for two new sales competences:

- 1 Convincing the customer to take an active role.
- 2 Giving the customer the space to actively contribute (read: forfeiting absolute control over the sales process and the predicted outcome!).