



People Buy From People (...in the Enterprise IT World)

By Robert Gelinias.

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Probably the most egregious marketing blunder most young technology companies make when attempting to penetrate the Fortune 500/1,000 Enterprise market (with whatever amazing new mousetrap they've come up with) is to view their target market as a collection of "Companies," not specific decision-making Human Beings.

Companies don't make 6-figure and 7-figure buying decisions – People do.

Many years ago, back in the late 1980's to be exact, as a young sales manager I sat at a large company dinner next to my own VP of Sales at the time. This was a big Fortune 100 company I worked for, with tens of billions of dollars in revenue a year, one of the biggest players in the technology world. As we chatted, he made a very memorable statement to me that was probably the most ignorant thing I'd ever heard in my entire sales and marketing career, then or since.

He said, "Bob, your job as a sales manager is to get our clients to so value our brand and believe in our company name that it doesn't matter what CLERK is standing there in front of them taking the order."

Fast forward about twenty years, and yet another successful businessman tells me: "Bob, we need to develop a sales process that is scalable, repeatable, with proven predictable results."

Long-story-short, he was, in essence, saying pretty much the exact same thing as the other guy back in the 1980's.

Translation: "We want an *idiot-proof* process or silver-bullet formula that guarantees us sales success, regardless of which idiots we hire to sell our stuff." That is, "We don't want the individual sales people to matter, or to be very relevant in the overall equation beyond basic administrative competence." In this mentality, the sales function should be so "paint by numbers" the Company should never be vulnerable to any individual salesperson's skills, talent, or abilities—or lack thereof.



Naturally, if you've actually worked in big-ticket IT enterprise sales for any length of time and carried a nice 7-figure quota, you've probably run into senior managers who think along these same or similar lines, and when you hear statements like the ones above you are predictably either appalled or laughing or both. That's the natural response that occurs when one encounters the well-intentioned, but truly ignorant believing they know what they're talking about.

The key disconnect of both of the sentiments noted above isn't that they express an impossible or even undesirable idea in general; it is that they are manifestations of a *Commodity-level* mentality – not an Enterprise-level mentality.

Admittedly, in the grand scheme of things, no one really cares very much who it is that sells them a hamburger at McDonalds, or who sells them batteries at Wal-Mart. In those retail consumer settings, the person standing at the cash register really is just a "clerk", trained (with pictures of burgers and fries on the cash register) to execute your quick and very forgettable sales transaction and then say, "Have a nice day and come again." End of story.

Indeed, in a commodity product or service setting, having a relatively simple and foolproof sales transaction process, which is actually the final culmination of outbound corporate marketing campaigns and branding and packaging and merchandising that have worked together to do all the work of making customers aware of a product or service, and even better, influencing them to want to purchase it, makes all the sense



in the world. It just has no relevance to Enterprise-level IT Sales.

And there really is a very important reason why this is so.

The reason why consumer-oriented commodity marketing approaches don't work in the high-end enterprise world has everything to do with the strategic magnitude and career-impacting risks associated with enterprise-class decision-making.

If you buy a leaf blower at the hardware store, take it home and it doesn't work – the downside is likely to be your annoyance and inconvenience at having to go back to the store to exchange it or get a refund. However, if you're a CIO of a Fortune 500 company and choose a bad enterprise software system that runs the backbone of your company's business, and it subsequently fails and your business is adversely affected in a big way, you could be out looking for a new job.

But even before multimillion dollar decisions are made, just due to the sheer volume of monies involved in such major purchases, approval authority to make such decisions are commonly made at the highest executive levels, if not requiring approvals by Boards of Directors. Consequently, those charged with doing all the due diligence on selecting vendors and preparing the purchase recommendations and budget requests realize that screwing all of that up is not a permissible option.

Therefore, this is why Enterprise IT Buyers (EITB) have a fairly hard and fast hierarchy of decision-making logic. It goes something like:

1. First and foremost, if given, they will follow a senior management or Board of Directors "Directive" to use whatever vendors and technologies they are ordered to use. If they are unfamiliar with the vendor and technology of the Directive, they may attempt to request consideration of something more familiar and trusted, but if that doesn't fly, they will be expected to salute and do what they're told. At least if disaster occurs in that scenario, the vendor selection was made "above their pay-grade" and that fact alone might serve as a valid defense.



2. Barring a top-down corporate mandate, the EITB will always prefer to use a known, trusted vendor of a product/service that they've used successfully in the past, or currently use, and know beyond a shadow of a doubt works well and will not embarrass them.
3. Absent either of the first two options being available, the EITB will elect to talk to a known, respected colleague or friend in their personal network about what vendors and technologies they've used successfully themselves to achieve the same objectives.
4. If a colleague is of no help, they will then turn to well-respected industry analysts and other third-parties for detailed vendor and technology reviews – not to make the final decision, mind you, but just to put together a Short List for further investigation. Nevertheless, the point is to at least start with the vendors their industry as a whole has already blessed and consider viable.
5. Once the Short List is assembled, the vendor vetting process begins – finding out everything they can about those vendors online, then sitting through sales and marketing presentations, reading vendor literature, getting client references, possibly watching demos, etc.

Obviously, the hierarchy of the decision logic above makes sense. Each level down is a more difficult and more risky decision than the one above it. The irony of this logic chain is that for all the decisions that are made down at step



number 5 – the ones involving doing all the homework and due diligence – 99% of the time, the ultimate decision will always come down to doing business with the vendor whose Sales Rep has done the best job in making the EITB feel comfortable and trust him.

That's right – it all comes down to human comfort zones and personal trust. But even that logic is really just common sense, too.

That's because all legitimate leading vendors will have all the collaterals and artifacts that comprise the informational research portion of the exercise. All of them will show up on sales calls with their PowerPoint presentations, glossy literature, and slick demos. They will all have a handful of references to sing their praises.

So unless there is some dramatic show-stopper that is revealed that disqualifies one or more of them; or, conversely, if one of them has some absolutely unique capability that the EITB must have that no one else has, then all other factors will often end up being more or less a wash – and the human elements of the equation become the real decision triggers.

In Enterprise IT Sales, the skill of the Salesperson is most often the deciding factor.

Actually, there are three key objectives that a Salesperson has to be cognizant of and must establish as true in order to win the confidence and trust of the EITB. They are:

- **Credibility** – you can be believed and are knowledgeable and articulate
- **Capability** – you have the wherewithal to do or provide what you say you can
- **Applicability** – what you say you can do or provide is what they really need

The latter two areas are pretty self explanatory, but first and foremost is the establishment of Credibility. If the Salesperson isn't credible, they will never get a chance to accomplish the other two areas, for the simple reason that they aren't believed and trusted.

Sales 101 Teaches: Sell Yourself. Sell Your Company. Sell Your Product – in that order.

Therefore, if you can sell yourself, you'll earn the opportunity to sell what your company has to offer. That's the first key to winning over the EITB. So how is that done? How do you sell yourself?

It is a function of the masterful execution of talent and developed skill. And that is why commodity-minded managers don't like it, and don't want to hear about it. It's because it means that some people are good at it and others aren't. In fact, some people can't do it at all—*obviously*. And the reality of that truth means that there can never be an "idiot-proof guaranteed success formula" that any idiot can execute.

Sales is indeed a natural-born talent. It's like being able to sing, dance, play a sport, write a novel, etc. Some people are born with that talent, other's are not. Those who have it can develop it and polish it, and if applied properly, can enjoy the many fruits thereof. Those who lack that talent usually end up frustrated when attempting to do that which they are not qualified to do.

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Let us be more precise here. The true underlying talent of Sales is manifested as a core element of personality, of character. In fact, the word "character" is extremely instructive here, as are words like "charismatic", "charisma" and "charm."

Notice those first four letters of each of those words. The Greek root word "*Charis*" is translated into English as the word "Grace." Grace is defined as "an unmerited gift." It is something that a recipient of it doesn't earn nor are they simply entitled to it. It is something freely given by the giver.

Grace is the specific personality trait that the most talented Salespeople possess and exude naturally. As if by some magic, people just tend



to *like* them, and like being around them – i.e. because they're naturally *charming* and *charismatic*. Indeed, this may all sound very "touchy-feely," but the undeniable truth is: if all else is equal, the EITB will choose to do business with the *person* he most wants to do business with.



And that's simply because People buy from People.

The practical application of these truths are thus:

- If you need to sell to EITBs in order for your business to succeed, then you need a well-equipped sales force that engenders confidence and trust.
- The hiring of individual sales people must be more than a function of subject matter knowledge, a prestigious education, and a résumé full of respected company names. They must naturally demonstrate the personality traits of charisma and charm. In a nutshell, if you are a hiring manager, you must be able to look them in the eye and honestly ask yourself, "Would I buy anything from this person?" If you wouldn't, others probably wouldn't either.
- Stop looking for a mythical activity formula to fill your sales pipeline and improve your revenues. The best you can really do is to:
 - Recruit and hire the best sales talent you can find.
 - Equip them and train them with all the sales and marketing tools they need to be credible and capable.
 - Help create networking and engagement opportunities for them with target buyers via creative marketing campaigns that open doors and stimulate interest (i.e. generate leads)
 - Give them challenging goals and hold them accountable to achieve them.
 - And then get out of their way.
- When it comes to creating creative lead-generating, door-opening marketing campaigns, target *people*, not companies.

About the Author

Robert Gelinis is the President and CEO of JPE Inc. Consulting (www.jpeincconsulting.com). He has spent over 20 years in the IT industry as a senior executive and sales and marketing leader, having built many national and international Enterprise IT sales and marketing organizations. He has both an extensive Fortune 500 background as well as a wealth of successful Start-Up experience. He is also a published novelist, writer, publisher (www.archebooks.com) and frequent public speaker on both IT marketing and the writing and publishing industry.