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Check out *The Leaderonomics Show* interview where we got Tom Hopkins, a leading authority on the art of salesmanship to share his nuggets of wisdom to remind professional salespeople to sell from the heart, not from the mind: [bit.ly/LDRtomhopkins](#). Tell us what you've learnt by sending us your feedback at editor@leaderonomics.com.

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SALES TRANSFORMED

HOW MACHINE LEARNING IS CHANGING THE GAME

By BERNARD MARR
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CRYING the alarm for the death of the sales professional at the hands of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) is a bit too dramatic. But, it's safe to say that organisations that transform their sales functions to keep up with the times will find themselves rising above the competition.

MACHINE LEARNING TRIES TO TEACH COMPUTERS TO LEARN LIKE A HUMAN

With more data available to machines than ever, they are able to learn by using algorithms to interpret the data, extrapolate it and predict outcomes.

When machines get feedback about whether those predictions were right or wrong, they use that as a learning experience to make their predictive capabilities better in the future.

Machine learning is one aspect of AI and it is disrupting roles and responsibilities for professionals in every industry.

THE POWER OF MACHINE LEARNING

Never fear, sales professionals. There's a personal side to selling that machines will not (at least for a long time) be able to replace.

Humans, and exemplary sales professionals in particular, are uniquely suited to listening, convincing, negotiating and empathising as well as exploring and answering the very critical question of "Why is this the best product or service for me?"

However, the power of machine learning to contribute to successful sales initiatives cannot be understated and will only continue to grow in importance.



HOW MACHINE LEARNING WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE SALES FUNCTION

There are many ways that companies can use machine learning in their sales process. Here are just a few of them:

Interpret customer data: Machine learning helps make sense of the data we collect about our customers.

Research shows how important it is to have a "data-driven understanding" of our customers.

Even though many organisations have developed systems and spent resources to gather and store customer data, it's the machine learning that will now help us make effective use of that data in ways that relying on humans alone could not.

Improve sales forecasting: When you gather data on your prospective client (company size, stakeholders, solutions they want) and then, through machine learning, have the ability to compare it to historical sales efforts, you can connect the dots and better predict what solutions would be effective and the likeli-

hood of the deal closing and how long it will take.

This insight helps sales management better allocate resources and predict sales projections.

Predict customer needs: Business success relies on how well we provide what our customers need.

Machine learning can improve how responsive and proactive we are to anticipate the needs of our customers.

The better we are at addressing our clients' needs before they escalate and at suggesting a solution that could help make their life better and easier, the stronger our relationship will be.

Machines won't forget to follow-up or be too busy to proactively share solutions.

Efficient transactional sales: According to *Harvard Business Review*, by 2020, customers will manage 85% of their interactions with an organisation without interacting with a human.

Having machines step in to handle certain sales efforts quickly and effectively can free up the human sales force to focus on relationship-building.

Sales communication: There will most likely be dramatic changes to sales communication as a result of machine learning.

If business communication mimics the transformation of consumer communication, the business equivalent of short-form communication such as tweets and text messages will be AI responses.

Machines can quickly and easily answer queries about pricing, product features or contract terms.

Within the next decade, virtual reality will allow prospects to tour a factory, "join" conferences and meetings with your entire team and see products being manufactured, all without leaving their own office.

Salesforce's Einstein: We get a glimpse into the way sales functions will change by looking at the promises of Einstein, the AI solution from customer relationship management company Salesforce.

Einstein helps sales personnel by reminding them who to follow-up with, what opportunity should be prioritised because of a high probability of conversion and help to predict the best product or service for each prospect.

Machine learning will help process the data and identify opportunities for sales personnel to act upon.

Machines can take care of transactional sales to free up the human salesforce to build relationships and nurture their leads in ways only humans can.

By taking care of mundane tasks for sales staff, machines clear the way for the sales process to be better and more effective.



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AS every salesperson knows, it's not always easy to convince people to buy things – especially things they don't want. You can easily come off as too sleazy or too eager, too pushy or too uninterested.

Striking the perfect balance can be difficult, but it's something that's completely necessary if you don't want to come across as unprofessional to potential customers.

Here are seven bad habits that make salespeople look particularly unprofessional.

1 LACK OF PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

There's nothing worse than being caught off guard when someone asks you something you're supposed to know – especially when you're attempting to convince the other person to purchase it.

Read up on what you're selling before you make any sales call, so that you can answer all but the most personal of questions.

2 TALKING MORE THAN YOU LISTEN

While it's important to market what you want to give your buyer, not listening – or responding – to questions and concerns is a huge turn-off

BAD SALES HABITS

THE 7 THINGS THAT MAKE YOU LOOK UNPROFESSIONAL

for any potential buyer. Make sure to pay attention to what your customer says – selling is a two-way street.

3 INABILITY TO TURN PRODUCT FEATURES INTO BENEFITS

The main obstacle people have when grappling with whether or not to purchase something is how the product will benefit them.

Selling the product's features as potential future benefits is something that will persuade them to buy.

4 DIVULGING THE PRICE TOO EARLY

Withholding a final price makes you appear less pushy and more empathetic to the customer's needs. Hold onto the price until you have a firmer grasp on the situation and the potential outcome.

5 NOT CUSTOMISING THE PRESENTATION

Nothing ticks off potential buyers more than receiving a canned presentation for a product that has

nothing to do with their own unique needs.

Making the buyer into just another person to sell to reeks of unprofessionalism.

6 LACK OF ELOQUENCE OR ARTICULATION

Even though it's not necessary to be the best speaker or writer who ever lived, it's definitely important to demonstrate good speech and impeccable grammar and spelling in your dealings with customers.

Otherwise, you'll give the impression that you don't care much about the product you're selling – and if you don't, why should anyone else?

7 LEADING A SALES CALL WITH YOUR PRODUCT INSTEAD OF YOUR CUSTOMER

Although you're selling a product or service, it's really the buyer that ultimately matters at the end of the day. Begin every sales call with an understanding of your buyer's attitude and inclinations, not what you're trying to get them to buy.

AmBank BizRACE

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TOP 35 FINALISTS

It has been an exciting journey so far for participants of the first ever AmBank BizRACE. We had so many excellent businesses in our Top 100 that our esteemed panel of judges faced a tough task shortlisting just 30 finalists. Therefore, we have decided to include five more businesses to form our Top 35 finalists. We would also like to thank everyone who took part in this exciting challenge to scale and grow their business to the next level.

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