

# Customer Voice Selling **PLAYBOOK**



The  
Walker Group

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## **The Problem**

The way people buy has fundamentally changed. The buyer is in charge. This has been true for consumer-oriented sales for some time but now businesses are buying the same way. The buyer now controls the sales process. They decide what they want, when they want it and rely on publicly available content and peer reviews to make buying decisions. Buyers don't want to be sold to or talked at about what your company does or how great your products are.

Unfortunately, most companies today haven't responded to this fundamental change and are suffering from Product-first Selling.

## **Product-first Selling**

Product-first Selling is a "see how great my technology is," or "look how impressive my service people are," approach. How do you know if your company suffers from Product-first selling? Some of the main symptoms: you don't have enough potential deals, the deals you have are stalled in your pipeline, and/or online retail sales are flat or declining. If you suffer from these problems, there are more important things your prospective customers care about.

Perhaps what you offer isn't important enough to trigger a sale. More likely, it's how you talk about your products and services that's not working. You're talking *at* your customers about product features, architecture, and capabilities. That's the "how" (and most of it's probably just noise anyway), not the "what."

Buyers want access to publicly available information (content) so they can make an informed decision. They decide *when* to call *you*. And if your products or services aren't directly answering the question, "why they buy," and addressing their priorities, you won't make the sale, period.

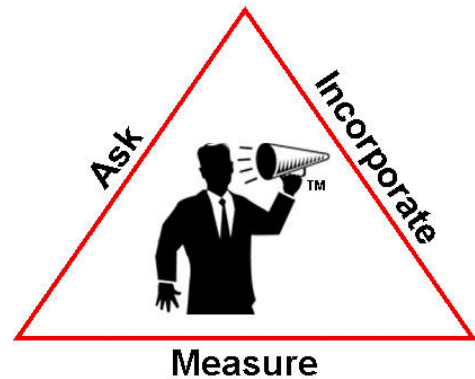
So it's time to start asking questions and listening to your customers and prospective buyers if you want to meet your growth targets, expand into new markets, or launch a new product. What do *they* care about? What are *their* priorities? You need to make sure what you're selling resonates with your prospective buyer.

But this is about much more than a sales person listening to a prospect and responding to requests. Those are just table stakes.

So what's the answer?

## Customer Voice Selling – Use your customers’ voice to craft your company’s voice

As we’ve said, everyone knows that listening to your customer is a good sales tactic, but that’s not enough. And frankly, the practice of using customer voice to improve products, innovation, customer support, satisfaction, branding, etc isn’t news either. So what’s Customer Voice Selling and how is it different? Customer Voice Selling allows companies to dramatically improve sales by incorporating your *customers’ voice* into your *company’s voice*. In other words, *ask* your customers the right questions, *incorporate* what you’ve learned about their priorities into all market-facing activities and materials, and *measure* the results.



### 1) Ask

“Let the Customer Tell You Why You’ve Made Their Lives Better”

The first step is asking your customers the right questions. Customer Voice Selling questions differ from customer satisfaction surveys, product management questionnaires and even branding questions. Customer Voice Questions uncover “why they buy” and customer priorities - the first step to selling to your prospects’ priorities. They are designed to capture an understanding of why your customers bought your product or service. In other words, what do they care most about that will trigger an action to buy?

But it’s more than just the first question. The follow-up questions, constantly changing based on particular answers, are equally important. And that can’t be accomplished by surveys or online questionnaires.

“The Riddle of Getting to True Customer Voice”

Let someone else ask the questions. Our many years of customer interviews prove this out again and again. The fact is your customers won’t tell you what they will tell a 3rd party. Why? It’s simple. Companies have relationships with customers. It’s actually quite natural; your company and your customers have great difficulty objectively separating themselves from that relationship and, as a result, answers are skewed. The board and management team believe they know what the customers need but customer interviews uncover other priorities and tell a different story.

Make sure questions address the following categories.

- **Challenges and Pain** – This might have nothing to do with your product. It’s essential to understand what is top-of-mind for your target buyers. Only then can you get a clear understanding of priorities and the problem your customers are attempting to solve with a product/service such as yours.
- **Buying Decision** – Understand why the previous method or previous tools and/or services didn’t work. What were the issues and factors that led to the customer selecting your company? (And, as importantly, understand why you weren’t selected from loss interviews.)

It’s critical to get a clear understanding of the factors that went into the buying decision and how important specific factors were in their decision. Get specific—rate and rank these factors.

- **Benefits** – Uncover the true benefits your customer is realizing. Be specific and quantify where possible.
- **Strengths and Weakness** – Uncover company and product strengths and weaknesses. These rarely match the results from customer satisfaction surveys or product management questionnaires.

Listen to what people are saying about your company and products via social media channels. There are conversations going on without you. Tapping into these conversations and then becoming part of the conversation is an important part of Customer Voice Selling. Tools that measure volume (e.g., Alexa, Compete) and tone (e.g., Blog Pulse, Technocrati) help capture the data but then it needs to be brought together with the results from customer interviews for a complete picture.

## 2) Incorporate

The next step is analyzing and organizing the customer interview answers. That's the easy part. What makes or breaks Customer Voice Selling is how the customer interview findings are crafted into the message and incorporated into every market-facing aspect of your company. The conversations your sales people have with potential buyers, your website, your blogs, what you tweet about, what content you make available to your potential buyer, how and where you talk to your potential buyers, are all based on incorporating what we've learned into your company voice.

“The Sales Pitch is Dead. Content is King.”

Remember, today's buyers don't want to be sold, they want access to good information on *their* terms that meets their needs. So the quality of the information, not just what you make available, is critical. Understanding and building what will strike a nerve with your prospective customer is all part of Customer Voice Selling.

Offer content that adds value instead of product and corporate overview brochures. It might be something that has nothing to do directly with your product but has everything to do with the industry you're in and what's on the mind of your prospective buyer.

## 3) Measure

There are a variety of sources you can count on to quickly measure how you're doing. An important part of measuring is asking.

Content

- What's the most popular content and why?
- Have you updated content or created new content based on what you've learned?

Salesforce, channels, and partners

- Is it easier for you to talk about what you do?
- Is the prospective customer “getting it” sooner?
- Is it easier to qualify/disqualify prospects?

Web and Social media

- Are you having more conversations?
- Are the conversations you're having more positive?
- Are those conversations leading to transactions?
- How are you using reviews – good and bad?

*Customer Voice Selling Playbook*

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Marketing automation and pipeline tools

- Are you nurturing the leads more effectively?
- Are more leads turning into pipeline opportunities?
- Are you forecasting more accurately?
- Are more deals closing faster?

### **Five Tips to Avoid Product-first Selling**

Here are five tips to follow to ensure your organization doesn't suffer from Product-First selling.

#1 - Create/refresh a new routine that imposes customer listening.

We are all caught up in day-to-day tasks of running our business but now's a good time to do a gut-check. Take the time to use the "Ask-Incorporate-Measure" guidelines to add rigor and discipline to your customer-focused initiative.

#2 - Create/refresh valuable content that directly maps to your target buyers' priorities.

No matter what, don't lead with product brochures, even though there will be continued internal pressure to do so.

#3 - Become the customer voice selling Commander for your organization.

A tech company's natural comfort zone is product-first. People easily slip back into the product-first comfort zone. Maintain simple customer voice check-lists prior to authorizing lead gen campaigns, product initiatives, or social media initiatives. Are we maintaining a customer voice, outside-in approach to this campaign? Do our product and service offerings align with what the customer wants vs. what the product team wants to build? Is all of our company promotional material customer voice centered?

#4 - Take a minimum of one week per year on customer sabbatical

We all know how important it is to meet with customers. Schedule a specific time, get away from the voice of the company, hit the road, and ask the right questions.

#5 - Set up a culture for continuous customer voice selling.

"Ask-Incorporate-Measure" needs to apply across the entire organization, not just sales and marketing. Be the advocate for Customer Voice Selling and set up cross-organizational goals and metrics. Customer Voice Selling shouldn't be another silo'd initiative.

### **We didn't just make this stuff up**

The Customer Voice Selling Playbook was created by The Walker Group. Customer Voice Selling is based on more than 70 years combined sales and marketing experience. We've taken what works (and as importantly, left out what doesn't work) and folded it into this methodology, which we've used successfully for more than 50 clients.