



## Modern B2B Blogs



### What the iPad Revolution Means to The Future of Sales and Marketing

By Phil Fernandez on March 8, 2011

On this blog, I have written frequently about how digital communications and especially social media have sparked a growing revolution in the sales and marketing process. The widespread embrace of social media has put even more information – and ultimately power – in the hands of the buyer, and that has drastically altered the jobs of the salesperson and the marketing professional.

It was hard not to think about these revolutionary rumblings this past week when the blogosphere, the Twitterverse, and even the chat around the water cooler were all about the launch of the iPad 2 in San Francisco. There was even more excitement about Steve Job's appearance at the event to personally introduce the second generation of the hugely successful iPad tablet.

A year ago, when the iPad was first launched, the questions were, "would anyone care?" and "would anyone buy it?" I think we have our answers to those questions! Beyond the overall buzz, I was particularly intrigued by a story in USA Today this past week that reported on the iPad's **runaway business popularity**. This was a pretty counter-intuitive news item because the original iPad was mainly viewed as a consumer-oriented device. According to the article, Apple says that the iPad has been tested or deployed at 80 percent of Fortune 100 companies. The story cited industry tracker iSuppli, which predicted that Apple will ship 43.7 million iPads this year, and 63.3 million in 2012, up from an estimated 14 million in 2010.

USA Today does not estimate what percentage of those skyrocketing iPad sales will be from businesses. However, it appears that corporations are rapidly embracing Apple's pioneering tablet as a powerful and uniquely portable new computing tool. For example, according to the USA Today story, medical device leader Medtronic has given more than 5,000 iPads to its sales reps, and SAP distributed 3,500 of the devices to its people. In addition, Mercedes put 400 iPads in its dealerships to keep transactions on showroom floors, near the actual vehicles. Smart move.

#### Major Shifts in Buying/Selling Process

This headlong corporate rush to iPads is striking on several fronts, the least of which is the growth of a trendy and popular new "touch" computing device. To me, what is truly significant about this technology milestone is that it signals a major shift in what businesses expect both from the portable computers they deploy, and the road warriors (especially sales people) who carry them.

Think about the typical laptop carried by armies of sales people. Why have companies invested so heavily in issuing tens of millions of laptops to their sales forces? The answer is easy. Companies want salespeople to input information into corporate CRM databases and to track prospects. Sure, they are also used to make presentations (the dreaded PowerPoint deck), but the main business purpose is inputting, tracking, and managing data and information.

Now remember the common wisdom about the iPad: That it's great for consuming information, but not so good for capturing information. This was the original argument made last year when the technorati proclaimed the new iPad to be a consumer device. Indeed, everything about the iPad runs counter to that traditional computer use case. No one would ever say that the iPad is the ideal device for plugging information into an SFA application. The easy-to-handle form factor and elegant touch screen interface of the iPad are tailor made for consuming and communicating information in an effortless and interactive way. The iPad design is not optimized for entering a lot of information or even doing a lot of typing of any kind. Yet, companies and their sales people are embracing the iPad in a big way.

Why? I'm thinking the reason stems from the same revolution that I described earlier in how the buyer/seller process has changed drastically due to digital technologies like social media. Today's buyers can access valuable and relevant information online, especially through trusted sources on social networks, blogs, and communities of interest. As a result, these buyers are now more in control than ever of the buying/selling process.

That leaves the company and its sales people in a role that should be (must be) about communicating, educating, and helping the potential buyer – not just telling, selling, and trying to close a prospect, who might have little or no interest in the pitch.

#### Encouraging Collaborative and Consultative Communications

That is where the power of the iPad and other similar tablets comes into play. As the relationship between the buyer and seller has so fundamentally changed, the sales person has had to adjust her/his approach to connect and engage with the empowered buyer in very different ways. The iPad helps to break down the old barriers – even the physical space – of the buying dynamic, enabling better sharing of information and more effective consultative communications.

All of these changes are part of the "meta" revolution that is happening today in how companies create, manage, and accelerate revenue. The fact is that the old business revenue paradigm has been broken for years. Smart, forward-thinking companies are increasingly coming to this realization and are now taking bold steps to transform their sales and marketing processes, their metrics, and their entire revenue generating engines.

These corporations are now treating their revenue demand chain in much the same way companies did years ago when they totally reengineered supply chains and manufacturing programs using breakthrough strategies like Six Sigma and Total Quality Management.

Even at the micro street level, smart sales people are starting to employ similar strategies as they rethink how to attack the new buying/selling process. They recognize that their prospective customers now have the data and information that at least levels the playing field for them. In fact, the buyer is just as likely to have the upper-hand today.

That is a big reason why more and more sales people are jumping at the chance to use a less intrusive and much more mobile and "friendly" iPad to engender collaborative, consultative conversations with prospects. Being stuck behind the customer's desk with a sedentary laptop is increasingly looking very old school to the modern day sales revolutionaries.

Revolutions come in all guises and need all kinds of tools to succeed. Arming your sales teams with iPads (or other similar tablet devices) just might be the spark that helps you incite a revenue revolution at your company.