

How To
POPULARIZE YOUR SALES APP



The PROBLEM

Companies have invested in technology with an objective to increase the sales effectiveness of the salesforce. Companies have deployed sales applications such as lead management system (LMS) or customer relationship management (CRM) system or distributor portal. These applications automate the administrative tasks of the sales person and also provide aggregate and summary data to the management.

But in reality, in companies, most of these applications are underutilized at best and abandoned at worst. The salesforce is reluctant to use these applications for a host of reasons including perceived loss of control, lack of relevant content, difficult user interface and inadequate training. The data in these applications is incomplete and hence even the management views are rendered useless. Information still continues to flow up and down in the company hierarchy outside these applications.

Web companies such as Google, Facebook, Amazon provide a cue to improve the usage of software applications. The survival and progress of these companies depends on how many and how often people use their website. Hence they have invested heavily in all areas important for this purpose including visual design and usability. No wonder millions of users all over the world use these sites effortlessly.

The Cue



The Solutions

One important principle these sites have followed is of **Give and Take**. Websites such as Google, Facebook have first *given* away their services free. This has allowed them to *take* advertising revenue. These sites have effectively used the principle of reciprocity which is part of human behaviour. Whereas sales applications such as CRM and LMS in a company typically serve the needs of the top management for information and control. They are not principally designed to make the life of the sales person easy. There is a need to balance the needs of both the field salesforce and the top management and roll out the features in a phased manner focusing on the Give element first.

The internet websites have focused on providing relevant, useful, updated **Content**. As they say “Content is King”. People came to Google because it provided the most relevant content based on a superior algorithm and it continues to do so. Amazon has millions of books on sale compared to a few thousands at a physical store. Amazon uses recommender systems to show the most relevant books to you.

A person's mother tongue is very dear to him or her. Sites like Google (which are originally American) have capitalized on this by providing local language options. This definitely creates an emotional connect for some of the users who are not so proficient in English.

These sites have focused a lot on **Usability** which is the ease of use. We can probably say “Content is King; Usability is Queen”. Google’s uncluttered user interface is a prime example of how easy it can be made for users.

In today’s age people are constantly bombarded by information from multiple sources and in multiple ways. Out of sight is out of mind. To overcome this problem, web companies keep sending you event-based emails or notifications to make you remember the site. These well targeted **Reminder Emails** are sent with some relevant personalized information tempting you to click and visit their website.

If we look at insurance companies or financial services companies, there are challenges such as a large part of the field sales is agents or independent financial advisors who are not employees and hence it is difficult to force usage on them. Even for employees, the challenge is compounded by the fact that there is high attrition. Constant **Promotion** and **Training** of the sales applications are important. Fortunately there are good internal communication and training infrastructures available in these companies which can be effectively leveraged. Case based promotion and training which is user-friendly is important to appeal to people of varied backgrounds.

In most companies there are several contests and rewards for sales performance. Sales persons thrive on the challenge of competitive contests. Some kind of **Contest**, albeit on a smaller scale, can be rolled out to increase the usage of sales applications.

A well designed focused program driven together by Information Technology, Sales and Marketing teams with Top Management sponsorship based on the principles and ideas described earlier can improve the adoption of sales applications amongst the salesforce. The idea is to increase sales efficiency and productivity. *The ultimate aim is, not just technology adoption, but enhanced, quality sales.*

The beauty of these ideas and techniques is that in some form these can be extended to end customers for web sales and customer portal.

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