

Stakeholder Mapping in Sales

Siddarth Baliga*

Selling a product or service is possible only when the sales representative meets the right people at the right time. In large enterprises with complex hierarchies, an amateur sales representative will almost always end up getting stuck in the corporate labyrinth. Finding the quickest path requires an innate ability to avoid blind spots, trace invisible relationships, identify people who can initiate or influence decision making. Initiators, influencers, users and decision makers are not formal titles, but a trained and smart sales representative will see through the clutter and get them to work in his favor. The article gives insights into mapping key stakeholders early on in the sales process.

One of the fundamental yet most important traits that every sales representative must have is the ability to map stakeholders, manage key relationships and understand the decision matrix.

For selling Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions to large enterprises who does a salesperson approach first to strike a deal? Is it the HR manager, the functional head or the administrative head? Startups have more fluid structures, which makes it both easy and difficult.

Let us look at this from a B2C perspective as well, say, an EdTech or a skill development organization selling courses or training programs to youngsters. Some theories and advertisements focus on grabbing the child's attention, whereas others focus on parents—specifically fathers.

Exhibit 1: The Corporate Maze



Being Judgmental and Gender Stereotyping

When selling to corporate enterprises, it is imperative to understand the invisible relationship maps and hierarchies that exist in these organizations. In households, it is not necessary that fathers are always the decision makers. They may just love the product or service and recommend to the family.

As a thumb rule, there are four key stakeholders in any decision making matrix, namely, initiator, influencer, user and decision maker.

Initiator

The initiator is someone who helps a sales representative to navigate the complex corporate maze. It may be the decision maker himself or maybe someone in his peer group who has close proximity to the decision maker.

The privilege to select an initiator in a large enterprise is rare, but one should still look for an ideal fit. This is especially true for large enterprises where breaking in could be difficult.

An astute salesperson identifies these invisible lines, the underlying currents, early in the sales cycle and navigates without rubbing anyone on the wrong side. The ideal initiator helps make inroads and connect to the right people within the corporate maze.

Influencer

The initiator is a strong helping hand in knowing internal hierarchies, processes and procedures. But he would still have his limitations. He may or may not know who can help in convincing the decision maker. The

ability to identify the man Friday who can influence the decision maker still rests on the sales representative.

In an enterprise, the end users of the CRM tool could be the sales/marketing staff, whereas the new strategy officer might be able to influence the CEO to sign on the dotted line. A widely accepted thumb rule suggests that influencers spend significant time with decision makers.

Children are sometimes initiators as well as consumers. The daughter may want to study an animation program at a specific institute

and may insist on it. The father could be the influencer and the mother the ultimate decision maker. Professional networking sites, industry conclaves and forums make it easier to find out who the decision maker hangs out with. Wasting time with wrong leads will cost dearly in enterprise sales as the prospecting cycle

is already long. Hitting dead ends frequently implies lost opportunity.

The finger snapping button pushing managerial mogul is a myth in an increasingly modern democratic society. Despite rigid processes, committees and standard operating processes being in place, decision makers have their own set of trusted people in the inner circles that they turn to for feedback and inputs. These roles may not be defined in the organization chart, but it is extremely important to identify them early on. It may be the CEO's personal secretary, his general manager or his classmate at business school who maybe leading a business elsewhere.

Hitting dead ends frequently implies lost opportunity

Stakeholder Mapping in Sales

User

The proposed CRM solutions may eventually be used by 20 people in the marketing team. These 20 people are equally important in the decision-making process and should not be ignored. Product demonstrations, trial packs followed by exemplary pre-sales services are strong indicators of customer-focused organizations and build strong trust within all stakeholders in the prospective client's enterprise.

When selling to parents, ignoring the child will do more harm than good as modern urban families give equal importance to children's opinions. Even if all are convinced, the user (the student) may not want to study the course or buy the product.

Decision Maker

The decision maker in conventional parlance is someone who signs on the dotted line and controls the purse.

In an enterprise setting, it may be the functional head, the purchase head in conjunction with inputs from the financial controller or it may be the CEO himself.

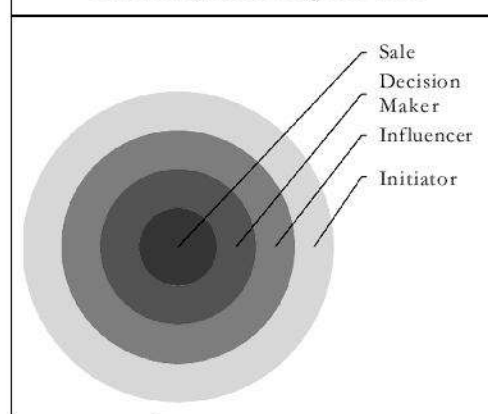
At Indian homes, it could be the major income earner. It is incorrect to stereotype mothers as influencers and fathers as bread-winners. Sales representatives end up making the fundamental mistake of trying to convince the fathers. The sales pitch can go awry. With evolving social fabrics, we have at-home dads and highly successful working mothers too.

Even otherwise, the income earner is not necessarily the decision maker. The roles differ from home to home. An eye for detail is essential to pitch the right statement to the relevant person at an appropriate time.

Blocker

Blockers are toxins that should be identified and avoided. The blocker is actually a wolf in

Exhibit 2: Reaching the Sale



sheep's cover and will behave like an influencer or a decision maker but is not one. He will waste time on utilizing free trials, demos and proposals and may even keep deferring decision making, but will eventually stop answering your mails and calls.

The B2B customer is just another human being like the rest of us. But he steps into a new world of mind-boggling bureaucratic processes at work. A business enterprise views purchasing decisions very differently as compared to an individual buyer. The buying decision is an outcome of checking against several boxes rather than a gust of impulse.

The prospect would have been in the domain for long and does not look at sales representatives as consultants who can solve customer problems. The prospect views them as dollar-hungry sharks who are only interested in hitting their sales targets.

As per Jim Dickie, Research Fellow at CSO Insights, B2B prospects do not consult a sales representative early on during the buying cycle. Forrester research states that 59% of buyers prefer researching online instead of interacting with a sales representative as they feel sales representatives push their own priorities. The Heinz Marketing and Snap App study indicated that only 9% of millennial B2B buyers surveyed said they

Sales Management

connect with vendors before doing their own study about the product.

A B2B buying decision involves multiple stakeholders with each one wanting to tread carefully in this corporate web of individual preferences and priorities without rubbing the wrong shoulders. An average B2B buyer gets anxious when recommending a product, for purchase, within the organization. His recommendation/decision can have longstanding ramifications on the organization's business. If users do not like the product or if it negatively impacts organization revenues, the buyer may lose credibility and even risk facing penalties. This emphasizes the importance of strategizing each effort in making inroads into enterprises to sell products or services.

Blockers are time wasters and are either self-proclaimed decision makers or influencers.

Avoiding them is equivalent to reducing acquisition and opportunity costs. Stereotyping is harmful and is a personal bias that is best avoided.

Conclusion

Customer service is a journey, not a destination and what one demonstrates throughout the sales should be offered at the pre-sales stage itself. While most conventional trainers recommend directly approaching the decision maker, the decision is actually based on feedback from multiple stakeholders. Ergo, convincing all is equally important. Short-term setbacks are natural when one aspires to swing big deals with the who's who in the industry. A sales representative should be open-minded, non-judgemental and must keep in touch with every stakeholder without being biased based on specific experiences.

Reference # 10M-2020-08-05-01

How to Create a Stakeholder Map and Why You Need One

Whether you need to partner with IT, sales, marketing or operations, you will need to cooperate. The challenge, of course, is that other people have their own priorities, challenges and values.

Creating a stakeholder map

The first challenge, when seeking to manage your stakeholders better, is to identify them. This might sound patently obvious, but often too little time is spent on this stage.

Leaders (including data/analytics/insight leaders) will easily recall others they work with often. But, one of the benefits of a well-designed stakeholder map is having taken the time to spot others. Consider the following possible direct relationships:

- Whose investment/permission do you need, to proceed?
- Whose process approval do you need, to comply?
- Whose resources do you need to deliver change/action?
- Whose engagement do you need, to do the work?
- Whose expectations do you need to meet, to succeed?
- Whose cooperation do you need, in order for it to work?
- Who thinks they are affected (but aren't) and needs reassurance?

Source: <https://www.customerinsightleader.com/opinion/create-stakeholder-map/>