



Build Your Business Through Referrals

Facebook and Face Time Matter:

The Role of Technology in Sales

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Introduction

Our smartest, tried-and-true tool for business development, lead generation, and deal closing has always been ourselves. And that's not going to change anytime soon—if ever.

Times, they are a' changing. And they have been for quite some time. Today, technology changes and develops almost overnight, and the business world follows closely in its wake, continuously growing and evolving processes for just about everything we do at work. So, it may sound shocking when I say that in the sales world, what's really important hasn't changed at all.

Pundits can rant all they want about the “new normal” and “new realities,” and how Web 2.0, Web 3.0, and social media will change the way we sell. The Internet is the most powerful, life- and business-changing tool created in generations, if ever. But while it has altered our sales processes, technology won't save our sales careers. It won't fix our business-development, sales, or customer relationship management (CRM) challenges. It can be a great tool, but it is the *person* behind the LinkedIn profile, all the fancy gadgets, and high-tech presentations who actually makes the sale.

A Southwest Airlines commercial several years ago offered a powerful reflection on the importance of personal connections in our technology-driven world:

- You can't fax a handshake.
- You can't pat a voicemail on the back.
- You can't tickle a voicemail.
- You can't have lunch with an e-mail.
- You can't fax a pillow fight.
- You can't slow dance online.
- You can't have coffee with a website.
- You can't smell homemade bread on your pager.
- You can't e-mail a kiss.

I couldn't have said it better myself.



The Web: Its Many Iterations

The Web has certainly changed the *face* of sales. Super-simplified:

Web 1.0: An online corporate presence via websites.

Web 2.0: User-centered design (presenting products and solutions in a way that matters to our clients), collaboration, and user-generated content.

Web 3.0: Decentralized, accessible-from-anywhere data (“the cloud”), and smart(er) phones.

But the *brains* behind the pretty face still belong to human beings. Technology can get overwhelming—websites, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds, and online forums. How do you make sense of it all? To what do you pay attention? And who helps you decide where to put your energy (and money)? I’m willing to bet it’s a live person—a trusted friend, colleague, or mentor.

So, when it comes to sales, there’s nothing like a one-on-one conversation to make the difference. As Jim Blasingame, my colleague and founder of the wonderful [Small Business Advocate](#), puts it, “Face-to-face is the original social media.” I couldn’t agree more.

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Old Doesn’t Necessarily Mean Tired

I am not a Luddite or a technological fuddy-duddy. Like many of you, I happily, eagerly, and creatively embrace the new offerings that technology and Web 3.0 serve up: from- and to-anywhere sales training, web-based conference and meeting, cloud-based CRM... the list goes on.

I embrace technology where it makes sense. I simply believe that it has its place—and so does the tried-and-true sales method that never goes out of style. Engage your critical thinking: What’s the best way to reach, communicate, develop, and sell to your key audience? I bet that face-to-face, person-to-person communication seals the deal for you—time and time again. And that is one thing that isn’t going to change.



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1. Why Social Networks Won't Build Your Business

Social networking isn't the next big thing. You are! It's still the personal connection that seals the deal.

The Internet, social networking, smart phones, and other breakthroughs in technology have fundamentally changed the way we do business. New technology drives communications, messaging, and information access at warp speed, and our clients expect immediate access. This pattern of ever-increasing sophistication not only creates an intensely competitive marketplace, but places further demands on us to act and react quickly.

The rise of social media—such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, and LinkedIn—has lured many sales pros into scaling back their sometimes time-consuming personal interactions and relying on social media to surface “qualified leads.” Big mistake!

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Get Real

Social media is a powerful sales tool. But it serves three purposes (and three only):

1. Search engine optimization
2. Research on new or potential clients
3. Learning more about the networks of those in your social networks

Some salespeople tell me they actually attract new clients through social media. Could it happen? Yes. Would I rely on it? Absolutely not. I only count on what I bring about—through a proactive, intentional, referral-selling strategy with personal introductions.



To Know You Is to Like You

In his 2009 commencement address to the graduating class of the University of Pennsylvania, Eric Schmidt, then chairman and CEO of Google (now Executive Chairman), urged students to step away from the virtual world and make human connections. “Turn off your computer,” he said. “You’re actually going to have to turn off your phone and discover all that is human around us.”

There’s a saying in sales: Clients buy with emotion and justify with fact. If our clients don’t like or don’t feel comfortable with us, they won’t buy from us. We know how quickly people make first impressions. Most people decide within the first few seconds if you’re trustworthy, so it’s important to always start off on the right foot. Your social media savvy won’t make that happen. But a trusted referral and a personal connection will.

To Like You Is to Trust You

The most important business decisions are still based on personal relationships. There is significant research about why customers make buying decisions. Bottom line: It’s because they *like* and *trust* the salesperson and his organization. Think about it. We’re selling services, investments, systems, and/or products. We are asking for people’s time and money! Why would they work with someone who *hasn’t* been referred by someone they trust?

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To Trust You Paves the Way

The most energizing and exciting part of our work is the relationships we build with our clients—*the interaction*. We enjoy learning about our client’s business and matching our solutions to their needs. In an era dominated by ever-expanding technology and social media pressures, always remember that personal connections, referrals, and earning trust are what count. Yes, it requires brainpower. But isn’t that what we love about what we do? Indeed.



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2. The Do's and Don'ts of Social Networking for Sales

As I discussed in the first article, “Why Social Networks Won’t Build Your Business,” social networks aren’t the easy answer to finding new clients. But a social media presence is a must-have in today’s world. Here’s how to make social media work for you.

Do develop a social media strategy. Like a sales or marketing plan, you should write out your social media plan. What is your goal? Who is your audience? What do you want to communicate? Leverage social media as part of your go-to-market strategy. How does your strategy link to your customer’s needs and your business priorities?

Do link up beyond LinkedIn. Take the time to build your personal connections; pick up the phone and talk to people. Go to lunch. Have coffee. Just get out from behind your computer and nurture your relationships—even if you *did* build them virtually.

Don’t skip the introduction. Just because you have a Facebook friend in common doesn’t mean you have a relationship. Social media is a great way to find out who knows someone you want to pitch, but if your mutual associate doesn’t provide a personal introduction, you’re basically cold-calling—reaching out to someone who isn’t expecting your call and probably doesn’t want to hear from you.

Don’t turn your Facebook page into an advertisement. Social sites are not for selling. They are for establishing connections, identifying ways to collaborate, and providing value. Instead of telling people you’re an expert, prove it. What tips or other useful information can you provide your visitors? Link to other sites that you have found helpful. As you become

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recognized as a resource in your industry, you will build your Web presence—and eventually, your business.

Do incorporate your keywords. Your profile pages are an excellent place to get extra attention from search engines and raise your Web presence.

Don't forget to do your homework. Social media sites can help you prepare for meetings with potential clients by allowing you to learn about their backgrounds and your mutual associates. Instead of rambling about the weather, you'll have something to talk about during your first meeting.

Don't look for new clients; do look for new referral sources. If you have been trying to get a meeting with a particular company or individual, social media can help you quickly find out who in your network has a close connection so you can ask for a referral.

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3. There's No Hallway on the Web

There's nothing like getting the gang together. Salespeople have great combined power and energy when they gather in person and share successes, sales techniques, ideas, and information. At conferences, we learn as much through conversations with peers in the hallways as in our sessions. But there's no "hallway" on the World Wide Web.

The digital world—as great as it is—threatens personal connections. Humans need face-to-face contact with others. Even with whisper-light computing power and immediate, 140-character Twitter posts, we are a face-to-face species. We thrive on interpersonal communication and being in the presence of like-minded individuals working together to accomplish results.

So, if you want to advance your career—and especially if you want to *sell*—put down the mouse, step out into the hallway, and learn to *speak* to people, whatever their language.

In an era when companies cancel sales meetings because they believe webcasts and videoconferences are just as effective, they actually need to do the opposite—schedule more. Since the start of the recession, many companies have slashed business travel budgets by [20 to 40 percent](#), viewing it as expense rather than what it really is—an investment. Face-to-face meetings aren't luxuries. Even in our technology-driven world, nothing replaces a handshake and in-person interactions for both building and maintaining business relationships. In fact, 95 percent of business people agree they're the key to building long-term relationships, according to a [Harvard Business Review](#) reader poll. And a 13-year study of American businesses by [Oxford Economics](#) shows that for every dollar spent on business travel, organizations reported around \$12.50 in increased revenue and \$3.80 in new profits.

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Now more than ever, as businesses seek to operate more effectively and efficiently, the firms that recognize the relationship between business travel investments (whether it's to meet with clients or for sales training) and increased sales, and then act on that knowledge, will see a big impact on the bottom lines.

One of my clients told me about a potential deal she was trying to close with a major prospect, but she couldn't get the decision-makers on the phone. I strongly recommended that she schedule an in-person visit. Fast-forward two months. She not only met with potential buyers; she got the opportunity to present to 60 people and now has four strategic projects in the pipeline. She called me (elated) to say thank you. The personal visit, she said, sealed the deal.

Recently, I tacked a 60-mile drive onto the end of a vacation to meet with a prospect. That business-development visit resulted in two speaking engagements, which never would have occurred had I not taken the time to visit and build a new, mutually respectful relationship.

You don't have to hop on an airplane. Drive your car; get on a bus; take a train. Just meet face-to-face with every *major* client and prospect. You will accelerate your sales process by at least 30 percent, spend less time prospecting (who wouldn't want that?) and attract more quality clients.

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4. Ace the Face-to-Face

We've all been there. The lights are dimmed, and everyone in the room is looking bleary-eyed at a screen, listening to a product manager, salesperson or executive read each PowerPoint slide word for word. You look at your watch every 30 seconds, wondering how much longer the torture can last.

It's easy to get sucked into the PowerPoint universe—it allows us to “present” to our audience at a safe and often “virtual” distance. While computers may have connected the entire world, global economies, and former schoolmates, they can also distance us from the people right in front of us. And you need to first connect, person-to-person, if you ever intend to make a sale.

According to Susan RoAne, author of [What Do I Say Next?](#) (Warner books, now Grand Central) recent research from both Harvard and Stanford universities indicates that the No. 1 skill for success in the 21st century is the *ability to talk to other people*. As salespeople, if we don't “connect” with potential, there is no next step—which is why referrals are so powerful. When you meet with referred prospect, it's easy to start a discussion and connect. For one thing, this person *wants* to talk to you because someone they trust has already paved the way. You have a built-in conversation starter—the mutual associate who referred you. And you can bypass those uncomfortable and awkward first steps where you explain who you are and what you do. Someone else has already sung your praises for you.

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Clients make multimillion-dollar decisions because they feel we're sincere. Remember, most people can spot phoniness a mile away. I don't believe in using tired (and transparent) sales techniques like walking into someone's office and commenting on the photographs or awards displayed on the walls. I know, that's a tactic you learned in a sales training program you attended. I learned that, as well. When you receive a referral introduction, you don't need



tactical conversation starters. You start by talking about the person who referred you, and then you get right to the business at hand. No wasting time. No tactics. It's just you and your referred prospect discussing how you can drive results in their business. What could be better than that?

Here are some ways to genuinely connect with your clients:

Relate and anticipate! Salespeople are often the first to know what's new. Demonstrate your knowledge of your client's industry and business by addressing how your product or solution will help with the current problems they're facing—as well as what's expected down the road. Many people have their heads buried in their work but they still want to know what's going on “out there.” They expect you to know, so be sure to have relevant answers.

Listen! Ask insightful questions and listen carefully to the responses. What you hear may be different than what you expect. As a professional salesperson, you know how to read between the lines and understand the shades of gray as well as the black and white. Frequently, the way the client initially defines their problem turns out to be a different problem entirely. Now you must ask more questions, confirm the real issues, and suggest next steps.

Sell! Zero in on how your solution helps this client—and what results can he expect? Rather than wasting your prospect's time discussing all the aspects and accolades of your business, stick to the key points pertinent to this particular customer.

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Connect with *people*, and you'll close the sale. If you connect with the business problem only, and don't take the time to relate to your client, you won't win the business. Remember, business is serious, but people aren't, so forget the technology and make the person-to-person sale.



About Joanne Black



America's leading authority on referral selling and founder of No More Cold Calling, Joanne Black helps salespeople, sales teams, and business owners get more referrals and attract more business fast without increasing sales and marketing costs.

Discover how to turn cold prospects into HOT clients more than 50 percent of the time and ace out the competition with her proven, referral-selling system.

A captivating speaker, sales guru, and innovative sales seminar leader, Joanne is changing the business of sales.

Some of Joanne's views are contrarian, and in the established school of traditional sales, considered heretical thinking. But for Joanne Black, and her clients, the only smart approach to client acquisition is referral selling. Joanne Black is a member of the National Speakers Association and regularly speaks at sales and incentive meetings, sales conferences, and association meetings.

Share your sales challenges and tell us what you think:

Email Joanne: joanne@nomorecoldcalling.com

Thank you!