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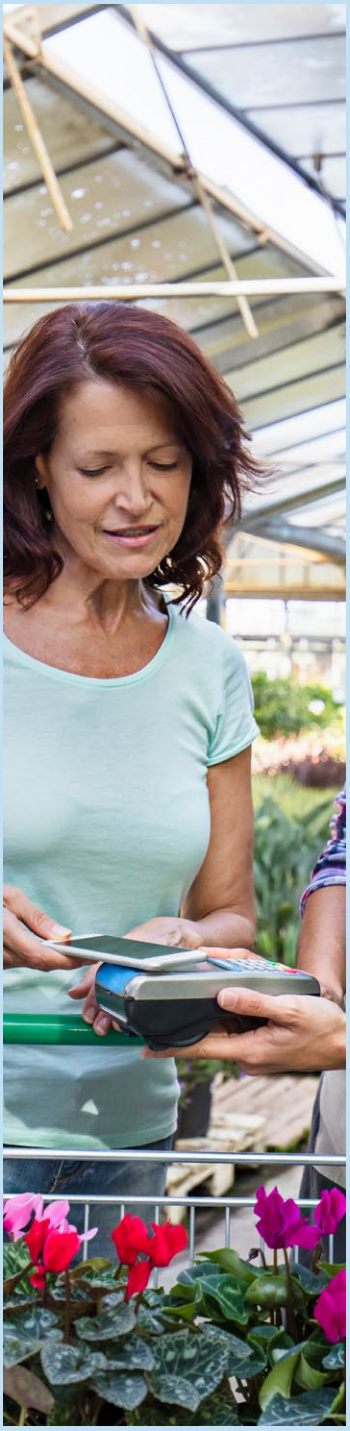

SOCIAL SELLING – KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SELLER

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Understanding social selling

Retailers and consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies are quickly realizing the versatility of social media platforms – they now know that these platforms can be used for more than broadcast marketing. In fact, today, it is a necessary tool for comprehending, communicating with and gaining the loyalty of the ideal customer.

Social selling is a methodology in which B2C and B2B brands use social media networks for the entire customer lifecycle, from connecting with the prospects to nurturing long-term relationships with stakeholders.

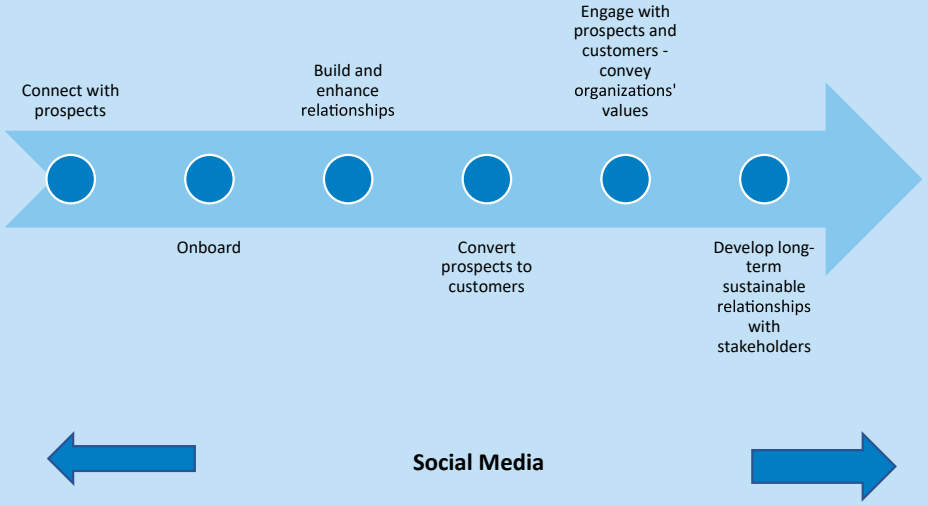

Figure 1 The customer lifecycle

Why have social networks gained relevance? Because customers use the internet and various social media channels to discover more about what they wish to or aspire to buy. Naturally, companies must ensure that they are present on social media through their marketing channels or social sellers to reach prospects effectively. Being on the right platform at the right moment has never been more critical for retail and CPG firms.

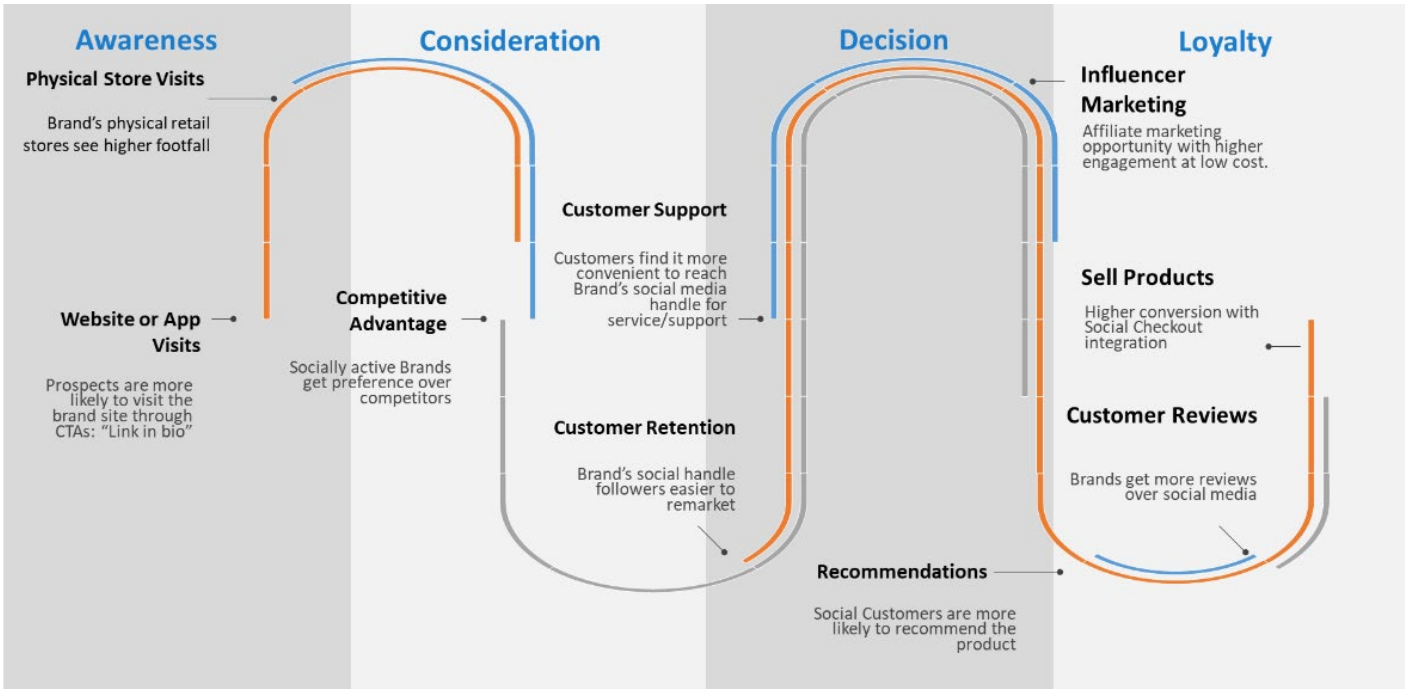

Figure 2 The seeker's journey on social media

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Social sellers are individuals who reach out to prospects using their own profiles on various social media networks. In this way, they assist organizations with onboarding prospects or customers and generating sales. Social sellers can be employees of an organization or independent contractors who work as brand ambassadors for the product on social media.

Four ways in which social media can help develop relationships

- Look at the social selling score index (SSI) of sellers every month
- Ask for a quick round-up or an authoritative opinion to develop engaging content and attract the attention of high-value connections.
- Help formulate a congratulatory message on a new achievement or milestone.
- Ask the seller to share something they learned from a connection, and don't forget to tag and thank those friends

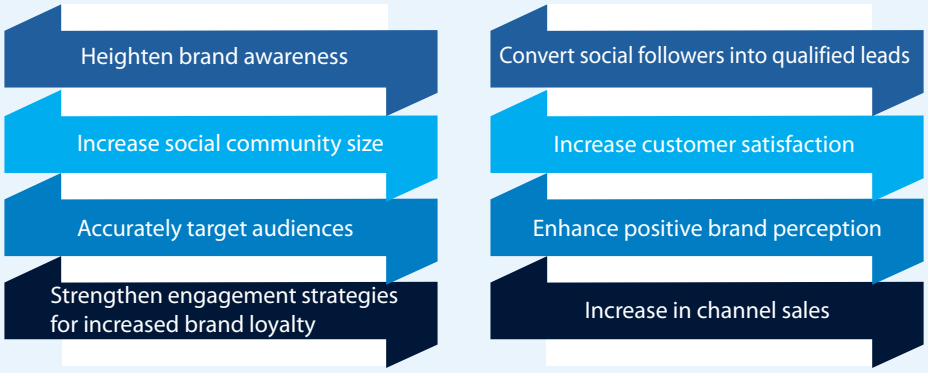

Figure 3 Key aspects of social selling

Social selling is an attractive proposition for brands and retailers as it addresses many of the challenges these companies contend with every day.

	Retail and CPG business challenges	How social selling solves the challenges
1	More digital, less in-store marketing	Social media advertising can be a powerful tool for expanding a brand's reach and acquiring new customers.
2	Increased consumer control for online shoppers	CPG firms and retailers will certainly advertise on online channels, such as Amazon, Flipkart and online grocery stores. First, however, marketers must identify social channels that effectively accomplish the company's goals.
3	Premium brands face significant competition, and margins may continue to decrease	Social media tools combine data from numerous sources to support decision-making. For example, pricing managers can use social media data to identify the most effective strategy for regular sales and promotions. In contrast, brand managers can focus on competitors, better understand their customer base, and plan new product launches.
4	Rapidly shifting demographics	Data reveals that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have the biggest reach for viewers, especially among users over 50 years of age. On the other hand, Twitter and Snapchat have more users between 18 and 29.
5	Customer acquisition cost	The cost of social selling is significantly lower when compared to the cost using sales professionals and the typical sales cycle
6	Product and brand innovation	Sales and product research can be performed by listening to existing social media conversations. • Learn about the customer's difficulties. For example, do they ask the same questions to the same people? • Find a point of agreement. For example, do you have a similar job, relationship or hobby? • Take note of what they say. This reveals what they enjoy and admire. • Participate in LinkedIn groups that have current leads. • Determine which posts they frequently comment on to understand whom they admire and what they worry over.
7	Brand loyalty may be at risk	Social selling will enable the organization to develop closer relationships with its clients, resulting in longer-lasting relationships. Through social media, social sellers may learn about their customers' likes, dislikes, tastes and interests, which will help them create the correct offerings.

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Being a social seller - what it entails

Successful social selling extends beyond traditional selling practices.

1) Capitalize on the social network to reach out to potential customers by attracting leads on social media profile or page

2) Become a thought leader for a specific retail or CPG brand

3) Build credibility as a credible professional and expert in a field to build trust among prospects

4) Find the right contacts among current customers (competitors, suppliers, former employees, etc.)

5) Enable exchange of relevant information through storytelling and customer examples

6) Build trustworthy relationships by contacting the target audience via discussion groups on key topics.

It's important to treat social selling as one more sales avenue – in that context, social sellers must be evaluated for effectiveness and contribution to business growth. Some key parameters to track include:

1) Current Active Conversations – Number of active conversations at a given time

2) Agreement Rate of taking the conversation offline – Number of prospects who agreed to take the social conversation offline and in detail

3) Sales Appointments or Product Sales – Number of prospects who agreed for a sales appointment and the number of products sold via their content

4) Conversions – Number of sales appointments converted to a sale

5) Social Selling Index - An evaluation parameter where social sellers are evaluated on the following components: establishing professional brands, finding the right people, engaging with insights, building relationships

Must-dos for the social seller

1) Identify with the brand's values

2) Align your social media profile with the brand's interest

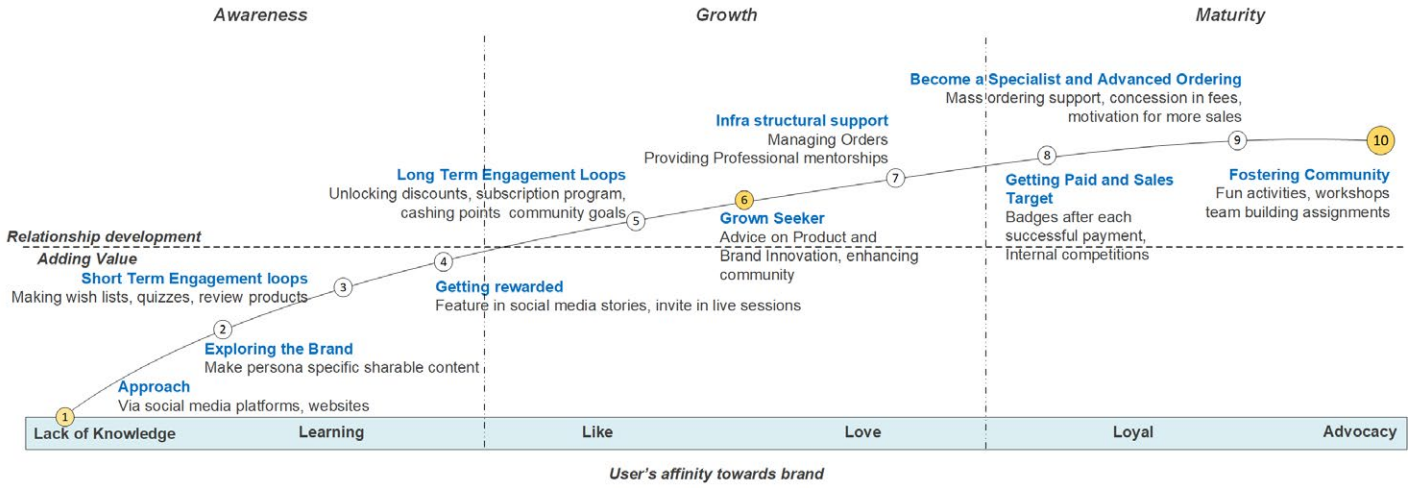
3) Acquire in-depth knowledge of the brand products and marketing communication approach

4) Showcase the products and their benefits

5) Identify and address the target customer's pain points

6) Follow influencers, social news, tools

Becoming brand ambassadors



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The user transformation journey map aims to progress a generic user to a grown seeker, community lead and finally, a brand ambassador. Through this journey, a company's social media presence will establish the brand as an authoritative source of information for its target market. Seekers want to be more than just a buying option; they want solutions to their problems. Therefore, irrespective of what they sell, the brand must build short- and long-term engagement loops for the seekers. In addition, to brand growth, the volume of consumers must also increase.

Brand Ambassador Program – High-level Capabilities
Lead and Account Management
Selection, Onboarding, Training
Brand Ambassador Panel (Analytics and Dashboard)
Reward and Incentive program
Gamification enables fun learning and functionalities
Order management system
CRM Loyalty Management
Mobile Push Notification and campaign

Nurturing consumers to become brand champions, with guidance at various touchpoints through the journey, strengthens a brand's reputation as a high-value, trustworthy brand. Furthermore, a brand can build relationships by value-adding through infrastructure support, gamification and advanced ordering systems when selling their product or services.

High-value resources and content contribute significantly to the seller - be it an insightful eBook, webinar or seminar or an informative long-form course at a strategic stage of the journey.

Spotlight on social selling in the B2B arena – best practices

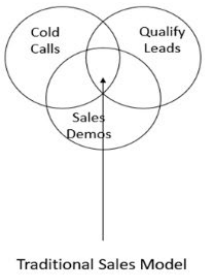
Salespeople typically used social media to respond to open-ended questions and comments or share material through the sales cycle — from awareness through consideration and finally to purchase.

Research by IDC has found that[1]

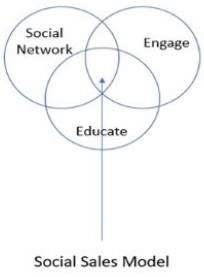
- 91% of B2B buyers are now active and involved in social media
- 84% of senior executives use social media to support purchase decisions
- 75% of B2B buyers are significantly influenced by social media.

1. Harness social media to the fullest - Traditional retail and CPG sales models relied on cold calling, sales demos, and lead qualification. However, the new B2B sales strategy involves using social media networks to reach new prospects and educate them on how your company can help and nurture them through content.

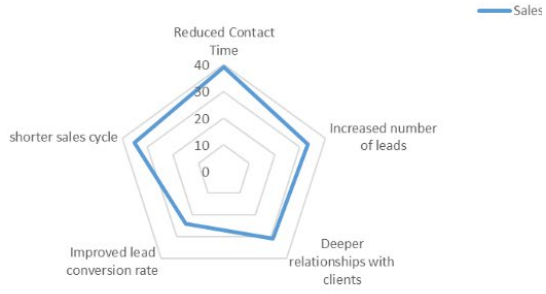
According to an Aberdeen study[2], sales agents that use social selling locate 45 percent more prospects on average. Furthermore, social selling assists best-in-class organizations in achieving a 16 percent increase in revenue year over year. As a result, social selling is the sales team's third most significant focus this year. An increased number of leads, a higher conversion rate and shorter sales cycles are advantages of social selling.



Traditional Sales Model



Social Sales Model



(1) https://www.superoffice.com/blog/social-selling/#:~:text=Research%20by%20IDC%20has%20found,significantly%20influenced%20by%20social%20media

(2) https://www.slideshare.net/linkedin-sales-solutions/idc-research-social-buying-meets-social-selling

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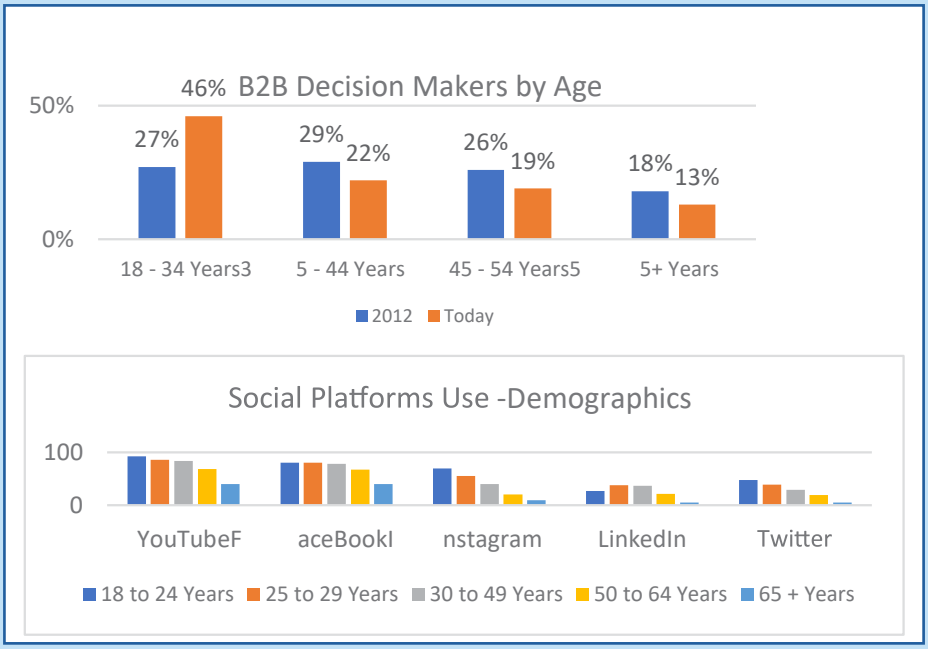
2. Select the most pertinent social network - Although new social networks keep emerging, only the salespeople active on the same platform as their potential clients truly win. That's why fashion salespeople are active on Pinterest while B2B salespeople get leads on LinkedIn.

3. Identify appropriate individuals - Use a platform like Followerwonk, designed exclusively for Twitter marketing, to expand your network. Such programs allow you to search Twitter accounts by a topic or phrase and then provide a list of the top-rated Twitter users in order. For example, you could start your search with "CRM," "Sales," or "Marketing". As a result, brands can easily identify several Twitter users rather than visit each profile and request a follow, which may be time-consuming. They can export the list of individuals and then filter through to the more relevant accounts.

4. Make a list of vendor firms you'd like to work with and follow them - Company profiles or accounts of small businesses to major organizations can be found on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Retail and CPG brands can follow these companies to be updated on their happenings. For example, when a company receives an award, you can congratulate them or invite them to a demo when they ask for product recommendations. This is similar to how retail and CPG brands approach an account-based marketing plan.



5. Provide value by providing relevant material - Gaining the attention of a user is most crucial. Every user on social media has a problem to be addressed –tangible or intangible. Accordingly, a retail or CPG brand's company page must think about adding value to them through our social media content.

Challenges and future of social selling

The challenges

Focusing on Wrong Social platform

Deciding the relevant social platforms to focus and spend resources on is the biggest challenge for social Selling strategy.

Rapidly Changing Algorithms

Social platforms keep changing their Algorithms at fast pace. Brands need to stay updated with these changing algorithms to alter their social strategy.

Tracking Effectiveness

Inability to track the effectiveness of Social Strategy through engagement metrics is challenging for merchants.

Integrating Customer Experience

Integrating Manual Orders, Inventory, Fulfillment and Customer Support is a challenge for merchants to provide optimum customer experience.

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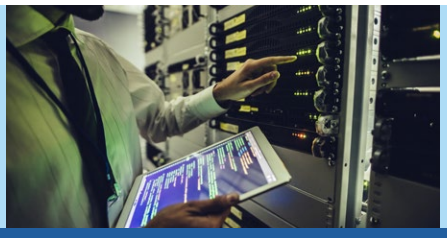
The future

Social proof

When considering a CPG product, customers want examples of social proof (evidence of what other people believe). As a result, marketing teams must include testimonials, review sections, discussion forums and other social aspects into their marketing efforts. This gives users more avenues to check, such as product review websites, feedback sections and forums.

Bigger data

An organization may collect sales records, lead queries, service interactions and partner data and use that information towards sales efforts. Currently, marketing is the only department that uses big data, but sales departments can also profit as the sales process becomes more social and individualized.



Collaboration across teams

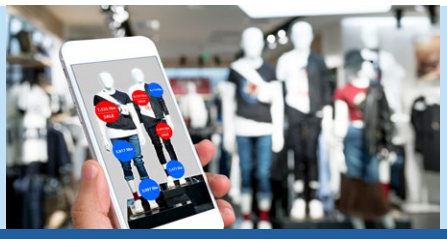
Social selling is a good illustration of how the lines between marketing and sales teams are gradually merging in the retail and CPG industries. When the benefits of social media are established, the plan frequently starts in a company's marketing department and then moves to sales teams. Working collaboratively with the two teams can help save time by avoiding duplication and focusing on the most efficient methods.

Peer-to-peer social marketplaces

WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, are emerging as the future Peer-to-Peer marketplaces, with a community of social media users transforming into buyers and sellers.

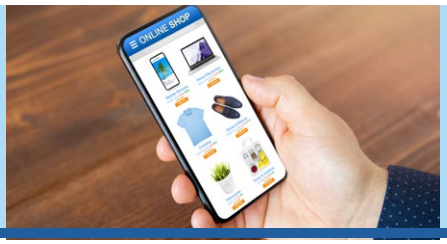
Clickable products

Interactive gamified polls, quizzes and QAs will keep customers consistently engaged and generate leads.



Live shopping

CPG and retail brands will need to integrate headless checkout directly into shoppable posts, stories, and live videos from social media influencers.



Beyond social

Finally, we believe that social selling will open the way for new digital sales strategies. Social media has provided a firm foundation, but it is not the end. It will become increasingly important to determine how to exploit them in the larger digital ecosystem best to engage and nurture prospects.

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