

Teach Your Partners How To Fish: BlitzMasters CEO Shares Channel Sales Best Practices

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In today's digitally connected world, it's sometimes easy to get lost in the sea of email nurtures, social posts and other tech touch points.

But personal touches such as events, in-person meetings and phone conversations still hold significant weight — especially in the channel world.

That doesn't mean digital tactics should be ignored or forgotten. Rather, sales teams should be equipped to create an optimal mix of digital and personal strategies to build long-term, valuable relationships with customers and prospects.

In this exclusive interview, Andrea Sittig-Rolf, Chief BlitzMaster and CEO of BlitzMasters, which helps sales organizations inspire change, maximize sales and increase bottom-line results, will share key trends and best practices vendors should apply to their partner engagement and enablement strategies.



For years, Sittig-Rolf and her team have helped a variety of channel players, including **Avaya, HP, Juniper Networks, NEC** and **Xerox**, ramp up their sales results.

Channel Marketer Report (CMR): What trends do you believe have the most significant impact on channel sales teams today?

Sittig-Rolf: Understanding the potential of Big Data and analytics and how it can positively impact end-users is the key to success for the channel salesperson in 2015.

Some of the common business initiatives for end-users this year include:

- Attracting and maintaining customers;
- Managing risk; and
- Improving IT economics.

Helping end-users understand how to use Big Data and analytics to run their businesses more competitively and profitably will give channel salespeople an advantage when selling against the competition.

CMR: Based on your work with clients, what do you believe are the most common pain points hindering sales growth?

Sittig-Rolf: Salespeople have a tendency to hide behind the impersonal touch of emailing, texting and using social media to try to sell products and services. Our argument is a sale doesn't happen until a salesperson *speaks to* a buyer! Clients hire us to empower their salespeople with the skills, tools and knowledge they need to make outcome-based prospecting phone calls.

We teach salespeople how to get past gatekeepers, handle objections, get voicemails returned and set appointments with key decision-makers to start the sales process. We find most salespeople are pretty

skilled when it comes to proposing a solution and even closing the sale, but where they often fail is in getting that first appointment to “open” the sale in the first place.

CMR: Vendors have often used the 20-80 rule to characterize their channel: 20% of partners generate 80% of the revenue. Does this rule still apply? How can vendors get more value out of all of their partners?

Sittig-Rolf: Yes, I'd say the 20-80 rule still applies. Vendors can get more value out of their partners by offering programs that make their partners better at running their business, not just better at selling a particular vendor's products. By investing in the *people* throughout the channel, all of the VARs will feel a greater sense of *partnership*.

Often, vendors spend a lot of time training partners on their particular products, but they don't often invest in things like helping salespeople be better salespeople. When vendors combine the training of their products with basic selling skills, for example, it creates a compelling value proposition for the partner to work with the vendor as a team when selling to end-users.

CMR: What do you find to be core best practices for engaging and empowering channel sales teams?

Sittig-Rolf: In addition to investing in their success by helping them learn valuable basic selling skills, running contests works well as an incentive to motivate partners to sell more of a particular vendor's products and services. Running a “National Call Blitz” is a great way to help partner salespeople reach the goals set by the vendors to sell more of their products and services, and is a fun way to engage the entire channel at once.

CMR: We're hearing a lot about social selling in the B2B world. Are you seeing the same type of movement in the channel space?

Sittig-Rolf: Social selling is great for the nurturing or marketing part of selling, but it's not as effective for *actual* selling; meaning getting face-to-face — or voice-to-voice for an inside salesperson — with the prospect to start the relationship. The best approach for actual selling is to pick up the phone, call the prospect and set an appointment for a future conversation where the prospect has set aside time for the salesperson to give their undivided attention.

CMR: Do you have any final tips or best practices for vendors that are striving to turn partners into powerful advocates?

Sittig-Rolf: Vendors need to make their partners the “hero” in every scenario and transaction. When vendors make the partner look good to the end-user, that partner will effectively sell the vendor's solution and feel a sense of pride and loyalty in doing so. The team-selling approach between vendor and partner is highly effective for building and maintaining loyalty with partners.



About Alicia Fiorletta

Alicia Fiorletta is Senior Editor for Channel Marketer Report. Working closely with industry analysts and experts, Alicia reports on the latest news, technologies, case studies and trends coming to forefront in the channel marketing world. With a focus on emerging marketing strategies, including social, mobile and content for demand, Alicia hones in on new ways for organizations to market to and through their partner networks. Through her work with G3 Communications, Alicia also acts as Associate Editor for Retail TouchPoints, a digital publishing network focused on the customer-facing area of the retail industry.