



# Mobile sales tools – help or hindrance to the modern SME?

Computers should enhance personal contact, rather than destroy it

By Peter Lawless



Getting your business up and running is the most important consideration most aspiring entrepreneurs feel they have when starting a business. As the business matures, more customers come on board, and indeed more staff members are employed. Accounting systems, stock control systems and numerous IT tools seem to spring up. And that is just inside the office! So what if the business owner is on the road, or indeed has sales people on the road, should they embrace technology as well?

As we embrace the information age, there are more gadgets available to the average sales person, than there were weapons for old age warriors. So does this add a credible advantage to the guy or gal on the road? Early sales reps had their wares and their wits, with which to earn a living, however as technology advances, does all of the constant flow of information actually make today's well trained professionals any more adept than their pre-technology counterparts?

## Is business just about profits, or do we need to look after our customers?

In the 90's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) was the saviour of the world. With this great tool, customers would be treated the same when they interacted with a company regardless of the channel they used.

One could look at a the latest bells and whistles microwave on the web, see it was in stock and go down to the local bricks and mortar version of the same shop and pick one up. I mean it was in stock according to the web wasn't it?

Joe behind the counter would tell me

knowingly, that actually that microwave, was not actually on the market yet, and the marketing guys had just got ahead of themselves. All of this as I spied the Joneses from next door walking out with one under the arm! What was more, I actually did not have any money in my account, because Jean at the bank had cross sold me the latest critical illness cover, to ensure I could still get paid, even if the intended microwave I wanted to buy blew up in my face!

So what has happened to customer service? Many will tell you that computers have destroyed the personal contact – but that does not need to be the case, they should enhance it.

## So the smart reps decided to stick to what they knew

That was how Joe Public, the humble customer fared with CRM, but how did Jimmy Rep on the road feel about CRM? This amazing management tool, to provide nirvana for customers, had actually another great benefit. It meant that rather than spending hours preparing excel spreadsheets for his boss, the sales manger could put all of the onus on Jimmy Rep, who would have to spend hours after each sales call filling in hundreds of meaningless fields, that no-one ever cared about.

And what was more, the filofax in his head, was now no longer his ticket to job hopping pay rises, since the company now owned all of the information about his customers on this database. What was more; they knew where he was, when he tried to sneak off playing golf, and how few sales he really made.

So what did Jimmy Rep do, he did nothing! He forgot to fill in the data, his boss

screamed at him, he moved jobs, and started the whole frustrating, non-selling process all over again, albeit on a higher base salary, with still little or no commission!

## Has technology left us more vulnerable?

Information was always being intercepted. Back in the Roman times, it was often good policy to send a number of messengers back from the regions with news to the Empire. It was often the case that the not so fleet of foot got caught, their messages stolen, and their mutilated corpses hung for the crows. With any luck one of the other guys would evade capture and bring the tidings to the Emperor!

Now I am not saying that our friend, Jimmy the rep is likely to lose his head, when his laptop gets ripped off. Unless of course his boss is an ogre! But there are risks, and for that reason it is vital to have a good security policy.

The Sales Manager who owns the customer information, which a vital company asset, should ensure that all forms of mobile communication are extensively audited by an external security company. There should be policies in place, to protect all the data that a mobile rep may have access to. Not only is the loss of your own company crown jewels serious, but one of your customer's data falling into the wrong hands could be catastrophic.

Aside from external fraudulent data loss, accidental loss can also be highly disruptive which is why a good backup and disaster recovery plan is very important. Your consultant, preferably one who has a security classification like BS 7799 themselves, should also be able to provide guidance and services around that.



The most difficult loss, however, to protect against is employee theft. The old fashioned practice of marching a resigning sales rep to the door is no longer practical. Easy access to USB data keys, will mean that any data a rep decides he wants, will be long gone before he hands in his notice.

## Quantifiable benefits of Mobile Sales Tools

### The “Tongue in cheek” Tools of the Trade.

- Mobile phone – to receive calls during a meeting, to be able to say, “Sorry I am in a meeting”!
- Lap top – to power the mobile CRM application
- PDA – with mobile email, because your lap top is too big to carry everywhere
- Wireless Pay as you go card – to reply to email, while drinking coffee, because the PDA is too fiddly to use to write on
- Personal Mobile – to avoid the BIK on the work one and to receive calls from the head-hunters on
- Broadband with VPN at home – to keep in touch with the office, and print those huge proposals
- Hands Free Car kit – to make those vital calls in the car, to say you are running late for a meeting.
- Memory Stick – to keep a back up of the product catalogue on, and to store the latest photos of your golfing holiday in Spain on
- Mobile Projector - for those unplanned presentations

OK, enough moaning about the terrible life of Jimmy rep, on the other hand, there are immense productivity gains to be had from well employed use of sales tools.

If your Customer service system is implemented in a way that ensures its number one intended beneficiary, the customer, is actually the number one beneficiary, then you will truly reap the rewards on its expenditure. We all have

heard the maxim that happy customers, will not only buy more from you, they will also refer you to other customers.

First your customers will be served the way they want to be served. The three key areas where they will benefit are as follows;

- They will enjoy a consistent and excellent level of service, whatever channel they use to interact with your company.
- When they get a visit from either a sales rep or a service engineer, that person will know all about them, and be able to serve them in the best possible manner.
- They will only receive marketing communications, about offerings which are suitable to their requirements, needs or wants.

Meanwhile the sales reps will benefit from tools that enable them to be more productive, and thus earn more commission as follows;

- By having the support of a customer service system and an appropriate sales methodology, they can ensure that success gets repeated and mistakes eliminated.
- Having the ability to use all of the company tools, they do not waste time travelling to the office, and can have all the information at their finger tips, to go straight out to customers. This eliminates wasteful travel time, and gives them more customer face time.
- When their company employs inside sales reps, all information, including appointments generated can be passed to the field sales rep in real-time, to keep their commission earning schedule full.
- Being able to access the latest company information on the road, ensures that the mobile sales rep, can be fully up to date, enabling them to be their customers source of information, forging stronger bonds, which results in increased sales.
- By having access to the company’s ordering systems, while being with a customer, facilitates faster and more accurate ordering of what the customer

wants, increasing what the customer can buy.

## Conclusion

Driving to Cork in a tractor, is about as smart as using a mini to drag a load of hay across a field. Selecting the correct tools, with appropriate training and motivation will yield tangible benefits, by delivering increased sales, higher commission and shorter working hours to a good sales rep.

The Job Advert “carrots” of Laptop, PDA, Mobile phone and car, are essential tools of the trade, when backed up by systems that measure and assist in sales rep productivity. When these tools lead to shorter hours and higher commission, then mobile technology will have been used as intended.

It is worth noting however, that even with the correct tools, it is vital to have an organisational structure, centred on your customer. Everyone should be fully conversant with your core value proposition, and be able to clearly articulate how customers and prospects get value from your offerings.

Your systems, procedure and policies, should clearly enable consistent, positive interaction with customers, ensuring that success is repeated and mistakes are avoided.

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*In association with The Irish Computer Society*



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