

Business Buyer's Expectations Before the first Buyer-Seller Interaction

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Building further on the ongoing changes in the buying process (Spina et al. 2013), business buyers have more access to digital technologies in their buying decision than ever before (Ostrom et al. 2010). These changes in business practices resulting from the digitalization of the buying process, is pushing sales organizations to rethink the way their salespeople sell. Since this digital era is very likely to continue its development, it is remarkable that the academic literature is still very fragmented on how selling organizations should combine and implement their different (digital) sales and communication tools to connect with the professional customer, decrease the average cost of sale, and increase the customer lifetime value. Basing ourselves on the study of CEB (2012), the time before a first buyer-seller meeting takes place is largely understudied while its impact might be tremendous. In this exploratory study, we attempt to further close this gap in sales literature by collecting three waves of data, analogous to a funnel approach. In the first wave, we conducted 34 semi-structured interviews with purchasing executives to grasp their broader expectations towards first meetings with selling teams. These interviews were transcribed and then analyzed by the use of NVivo 9. In the subsequent wave, an additional 19 dyadic interviews with customers from four different companies were conducted to further crack the digital transformation challenge in buyer-seller relationships. In the third and final wave, we interviewed 11 purchasers after their initial outreach to the selling company but before their first face-to-face meeting with the sales team. The results may be divided into ‘Expectations to the digital channels’ and ‘Expectations to the forthcoming buyer-seller interactions’. In the first category we identified a common perception on the desired level of information sought by procurement, from data to knowledge, where constructive thought leadership should have the right strategic fit, depending on the purchasing portfolio model (Kraljic 1983). We make a number of suggestions of how these digital channels should be used to generate offline traffic, depending on the extended framework by De Vincentis and Rackham (2008).