HOW DOES THE COMPLEXITY IMPACT SALESPERSON'S ABILITY TO GET APPOINTMENTS?

Pia Hautamäki, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland

ABSTRACT

The business environment has changed. Business buyers have more information than ever and they are able to choose with whom they do business. We studied 17 buyers qualitatively. We found that the buyers want to meet salespeople only when they have a complex problem to solve. Research of buyers is needed because sales organisations need to prepare their activities for the future.

INTRODUCTION

During the last years the businesses and big companies have started to operate increasingly globally and their customers' needs are more complex than ever. Business to business sales organisations concentrate on selling intangibles and tangible products have moved to web stores where business buyers are able to do the purchase independently as the transaction doesn't need selling activities of a salesperson. Global environment and businesses' complex needs place salespeople in a new situation. The literature needs research to help sales organisations understand the challenging environment. Research of buyers is needed because they have the authority to choose and today's sales organisations need to prepare their activities to adjust to this changed business situation.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

This research used qualitative research method, where the researchers interviewed business buyers who attend the buying process in the companies. As a method we used interpretive analysis which makes it possible to understand the business buyers' value expectations, beliefs and attitudes toward the selling activities on a deeper level. Our sample consists of 17 qualitative in-depth interviews of business buyers. All business buyers had been working in their positions at least three years and all companies in the project operate internationally in service business. Research questions in this research were; why and in what situations do the business buyers meet new salespeople, how does the buyer's decision process start and how do the buyers prepare before meeting the salesperson.

FINDINGS

We found out that initially business buyers want to meet salespeople only when they have a complex problem to solve and they need consultation. We also found that today the business buyer is the one who first contacts the sales organisation and in meetings the business buyer is well prepared. Sales managers should find this study beneficial when planning the salespersons' activities because business buyers may interpret high level of activity as pushing too much especially if they don't have a problem to solve at the moment. On a management level it is important to coach salespeople to meet the buyers' salient beliefs already before the meetings and prepare well to new business meetings in complex business environment. While training business to business salespeople, it would be worthwhile to concentrate on the new approach of buyers' buying process and salesperson's role as a business advisor and consultant.

In sales literature and especially in service sales there is a research gap in this new complex environment. There is a small number of studies from customers' point of view. Customers have much more information available than before and it is important to study how that fact affects the decision making process of a business to business buyer. This topic is underdeveloped in literature thus there exists a large gap.

References Available on Request