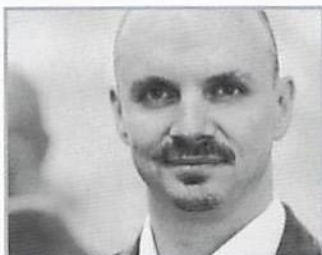


Salespeople should tool up with technology

Paul Black says... you can't replace a salesman with an algorithm, but you can use technology to help them get results



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Despite recent events, the automotive industry is remarkably resilient. While it may be a stretch to call it 'recession-proof', it weathered the financial crisis admirably and aftermarket sales account for a huge proportion of the

but not impossible. That said, you will need to rethink how you do business — and your first priority should be rejuvenating your sales strategy. This doesn't necessarily mean tossing the old approaches out entirely, but success will mean embracing new methods.

GOOD SALESPERSON

What makes a good salesperson? It's first necessary to understand that many of the barriers to aftermarket sales success are entirely in the mind — and that overcoming them will require a broader psychological shift within your team.

There is an idea, within these teams and within the wider culture, of what constitutes a 'good seller'. It has some basis in reality. To sell effectively does take an element of self-confidence and personal charisma.

Film and TV

reliance on in-person sales, cold calls, and interpersonal communication.

In the modern age, this isn't going to be enough. The qualities of a good aftermarket sales professional are still important, but in the current market, they're no longer enough; in many respects, bringing charm alone is like bringing a knife to a gunfight.

A sensible aftermarket executive needs to convince the sales team to get on board with new technology — and then empower it with the technological arsenal it needs to get ahead of the competition.

SALES INTELLIGENCE

Think about your worst-selling product; if you're an attentive executive, you'll know what it is. Whether it's brakes, engine parts, wipers, or wheel trims, you've likely already formulated

armed with this knowledge of what should be sold with what, you can authorise special offers when both items are purchased at the same time. Equally, if car wax kits sell very well under certain conditions — May Bank Holiday, Father's Day, etc. — the software makes it possible to identify these conditions ahead of time and organise discounts that undercut the prices of your closest business rivals.

Of course, more than anything, technology lets salespeople be salespeople. The right tool will be able to retain all relevant information about a customer — and make it accessible at a moment's notice. Salespeople meet hundreds of new prospects in any given week; they cannot be reasonably expected to remember everything about each one, but each one will expect exactly that of them. The software enables them to fake it effectively — and concentrate on the meat and potatoes of their role.

REFINED, NOT REDEFINED

Above all, this is the true worth of technology to the aftermarket sales industry. The attributes that make for a good 'closer' remain as valuable as they ever were, and getting customers to sign on the dotted line with a wink, a smile, and just the right amount of eye contact will always be important.

But there's no denying that it's easier to get to that point if your sales professionals are equipped with the right tools. In this sense, your overall aim shouldn't be to overhaul or redefine their roles. Instead, use technology to distil their jobs down to their basic essence, empowered with the best information and leads available, and unencumbered by administrative rabbit holes or dead-end market research.

If a sales team isn't spending most of its time on the business of actually selling, something's gone wrong. Technology can help put it right — but only if you let it.

"Use technology to distil salespeople's jobs down...empowered with the best information"

overall industry's success with £11.2 billion in yearly revenues.

Superficially, it seems like a great time to be operating in this space; the reality, of course, is that it's something of a mixed blessing. While this provides considerable opportunity for new businesses, it can also be extremely difficult to make inroads: alongside local outfits and smaller e-tailers, you're competing with the industry big boys, which have the financial muscle to buy parts in bulk — and sell them at better prices than smaller companies can afford.

With this in mind, boosting sales (and profits) remains no small task, even if conditions are favourable on the whole. If you're a smaller outfit operating in the aftermarket, the task ahead of you is a difficult one,

reinforces this notion to some extent. Struggling salespeople are portrayed as weak and feeble personalities — think Jack Lemmon from *Glengarry Glen Ross*, or the subject of the Maysles' Brothers' documentary *Salesman* — while successful salespeople are portrayed as heroic supermen who win new business with pure swagger and braggadocio (swaggadocio?). This is especially prevalent in the aftermarket industry, where online uptake is, on the whole, fairly slow, and there is a heavy

£11.2
Billion of after-
market sales in
revenue, annually

some idea of why it's selling badly. Pricing, quality, a broad lack of demand: whatever it is, you've likely just ordered as little of it as possible and resigned yourself to its current, disappointing levels of profitability. You don't want to be caught short, but you don't want to have to waste money on an item that your sales team can't move.

But what if it could sell well under different circumstances?

This is the promise of modern technology — and big data technology in particular. The automated trend analysis offered by sales intelligence provides a way to see patterns and opportunities that your team might have otherwise missed. For example, they may not know if low-selling hub kits perform very well when paired with brake discs or suspension parts. I've picked these items at random, but when you are