

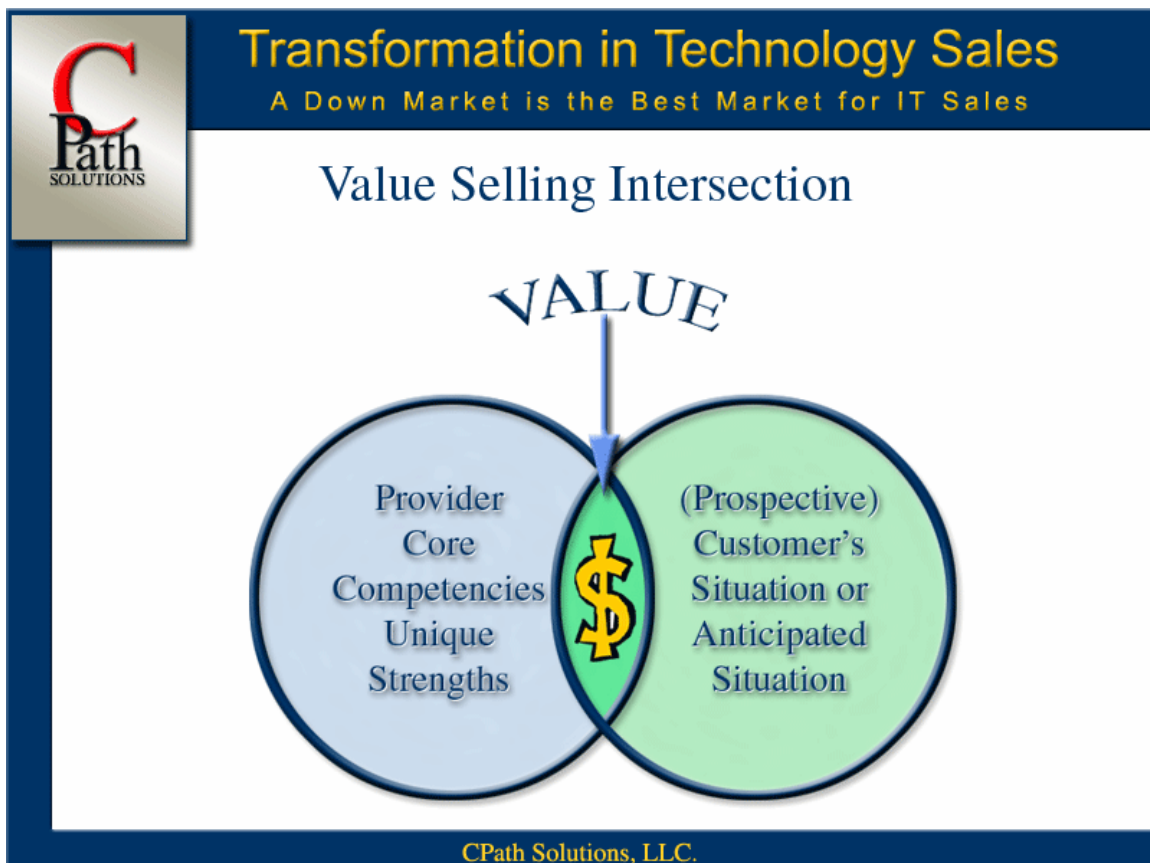
STRATEGIC GROWTH SALES PLATFORMS



My firm, CPath Solutions (www.cpathsolutions.com), routinely encounters companies asking us to help them solve their “sales problem.” In virtually every instance, senior executives are confident they have a terrific product or service, an extensive target market willing to pay a fair price for their goods, and a sound operation. The problem as they view it is these positives are undermined by an ineffective sales team.

While these company executives may not be wrong, their assessment is not entirely correct. What is interpreted as a sales problem is actually a growth problem. And the issues conspiring to undermine a given company’s market success often go far deeper and are more complex than teaching old sales dogs new tricks.

It starts with a company’s strategic plan, and although sales executives might participate in shaping an annual (or more extended) plan, the sales discipline is typically organized and operated at a purely tactical level. To be effective, the details of a sales operation must be placed at the center of a company’s strategy. At the outset, a company has to properly assess its value proposition. This can be depicted in a very simple graph:



By identifying the intersection of one's core competencies and unique strengths to the needs of the target market, companies will create a highly efficient sales force.

We have all heard the familiar refrain: "Sales is a numbers game" or "The more calls we make, the more business we will sell." I never quite believed this to be true, and in various sales leadership roles at four different companies over a seven-year period I conducted research to prove or disprove this notion. All told, I tracked the number of sales calls made and the number of closes generated by nearly 600 sales professionals, ranging from entry-level territory reps to seasoned national account vice presidents. The result: there was no statistical evidence to support the theory that those who made the most calls brought in the most business. In fact, the evidence showed that the sales people with the greatest number of closes made the fewest calls. The answer as to why is simple. These sales people were better at targeting the right prospects. The method they used was to identify those most likely to buy rather than those they wished they could sell.

A good friend of mine is a litigator. He is fond of telling me that he usually wins his court cases in the library rather than through some compelling argument made in the courtroom. This is good advice for setting a sales strategy as well. Companies that set a strategic market plan are most likely to drive more business than those that expect to drive growth through a brute force sales effort.

The next strategic consideration is managing the sales force, from selection to training to on-the-job execution.

It starts with the selection process. In the strategic context this means knowing what type of company yours is. We believe there are two basic types of companies:

Selection: Blue chip hiring, staffing a firm with people with an abundance of experience that do not require significant oversight or training. In sales, this is exemplified by selecting veterans with "Golden Rolodexes." **Cultivation:** Hiring for potential, based on a corporate culture that invests in people, develops talent, and considers organizational fit the key characteristic.

So few organizations get this right we are no longer startled by how surprised executives and sales people are that mismatches in the selection and management processes always lead to poor results and utter frustration.

As an example, one of our Fortune 500 clients has over a 50-year history of promoting from within their organization. After a two to three year run of flat-to-negative growth, they changed this policy and started recruiting sales management from other companies. They had recently hired a vice president with a proven sales process and nearly a quarter-century of superior results at a Fortune 100 company. The CEO, who made the hire, remained impressed with this VP, but began to grow impatient with her. Perhaps not realizing exactly what he was saying, he remarked, "I know she has good processes, but I don't want her to use those, I want her to follow *my* methods!" She was a bit more graphic describing her experiences with this firm--a case of a cultivating CEO hiring on selection without fully understanding what this meant.

This phenomenon is even more profound in smaller companies. This is particularly true where the business is run by someone who came up through the ranks (as this CEO did), or with privately-held businesses.

Managing all of this has become increasingly complex. To help identify where your challenges and opportunities are, we created the accompanying Company Self-Audit. By evaluating one's standards, managerial protocols, and methods, any company with a legitimate value proposition can set an appropriate strategic plan for driving significant and sustainable growth. If you would like to discuss your self-audit conclusions with me, I would look forward to hearing from you. I can be reached at MBerman@cpathsolutions.com, or 212-532-4800, extension 225.

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