



It's Time for UK Businesses to Sell Big, Sell Global and Stay Relevant

BY BEN LAKER AND CLAIRE EDMUNDS

Selling is becoming harder than ever write Ben Laker and Claire Edmunds, CEO & Founder of Clarify, a specialist business development firm operating globally. In this article, the authors elaborate on three key messages that sales leaders must use to support their boards.

Buying decisions of large enterprise now around six months to go from “Hi” to “Buy”.¹ Thirty-three percent of sales leaders expect this to lengthen as risk-averse decision-makers take more purchasing decisions by committee,

and 27 percent of the time the decision is “no decision”.

When communicating with a buyer, sales people should promote change, create new patterns of thinking and to offer challenging insights. When buyers refrain from making a decision and continue in their current state, they are either unconvinced to enter a different end state, or have not been equipped by the salesperson to make the case for change within their organisation. The “no decision” demonstrates the “least worst option”, but this simply kicks the can down the road. The total value of “no decision” opportunities

are US\$20.4 trillion, up 13 percent in five years.²

So why are executives making less decisions? The world is becoming increasingly uncertain. Debt-laden governments, risk averse and banks businesses are applying a stranglehold on growth. The consequences of which are stark. Findings from Clarify's latest research suggest that 68 percent of businesses across Britain are falling behind their European counterparts, and 23 percent of these businesses will die within the next 24 months. Growth is required, and it is required now.

To help these businesses, the UK must create an environment in which innovation is prioritised, particularly as its economy is now the worst performer in the European Union. With Q1 2017 growth of just 0.2%, the UK is already falling behind and given that big City banks are set to move 9,000 jobs to Frankfurt and Dublin,³ the future looks bleaker. The only solution, according to Clarify, is to leverage cutting edge innovations and technology. In effect, every business should behave like a software business. The challenge however is that board members of these businesses

are not technology experts, and therefore need help to understand where to place their big bets, what will assist them on this journey and what will simply be a distraction. Clarify's research suggest that sales leaders must support their boards by articulating three key messages.

1 New Ways to Win New Customers

Many technology businesses with high value complex sales engagements find themselves getting 80% or more of their revenues from a tiny proportion of their market. As legacy propositions commoditise and margins are eroded, growth stagnates. Businesses know they need to find ways to win new customers, take new propositions into existing customers and increase the strategic value they deliver; but the strategies deployed to achieve this are often failing. Why? It is the newer value propositions that are the route to increasing wallet share in existing customers and winning new customers; however these propositions are also the hardest to sell. New concepts are harder to articulate, clients do not already recognise how they will get a return on their investment, so salespeople must access different buying centres – usually engaging with more senior individuals as organisations will view these investments as higher risk.

2 This Quarter, Next Quarter


Whilst enterprise field sales teams may have the knowledge and skills to handle these challenges, they are focussed on opportunities that will close this quarter and next, often don't have the bandwidth and are too expensive a resource to concentrate on building new pipeline. Sales Leaders' may have invested in creating a demand centre which meets the needs of a run-rate business but doesn't work for newer or more complex propositions.

3 A Wise Investment

Sales Leaders' are increasingly realising the need for a dedicated best-in-class Business Development function. This function should be able to articulate complex messages to senior Executives, utilise the same advanced sales skills and methodologies that enterprise field sales teams are deploying, build and

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execute target account plans in conjunction with Account Managers and work collaboratively to develop the opportunities they find beyond the first engagement with field sales to maximise the pipeline generated, reduce funnel leakage and ensure that sale expenditure is invested wisely.

Their key takeaway is that sales leaders must challenge and transform the structure of sales' to generate scalable and predictable pipelines, improve win rates and drive profitable growth. Given that salespeople are the canary in the economic coal mine,⁴ now is the time to step up and sell big, sell global and stay relevant. 



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Claire Edmunds set up Clarify in 2003, a specialist business development company, offering a fundamentally different operating model for enterprise sales; one that delivers predictable pipeline and revenue but also creates long-term transformational change. In 2014 Claire was awarded "Woman of the Year" (SME) and in June 2015 Claire was recognised by *Real Business Magazine* and the CBI as "First Woman of Business Services" at the national First Women in Business awards.

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