

# Keller Center Research Report



» June 2020, Volume 13, Issue 2

## Social Media Addiction & Work-Life Balance

*Suzanne Zivnuska, PhD, John R. Carlson, PhD, Dawn S. Carlson, PhD, Ranida B. Harris, PhD, and Kenneth J. Harris, PhD*

## Ensuring Newcomer Agent Success

*Danny P. Claro, PhD, Carla Ramos, PhD, Gabriel R. Gonzalez, PhD, and Robert W. Palmatier, PhD*

## Creating Charisma

*Sandra Pauser, PhD, Udo Wagner, PhD, and Claus Ebster, PhD*

## Office Politics: Training Ground for Adaptive Sellers

*Takuma Kimura, PhD, Belén Bande, PhD, and Pilar Fernández-Ferrín, PhD*

## Reclaiming Competitive Advantage with Web Design

*Alexander Bleier, PhD, Colleen M. Harmeling, PhD, and Robert W. Palmatier, PhD*

## INSIDER: Rehumanize Your Business

*Maria Arauz, MBA*

## INSIDER: Conversational Marketing

*Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA Candidate*



Baylor University

HANKAMER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS  
Keller Center for Research

# Keller Center Research Report

Baylor University, Keller Center for Research  
Hankamer School of Business  
One Bear Place #98007, Waco, TX 76798  
[www.baylor.edu/kellercenter](http://www.baylor.edu/kellercenter) » [Keller\\_Center@baylor.edu](mailto:Keller_Center@baylor.edu)

*Keller Center Research Report* is a trademark owned by Baylor University.  
© Baylor University. All rights reserved.

## Editorial Staff

**Randy Hacker, MBA**  
*Executive Director*

**Marjorie Cooper, PhD**  
*Editor*

**Amanda Rodriguez, MBA**  
*Associate Editor*

# Table of Contents

<b>Social Media Addiction &amp; Work-Life Balance</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Suzanne Zivnuska, PhD, John R. Carlson, PhD, Dawn S. Carlson, PhD, Ranida B. Harris, PhD, and Kenneth J. Harris, PhD</i>	
<b>Ensuring Newcomer Agent Success</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Danny P. Claro, PhD, Carla Ramos, PhD, Gabriel R. Gonzalez, PhD, and Robert W. Palmatier, PhD</i>	
<b>Creating Charisma</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Sandra Pauser, PhD, Udo Wagner, PhD, and Claus Ebster, PhD</i>	
<b>Office Politics: Training Ground for Adaptive Sellers</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Takuma Kimura, PhD, Belén Bande, PhD, and Pilar Fernández-Ferrín, PhD</i>	
<b>Reclaiming Competitive Advantage with Web Design</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Alexander Bleier, PhD, Colleen M. Harmeling, PhD, and Robert W. Palmatier, PhD</i>	
<b>INSIDER: Rehumanize Your Business</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Maria Arauz, MBA</i>	
<b>INSIDER: Conversational Marketing</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA</i>	

# Social Media Addiction & Work-Life Balance

*Suzanne Zivnuska, PhD, John R. Carlson, PhD, Dawn S. Carlson, PhD, Ranida B. Harris, PhD, and Kenneth J. Harris, PhD*

Internet addiction is regarded as a growing health concern in many parts of the world, with some studies estimating rates of addiction between 1.5% and 8.2% in the United States and Europe, and as much as 7% in some Asian countries. Social media usage in particular continues to grow in popularity and contributes to the rising rates of internet addiction.

The use of social media is becoming pervasive and rapidly bleeding into the real estate industry. Some of this use is positive, as it helps agents build their professional networks and obtain work-related information and feedback.

However, although social media may be seen as a resource that can build social networks and aid in crowdsourcing information, it can also be a potential resource drain in the same manner as the other new technologies.

We hope to clarify our understanding of how social media can drain resources in the workplace by examining the impact of social media addiction and how employees react to social media posts by their colleagues and ultimately the impact of these social media interactions on job performance.

## About our Study

Addictive behaviors are thought to be grounded in the social and environmental context of the dependent person and are associated with emotional distress. For example, studies show that a generalized addiction to the Internet, or even addiction to smartphones, may be accompanied by loss of interests, decreased psychosocial functions, social retreat, and psychosocial distress. Although not specific to social media addiction, Internet addiction and other addictive behaviors, such as pathological gambling, have been associated with depression and stress, deteriorating quality of life, and loneliness.

We investigate the intersection of social media and the workplace, focusing on job performance impacts of agents' social media addictions and social media reactions through work-family balance and burnout. The research model is grounded in conservation of resources theory (COR), which suggests social media compulsions and emotional reactions to co-worker's social media posts will deplete agents' energetic and productive resources, making it difficult to achieve



work-family balance, increasing the likelihood of job burnout, and ultimately degrading job performance.

### Impact of Social Media Addiction

Social media can be defined as a technology platform facilitating “social interaction among people in which they create, share, or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.” Because social media is so interactive, it tends to be very reinforcing; people use it to stimulate online conversations and get feedback about their activities, interests, and opinions. For this reason, it can lead to habitual, or addictive, posting and monitoring behaviors. Therefore, we define social media addiction as “the excessive use and habitual monitoring of social media manifested in compulsive usage that comes at the expense of other activities.” We found that 65% of adults check Facebook every day, 1 in every 7 minutes is spent on Facebook, and smartphone users check Facebook 14 times a day on average. When normal use crosses the line into addictive behavior, the resource use itself creates more stress due to its demand on time, effects withdrawal, lack of control, and negative consequences associated with its use.

Our results show that there is a path of addictive behaviors that hinder the ability to achieve work-family balance. Lack of work-family balance ultimately leads to declining job performance. As an individual becomes more addicted to social

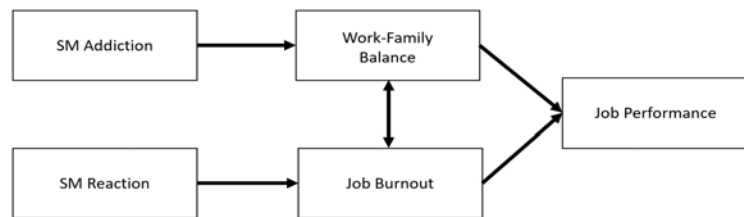


Figure 1. SM and Performance

media, the time and energy that would have otherwise been devoted to accomplishing expectations at work and at home are depleted in favor of spending that time and energy on social media. As a result, a real estate agent is less likely to be able to accomplish goals at work or in his or her family life, creating a distinct lack of balance in both domains.

### Impact of Social Media Reactions

Social media users may experience emotional reactions when reading other people’s posts because people post on social media for the primary purpose of getting reactions from others in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Therefore, we define these social media reactions as the “emotions that people experience in response to reading other people’s social media posts.”

The results of our study reveal that these emotional reactions, particularly in response to posts from colleagues, have the potential to influence work-related outcomes such as job burnout and ultimately job performance. This path is all about the emotional response to social media information and how that emotional response creates a cascading effect related to the depletion of emotional resources. For example, a strong anger reaction can increase blood pressure, heart rate, adrenaline, cortisol, and muscle tension, among other responses. Emotions may even have a

pervasive effect on mood. Respondents with strong reactions were more likely to report job burnout leading to decreased performance.

We also note a correlation between job burnout and work-family intersection. They operate both as predictors and consequences. As job burnout increases, work-family balance decreases, with the reverse also being true.

## **Practical Implications**

Our findings stand to make important practical contributions to real estate agency managers and employees alike. Agents may use social media to distract themselves from stressful or boring work situations or to procrastinate on work projects. Studies on compulsive Internet use suggest that some users become overly attached to using web-based applications, which can result in impairment at several levels, including psychological, social, and professional.

The path of addictive social media use to lack of work-life balance and ultimately degraded job performance suggests that the harmful effects of social media use can be managed by simple time management strategies. For example, rather than checking social media on an ongoing basis throughout the day, constraining social media time or putting time constraints on it may help real estate managers and employees better devote their time and energy to work-related activities that enhance their job performance. Agencies could support these efforts by reserving some time at the beginning or end of each day for social media or installing timers that start when social media apps are opened and notify users when an amount of time has passed. Encourage agents to find productive outlets, such as going on an afternoon walk, to reduce stress and boredom.

Understanding the relationship between social media use and job performance is just the first step for both managers and employees to combat the deleterious effects discussed above; practical changes must be implemented.

## **Recommended Reading**

Zivnuska, Suzanne, John R. Carlson, Dawn S. Carlson, Ranida B. Harris, and Kenneth J. Harris (2019), "Social Media Addiction and Social Media Reactions: The Implications for Job Performance," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 159(6), 746-760.

## **About the Authors**

### **Suzanne Zivnuska, PhD**

#### **Chair and Professor – Management Department, California State University**

Dr. Suzanne Zivnuska (PhD – California State University), Director of the Professional Consulting Program at Chico State, combines more than a decade of academic and consulting experience in management with real world experience in the health care industry. Suzanne has published more than 20 articles in top journals in her field in outlets such as *Human Relations*,

*Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, and *Career Development International*. She maintains an active consulting practice in human resource management and is committed to providing her students with practical, active learning experiences in the classroom.

**John R. Carlson, PhD**

**Associate Professor - Information Systems, Baylor University**

Dr. John Carlson (PhD – Florida State University) teaches desktop and mobile app development and has a longstanding interest in the impacts of software design on users and organizations. His research interests include the effects of computer-mediation on communication, decision-making, and workplace deception as well as the effects of social networking in the organization. John’s recent work has appeared in *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, the *Academy of Management Journal*, and *Computers in Human Behavior*.

**Dawn S. Carlson, PhD**

**H. R. Gibson Chair of Organizational Development – Management and Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship, Baylor University**

Dr. Dawn Carlson (PhD – Florida State University) studies workplace issues, such as abusive bosses and working mothers. Her work has been published in numerous journals such as the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, and the *Journal of Business Ethics*. She is co-author of a book “Beyond Juggling: Rebalancing Your Busy Life.” In 2009, Carlson won both the Outstanding Professor in Scholarship and Distinguished Professor awards from Baylor University. In 2018, she received the Distinguished Doctoral Alumna award from Florida State University, and in 2019, she was named one of the top extraordinary contributors to work and family research by *Community, Work, & Family*.

**Ranida B. Harris, PhD**

**Professor of Management Information Systems, Indiana University Southeast**

Dr. Ranida B. Harris’ (PhD – Florida State University) research interests include the effects of computer technologies on communication, performance, and decision making. Her publications appear in journals such as *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing*, *Journal of Information Systems Education*, and *Information Systems Education Journal*. Dr. Harris’ teaching interests include business computer applications, business data analytics, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Systems, systems analysis and design, and database management systems

**Kenneth J. Harris, PhD**

**Associate Professor of Management, Indiana University Southeast**

Dr. Kenneth Harris (PhD – Florida State University) has developed a national and international reputation for his groundbreaking research in the areas of leadership and abusive supervisory behaviors, and he is shaping the course and development of research in these areas. His work focuses on the effect that abusive supervisory relationships have on job performance, coworkers

and the workplace as a whole. His research is published in major journals of his field such as *Leadership Quarterly* and *The Journal of Social Psychology*, and his work has been cited not only in scholarly publications but also in popular media, such as Forbes.



# Ensuring Newcomer Agent Success

*Danny P. Claro, PhD, Carla Ramos, PhD, Gabriel R. Gonzalez, PhD, and Robert W. Palmatier, PhD*

Even as U.S. companies spend more than \$900 billion on building sales forces, salesperson turnover has reached 27%, and average tenures are as short as two years. According to the Sales Management Association, most firm-designed salesperson development efforts fall short, because newcomer socialization into a sales role largely results from self-directed activities that take place informally. Mitigating these trends within the real estate industry requires ensuring the early success of new agents. Through relationships with peers, real estate agents can obtain the information and support needed to master their job tasks, obtain role clarity, and fit in socially.

This article explores the impact of key agent-to-agent relationship characteristics on the success of real estate agents as they gain tenure in their firm. It first reveals the impact of relational tie changes over time, by providing evidence of two different effects of teaming (cooperative) and spanning (individualized) relational structures on salesperson sales growth over their tenure. The article also considers other factors including territory potential, headquarter distance, and agent education.

## Relational Ties

A relational tie refers to the link between two salespeople, which influences their actions. A key aspect of real estate agent ties is the directionality of the exchanges—reciprocal and unilateral ties.

*Reciprocal ties* occur when a real estate agent shares resources with a peer, who shares resources in return, commonly referred to as two-way interactions. These exchanges are established as people collaborate symmetrically and mutually share their deeper similarities, such as attitudes, knowledge, or experience. For example, one survey respondent stated, “In the (sales) training, I got very close to another agent. Whenever I need something, we share ideas. She also asks, but I ask more than she does, because she has been at the firm for a long time.”



*Unilateral ties* result when real estate agents’ views of their similarities are one-sided or when one party shares knowledge or experiences but the other does not. As one salesperson stated, “If

I'm going to meet a new customer and I have an idea about my colleagues' profile or know who's the expert in that type of customer, I go to them with these cases and ask what's the most suitable approach." In this case, one agent is viewed as an expert and the information exchange is one-sided.

## Relational Structure

Relational ties are embedded in larger relational structures—which we distinguish as *teaming* or *spanning*—and impart very different benefits to agents.

In a *teaming structure*, agents are part of a structure of highly interconnected salespeople who work as a cooperative entity. A teaming structure provides peer cooperation by configuring agent relational ties that are characterized by interdependence and strong norms, which motivate peers to exchange resources. This structure improves performance by encouraging collaboration and cooperation. For example, real estate agents in workgroups that embrace strong cross-selling group norms exhibit greater motivation to engage in cross-selling themselves, which makes them more likely to promote the firm's complete portfolio. Agents who maintain intrafirm relationships made of cooperative ties are much better able to coordinate intrafirm expertise and serve customers.

In a *spanning structure*, agents serve as a link between otherwise unconnected others and gain access to information and interpersonal influence. A spanning relational structure provides real estate agents with access to and control over additional resources. These agents take an intermediary position and leverage novel information, which motivates peers to exchange resources with them. Spanning research suggests the resulting benefits include access to and control over dispersed expertise and a capacity to influence peer salespeople. Agents who span peer networks through highly central managers can leverage diverse, competitive intelligence gained from those networks. Real estate agents who maintain a more diverse set of ties generate more innovative solutions for customers.

## Other Factors

### *Territory Potential*

Territory refers to the environment in which real estate agents must generate sales and realize performance objectives. Sales potential in the territory affects customer coverage, performance evaluations, rewards, and travel time. When potential sales in a territory increase, so do sales and growth opportunities, which makes it easier to close sales, facilitating socializing into the sales role. The agent can act more independently and rely less on social interactions with peers, needing their help less in terms of collaborative efforts or inputs for innovative solutions. In territories with high sales potential, there are enough opportunities for agents to find new sales and grow, decreasing the chance of conflict or the need to influence others. These benefits do not apply to territories with modest sales potential, where agents struggle to make sales.

### *Physical Proximity to Headquarters*

When located farther away from headquarters, agents are less dependent on non-redundant information or interpersonal influence to realize their sales goals. Real estate agents who occupy more peripheral positions in their firm tend to invest more in relationships with fellow peers who also are peripheral. Greater headquarter distance also can diminish identification with the firm or encourage out-group stereotyping.

### *Education Level*

Salespeople with more education have a greater capacity for critical thinking, effective problem solving, and learning. They can learn roles in the firm, organizational norms, and culture more quickly, rapidly acquiring role-specific knowledge, skills, and competencies. They also tend to be more knowledgeable about organizational practices in general and can successfully negotiate sales. As a result, the benefits of teaming likely diminish for well-educated real estate agents who can act independently, not relying on peer cooperation to carry out their work.

## **Managerial Implications**

Helping newcomers gain entry into a network of interconnected contacts is critical. In addition to one-to-one peer mentorship programs, firms might encourage multi-peer mentorship models to foster a teaming structure. Managers also need to help newcomers avoid isolation or sparse initial connections with peers, which would hinder their effective socialization and performance. A steep learning curve and associated workloads might increase the risk of isolation, so firms should consider explicitly scheduling activities in the office that involve other agents to grant newcomers more opportunities to interact with these peers.



Managers may also use our findings to identify effective newcomer relationship activities over time, initially focusing on building reciprocal exchanges to gain work task knowledge and role clarity quickly. Ways to encourage connections may include revealing newcomer backgrounds to peers, involving salespeople in more team-building exercises such as retreats off-site locations, designing sales training sessions that require more interaction, and pairing newcomers with high-ability peers to encourage direct observation and teaching.

To encourage longer tenured agents to join more spanning relational structures, managers should create opportunities for salespeople to connect with others outside their immediate social circles, such as arranging cross-territory collaborations to explore potential synergies. Agencies also can

proactively help tenured agents enter more unilateral exchanges, such that they solely send or receive information, to move them into more spanning structures.

Agents in territories with greater sales potential or who are farther away from HQ do not need the spanning benefits as much to reach their sales objectives. Agency decisions about sales territory allocations and designs can thus determine the effectiveness of spanning structures for a salesperson. Similarly, salespeople with more education and who already hold some crucial skills do not require teaming structures to the same extent to adapt to their role or join a workgroup. Those with less education should be strongly encouraged to leverage teaming structures to adjust to their role and gain task mastery.

These peer-to-peer interactions are essential in ensuring the success of new real estate agents in mastering their job tasks, obtaining role clarity, and fitting in socially.

### **Recommended Reading**

Claro, Danny P., Carla Ramos, Gabriel R. Gonzalez, and Robert W. Palmatier (2019), “Dynamic Effects of Newcomer Salespersons’ Peer Relational Exchanges and Structures on Performance,” *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2019.07.006>.

### **About the Authors**

#### **Danny P. Claro, PhD**

##### **Professor of Marketing, School of Business, Inspire Education and Research Institute**

Dr. Danny Claro (PhD – Wageningen University and Research Center) conducts research in the fields of sales management, sales networks, and relationship marketing in a B2B environment. He is a Scholarship Researcher participating in a Study on Productivity of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. His papers have been published in journals such as *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and *Journal of Supply Chain Management* among others.

#### **Carla Ramos, PhD**

##### **Assistant Professor, School of Business, Inspire Education and Research Institute**

Dr. Carla Ramos’s (PhD – University of Bath) research interests include business-to-business (B2B) marketing, sales force, industrial networks, services marketing, cognition and entrepreneurship. She has worked and taught marketing at a number of institutions such as the School of Economics of the University of Porto in Portugal, the Bordeaux Ecole de Management (BEM) in France, the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, and the Manchester Business School (MBS), University of Manchester in England. She has published her work in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of*

*Personal Selling and Sales Management*, the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, among others.

**Gabriel R. Gonzalez, PhD**

**Assistant Professor of Marketing, San Diego State University**

Dr. Gabriel Gonzalez's (PhD – Arizona State University) areas of research and expertise include the management of customer relationships, sales force management strategies, effective service infusion approaches for product manufacturing firms, and the effects of interpersonal networks among buying and selling firms on financial and relationship performance. Dr. Gonzalez has published extensively, and his research has appeared in leading journals such as the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, the *Journal of Services Marketing*, among others. His research has received numerous awards, such as the James M. Comer Award for the article making the best contribution to selling and sales management theory in the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*.

**Robert W. Palmatier, PhD**

**Professor of Marketing and John C. Narver Chair in Business Administration, University of Washington**

Prior to entering academia, Dr. Robert Palmatier (PhD – University of Missouri) held various industry positions, including President & Chief Operating Officer of C&K Components and European General Manager at Tyco-Raychem Corporation. He also served as a U.S. Navy Lieutenant onboard nuclear submarines. His research has appeared in *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, and *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. He is the editor-in-chief for the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* and Area Editor for *Journal of Marketing*. He has received the Harold H. Maynard, Lou W. Stern (3 times), MSI Young Scholar, Varadarajan Award for Early Contribution to Marketing Strategy Research, and the American Marketing Association Best Services Article awards. He has received numerous teaching awards for EMBA and MBA teaching including MBA Professor of Year, Robert M. Bowen EMBA Excellence in Teaching Awards (3 times), and PhD Student Mentoring Award (2 times).

# Creating Charisma

*Sandra Pauser, PhD, Udo Wagner, PhD, and Claus Ebster, PhD*

Selling success often depends on an agent’s ability to create favorable impressions; thus, the ability to manage client perceptions is of great importance. The literature almost unanimously stresses the importance of charisma as a prominent determinate for success within various disciplines, including sales.

Charisma stems from the Greek word *charismata*, which means “gift of grace,” implying that charisma is inborn characteristic. In modern thought, however, charisma is considered learnable. Charismatic individuals can convey messages in a convincing manner to charm their followers. Applying this concept to a personal selling context, we define charisma as the articulation of communication messages that enhance a salesperson’s appeal.



Our research identifies specific, learnable, and culturally appropriate displays of charismatic behavior as a means of enhancing client impressions and ultimately increasing sales.

## About our Study

Previous research in other social science disciplines has identified enhanced body movements as a driver of charisma. The results of our study extend previous findings, identifying specific nonverbal cues to use during the selling process. We measured and examined specific nonverbal behaviors which increase perceived charisma, an important driver of salesperson effectiveness, and thus buyers’ attitude toward the salesperson.

In the first of our two studies, salespeople from two different cultures pitched their respective products or services in a one-minute standardized setting. The individuals’ nonverbal behaviors, including body action and posture, were objectively coded using a time-locked coding scheme. In the second study, participants evaluated the videotaped sales presentations assessing the salesperson’s charisma and indicating their attitudes toward them. We then analyzed the coded body actions and postures and participant’s evaluation of the salesperson’s charisma, as well as attitudes towards them.



## Our Findings

Consistent with previous findings in personal selling and service marketing, we show that nonverbal communication matters in a personal selling context. Nonverbal messages enhance a salesperson's charismatic appeal, which in turn, leads to favorable attitudes towards the salesperson. Beyond that, our findings suggest that symmetrical and non-symmetrical arm actions and postures, depending on culture, have significant effects on charismatic appearance.

We expand prior literature by providing evidence that charisma is culture-specific in the sense that symmetrical or asymmetrical gesturing yields contrary outcomes. While charisma is a universal phenomenon, the results of this cultural comparison indicate that nonverbal behaviors that predict charisma in a sales conversation are of particular importance to international sales representatives. Within low-gesture cultures, such as the United States or Central Europe, an emphasis should be placed on symmetrical arm postures, actions and functions (see Figure 1<sup>1</sup> and Figure 2<sup>1</sup>). In contrast, asymmetrical movements should be emphasized in high-gesture cultures, such as Israel (see Figure 3<sup>1</sup>).



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Please note, sales professionals located in high-gesture countries should exercise caution when applying the findings of previous studies on nonverbal charismatic behaviors, as many prior studies have neglected to consider cultural context.

## Managerial Implications

Our findings show that specific, learnable displays of charismatic behaviors can be used as a means of enhancing client impressions. Considering that nonverbal communication messages are often encoded or decoded unconsciously, our research provides managers with guidelines on ways for enhancing awareness of nonverbal communication messages by strategically making use of symmetrical and asymmetrical nonverbal behaviors to enhance favorable client impressions. As with all learned behavior, practice makes perfect. The first step to incorporating charismatic behavior into your sales is to begin practicing.

Within your agency, encourage and train your sales force to use symmetric or asymmetric communication tactics, depending on cultural setting. Find low-stake situations in which to practice, such as sales training sessions. Take time out of your day to try out some role play sale pitches with a colleague. Practice on your own by recording yourself then reviewing and critiquing your pitch. Embrace feedback as you hone your movements.

As noted above, agencies within low-gesture cultures, such as the United States or Central Europe, should put emphasis on symmetrical arm postures, actions and functions. In high-gesture cultures, asymmetrical movements should be emphasized. Take the time to research the culture in which you are working to properly align your symmetrical and asymmetrical movements with your geographic location.

## **Conclusions**

As you begin incorporating symmetrical and non-symmetrical gestures into your repertoire of sales routines, the attitude of your clients will be positively impacted. Positive attitudes among clients will ultimately result in more effective sales.

US firms spend on average \$1,252 annually on an employee's training and learning expenditures. Researchers and managers clearly understand that effective selling requires the salesperson's ability to manage favorable impressions. Do not underestimate small changes of posture and movement that you can implement in order to improve customer perception at zero cost.

## **Recommended Reading**

Pauser, Sandra, Udo Wagner, and Claus Ebster (2018), "An Investigation of Salespeople's Nonverbal Behaviors and Their Effect on Charismatic Appearance and Favorable Consumer Responses," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 38(3), 344-369.

## **Reference**

1. Pauser, Sandra, Udo Wagner, and Claus Ebster (2018), "An Investigation of Salespeople's Nonverbal Behaviors and Their Effect on Charismatic Appearance and Favorable Consumer Responses," *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 38(3), 344-369.

## **About the Authors**

### **Sandra Pauser, PhD**

#### **Faculty of Business, Economics, and Statistics, University of Vienna, Chair of Marketing**

Dr. Sandra Pauser (PhD – University of Vienna) wrote her doctoral dissertation in the area of personal selling, which was honored with the scientific award (EHI retail institute) and won the premier award at the KSMS doctoral dissertation competition. Besides focusing on personal selling and sales management, her research, published in international journals, concentrates on consumer behavior and advertising.



**Udo Wagner, PhD**

**Faculty of Business, Economics, and Statistics, Chair of Marketing, University of Vienna**

Dr. Udo Wagner's (PhD – Technical University Vienna) is full professor of Marketing. His research achievements are reflected in more than 250 publications concentrating on marketing with an emphasis on marketing research, retailing and models of consumer behavior. Professor Wagner has published in renowned international journals such as the *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Marketing Science*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *European Journal of Operational Research*, and *OR Spectrum*.

**Claus Ebster, PhD**

**Faculty of Business, Economics, and Statistics, Chair of Marketing, University of Vienna**

In addition to his teaching role, Dr. Claus Ebster (PhD – University of Vienna) is the president of Market Mentor, a consulting company specializing in marketing strategy, consumer research and store design. As a researcher, Claus has focused on studies related to store design, environmental psychology, merchandising and sales techniques, which he has published in international academic marketing journals.

# Office Politics: Training Ground for Adaptive Sellers

*Takuma Kimura, PhD, Belén Bande, PhD, and Pilar Fernández-Ferrín, PhD*

Excellent salespeople are not bound to a script. That makes an excellent robot. Instead, excellent salespeople can adapt their sales approaches to meet customers' needs and make quality



recommendations. They can sense what a customer truly wants before the customer is able to put it into words. Excellent salespeople can uncover desires concerning which customers were unaware and present solutions that fulfill those desires. They can turn anxiety into expectancy. They turn fear into excitement. Adaptive selling is the goal.

Our study builds on other studies that established the positive effects of adaptive selling on sales performance.<sup>1</sup> To examine the effects and the interactions between adaptive selling, political skill, and intrinsic motivation, we sampled 249 matched supervisor-salesperson pairs consisting of 145 supervisors and 249 salespersons and applied a three-dimensional measure of sales performance.<sup>2</sup> Supervisors measured salespeople by individual task proficiency, individual task adaptivity, and individual task proactivity. Although much research has been focused on a salesperson's externally directed behavior, we found that both political skill and intrinsic motivation have moderating effects on adaptive selling and, derivatively, sales performance. In other words, intraorganizational skills are also important for successful adaptive selling. In light of this evidence, we recommend that every sales manager assist his/her salespeople with developing intrapreneurial abilities—i.e. intraorganizational political skills and intrinsic motivation.

## Politics Makes Perfect

While some evidence shows that adaptive selling techniques improve sales performance, much of the evidence is still inconsistent. One study found that adaptive selling was positively related to an individual salesperson's subjective performance and his/her sales data.<sup>3</sup> However, another study found that there is an insignificant relationship between adaptive selling and sales performance.<sup>4</sup> Many studies focus on the relationship between externally directed (i.e. customer-directed) activities and sales performance, but few studies have focused on internally directed (i.e. office politics) activities on sales performance.

Politically skilled salespeople have the ability to understand others and use this understanding to exert influence on others. They can develop useful personal networks that provide resources for

work-related tasks.<sup>5</sup> They also experience better self-understanding and can effectively interpret social cues from others.<sup>6</sup> This helps them navigate office relationships with coworkers and managers as well as improve customer interactions.

### **Motivation from the Inside Out**

Our findings show that adaptive selling has a positive effect on salespeople's task proficiency, task adaptivity, and task proactivity. However, our results also show that the positive relationship between adaptive selling and these positive outcomes is contingent on political skill for both task adaptivity and task proactivity. We also found a positive relationship between adaptive selling and individual task proficiency when intrinsic motivation was high but not when motivation was low. What this finding implies is that political skill only enhances the positive effects of adaptive selling on task proficiency when salespeople are highly motivated to improve task proficiency. For those with low motivation, political skill reduced the positive effect of motivation on task proficiency, suggesting that some salespeople are more reliant on political skills to manage perceptions of success than on actual performance.

If salespeople can communicate sincerity to their colleagues, they can also elicit trust from both managers and customers. Therefore, salespeople who can practice their political skills in the office are more likely to get the foundational resources they need from managers, enabling salespeople to see better results in the field.

Our study found that salespersons high in political skill had particular aptitude for task adaptivity and task proactivity, but not necessarily for task proficiency. A possible explanation for this is that salespersons with high political skill can adapt well when they are required to, but they may lack the motivation for proficient and proactive sales behaviors. Political behavior is discretionary, so some politically skilled individuals do not engage in political activity. They must have political will to do so.<sup>7</sup> Since all three metrics are needed to determine sales performance, we suggest that a second moderator of adaptive selling is intrinsic motivation.

Self-motivated individuals are dedicated to excellent performance. When individuals perceive the personal benefits of political engagement in the office, those that are self-motivated are more likely to involve themselves in exercising political skill geared toward improving performance. Political engagement is a self-determination activity. Self-determination theory posits that a high level of intrinsic motivation increases an individual's adaptive abilities.<sup>8</sup> In general, those that are high in political skill experience higher levels of task proficiency, task proactivity, and task adaptivity. However, in our study, self-motivated salespersons with political skills used intraorganizationally were able to improve their use of adaptive selling techniques the most. They were the top performers. When considering new salespeople for your team, it might be best to hire for motivation and train for political skill.

## The Training Grounds

Managers need to educate their salespeople about the benefits of engagement in adaptive behavior and political skill inside the organization. We recommend that the onboarding process for new salespeople include training for building personal networks within your organization to find information and resources that are valuable for sales activity. Do not limit all training to customer-related skills. Train your people to connect and integrate with other organizational members at all levels. Lecture-style training is not recommended;<sup>9</sup> instead, utilize experiential training. This is the training ground for selling in the field, so replicate the scenario as closely as possible. Others have suggested that is an effective way to train political skill.<sup>10</sup> We find this to be a good supplement for experiential learning in the office. Pair your top performers with those who could benefit from personal coaching. This can be a reminder of the importance of political skill training after the onboarding process is complete.



Real estate transactions are complex. For most customers, their home is the largest purchase of their lifetime. Agents meet multiple times at different locations for one sale that may take months to complete. Customers will want to know as much as they can about a home, and priorities will shift as they learn more about themselves during the home-buying process. Salespeople with excellent adaptive selling skills thrive in a complex sales environment. Good

agents truly understand their customers. Good agents are self-motivated, politically-skilled salespeople. If you are a manager in a real-estate brokerage who wants better sales, consider some political training before that next company Christmas party.

## Recommended Reading

Kimura, Takuma, Belén Bande, and Pilar Fernández-Ferrín (2019), “The Roles of Political Skill and Intrinsic Motivation in Performance Prediction of Adaptive Selling,” *Industrial Marketing Management*, 77, 198-208.

## References

1. Weitz, Barton A., Harish Sujana, and Mita Sujana (1986), “Knowledge, Motivation, and Adaptive Behavior: A Framework for Improving Selling Effectiveness,” *Journal of Marketing*, 50(4), 174-191.

2. Griffin, Mark A., Andrew Neal, and Sharon K. Parker (2007), “A New Model of Work Role Performance: Positive Behavior in Uncertain and Interdependent Contexts,” *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(2), 327-347.
3. Park, Jeong-Eun and Betsy B. Holloway (2003), “Adaptive Selling Behavior Revisited: An Empirical Examination of Learning Orientation, Sales Performance, and Job Satisfaction,” *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 23(3), 239-251.
4. Keillor, Bruce D., R. Stephen Parker, and Charles E. Pettijohn (2000), “Relationship-Oriented Characteristics and Individual Salesperson Performance,” *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 15(1), 7-22.
5. Wei, Li-Qun, Jun Liu, Yuan-Yi Chen, and Long-Zeng Wu (2010), “Political Skill, Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi and Career Prospects in Chinese Firms,” *Journal of Management Studies*, 49(2), 381-402.
6. Bandura, Albert (1991), “Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Regulation,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 248-287.
7. Mintzberg, Henry (1983), *Power in and Around Organizations*, Prentice-Hall.: NJ.
8. Treadway, Darren C., Wayne A. Hochwater, Charles J. Kacmar, and Gerald R. Ferris (2005), “Political Will, Political Skill, and Political Behavior,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(3), 229-245.
9. Bolander, Willy, Cinthia B. Santonino, Douglas E. Hughes, and Gerald R. Ferris (2015), “Social Networks Within Sales Organizations: Their Development and Importance for Salesperson Performance,” *Journal of Marketing*, 79(6), 1-16.
10. Blass, Fred R. and Gerald R. Ferris (2007), “Leader Reputation: The Role of Mentoring, Political Skill, Contextual Learning, and Adaptation,” *Human Resource Management*, 46(1), 5-19.

## About the Authors

### **Takuma Kimura, PhD**

#### **Professor of Organizational Behavior, Hosei University**

Dr. Takuma Kimura’s (PhD – University of Tokyo) research interests include organizational politics, political skill, and ethical leadership. He teaches courses in business and management studies and received the Top Reviewer Award in multidisciplinary research from Publons. He has been published in the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *European Management Journal*, and *Journal of Business Ethics*, among others.

### **Belén Bande, PhD**

#### **Associate Professor of Marketing, University of Navarra**

Dr. Belén Bande’s (PhD – University of Santiago de Compostela) research interests include sales management, corporate social responsibility, and consumer ethnocentrism. She has been published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal*

*of Business Research, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, Journal of Business to Business Marketing and European Journal of Marketing, among others.*

**Pilar Fernández-Ferrín, PhD**

**Associate Professor of Marketing, University of the Basque Country - UPV/EHU**

Dr. Pilar Fernández-Ferrín's (PhD – University of Santiago de Compostela) research interests include CSR and consumer behavior, marketing, and business administration. She was awarded the Emerald Literati Award for Excellence in 2016 and has been published in *Industrial Marketing Management, Food Quality and Preference, Journal of Product Innovation Management, Journal of Cleaner Production, International Journal of Emerging Markets, and Technovation*, among others.

# Reclaiming Competitive Advantage with Web Design

Alexander Bleier, PhD, Colleen M. Harmeling, PhD, and Robert W. Palmatier, PhD

In today's complex, Internet-driven real estate market, some agents have been left wondering where their competitive advantage has gone. Agents once held specialized access to listings and



were well-acquainted with information about pricing and quality of life in certain areas. With the quick availability of all these datapoints and more on the Internet, some buyers may feel they no longer need the specialized services of a real estate agent. Have you considered how the content and design of your web site might help you reclaim competitive advantage, while connecting with potential clients on a deeper level?

We conducted extensive e-commerce research through two studies to understand how the web design elements you use impact the dimensions of customer experience and help drive sales. Our research focused on consumer products sold through Amazon.com or similar platforms, but we believe the results found in our studies may help you showcase homes and refine the customer dimension you intend to impact.

## Selling Without a Physical Store

Real estate agents encounter the same issue many other salespeople face—selling without a brick and mortar store. When your first and predominant sales platform is the Internet, what concepts govern the design of the online store? Just as a fresh renovation of a store front will showcase products differently, we needed concepts for how to showcase products online. We found that “renovating” these online product listings impacts four distinct dimensions of the consumer experience; cognitive, affective, social, and sensory. To build the overall customer experience, we tested combinations of 13 easy-to-implement web design elements. Web design elements studied include linguistic style, descriptive detail, bulleted features, return policy information, cropped product feature photos, lifestyle pictures of the products in use, the size of pictures, product videos, customer star ratings, expert endorsements, comparison matrices, recommendation agents, and content filters.

As you consider the way these four dimensions impact your site, keep these definitions in mind. Your site's *informativeness*, or cognitive dimension is measured by how much helpful information a visitor can draw from the page. The *entertainment* or affective experience of your

website is measured by how much pleasure the page brings to users (regardless of whether it helps facilitate shopping). Your website's *social* presence is not necessarily connected to social media, but rather is the human connection, warmth, and sociability of your page. Finally, the *sensory* appeal of your website is closely connected to how you stimulate a user's senses. How does your current website impact cognition, entertainment, social and sensory needs? How can meeting these dimensions help boost sales? Our studies aimed to find out.

### **Study One: The Impact of Web Design Elements on Dimension and Sales**

We carried out two studies to understand the importance of these four dimensions, test which of the 13 web design elements we studied created experiences reflecting these dimensions, and determine how a brand's trustworthiness and type of product impact these effects. For our first study, we partnered with four Fortune 1000 companies in various industries and an online content agency to create mock Amazon.com product pages for 16 products. We manipulated the previously listed 13 web design elements as "present" or "not present" on these pages, creating 256 unique mock web pages for 16 different products.

For the experiment, we randomly presented one of the 256 product pages to 10,470 participants recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. With every web page, the participants were asked to spend at least 45 seconds exploring, then complete a questionnaire to understand demographics, the effects of each manipulated design element, and most importantly, scales to measure intent to purchase and the four experience dimensions. As a corollary to this study, we also worked to understand if the products we were utilizing were perceived as "search" or "experience" products—that is, can customers easily assess the product based on factual information listed online (i.e., search qualities), or does the product require direct sensory assessments (i.e., experience qualities)? Four hundred fifty-two respondents completed questionnaires to measure these differences. Similarly, 341 respondents completed questionnaires to help us understand the trustworthiness of the brands we utilized.

Results of this extensive study are plentiful. Concerning the four dimensions, *entertaining experiences* were the most effective, followed by *informative* and *social dimensions*, with *sensory appeal* trailing behind. With respect to specific web design elements, return policy information and expert endorsements do not contribute to any of the four dimensions.

When creating more *informative experiences*, bulleted feature lists, comparison matrices, descriptive detail, larger pictures, product videos, a recommendation agent, and a lifestyle picture were found meaningful, in order from more to less effective.

Nine elements impacted *entertainment value* of a web page, in order of most to least effective: picture size, customer star rating, a comparison matrix, bulleted features, descriptive detail, product videos, conversational language, and a cropped photo of product features.



Ten items proved relevant in creating *social presence* on a web page: picture size, linguistic style, customer star ratings, product videos, descriptive detail, comparison matrices, bulleted features, lifestyle pictures, and product feature crops were important, in descending order of effectiveness.



Finally, ten elements were found relevant when considering *sensory appeal*, in descending order: picture size, product video, linguistic style, lifestyle pictures, customer star ratings, a comparison matrix, descriptive detail, bulleted features, product feature crops, and recommendation agents.

Phrased in simpler terms, more informative experiences require outcome-oriented information, working

best with search products and trusted brands. Bulleted features, comparison matrices, descriptive detail, and recommendation agents help the most for this dimension. More entertaining experiences work best for those brands which are not yet trusted. Most well-executed web design elements will increase the entertainment value of your website. More social experiences communicate human presence and are effective with experience products. A conversational linguistic style and lifestyle pictures are much more effective in this dimension than elsewhere. Sensory experiences connect with users on a deeper level through their senses. Product videos and product feature cropped images are especially important design elements for this dimension.

## Study Two: Validating our Findings with Actual Sales

Study one resulted in a primary framework for designing online customer experiences, customized to specific products or brand factors. Study two, then, resulted in a test of external validity to the findings of study one. That is, we continued in partnership with one of the firms we had previously utilized to manipulate their actual Amazon.com product pages for two search products. We studied their sales volume before making changes, then gathered four weeks of data after changing the pages to utilize web design elements more suited to informative or social experiences. The sales of the two manipulated products were compared to a control product, and our partner firm provided access to Amazon's Premium Analytics for these pages. We added additional statistical controls to address potential bias.

Because these were real world sales analyses, it is important to note the level of sales for each product prior to the change in the webpage design. While the control and informative product page had statistically similar sales, the product to be targeted for a social experience achieved higher sales before we manipulated the pages. To account for this, we used a difference-in-

differences approach that allowed us to observe the change in sales compared to the control condition. As we expected, after the launch of our web design changes, sales increased for the informative page, decreased for the social page, and showed a slight nonsignificant decrease for the control condition. These results verified the findings of our first study: when selling a search product, more informative experiences improve sales, while presenting a more social experience for these products has a detrimental effect on sales. When customers are motivated to search and learn more about the products they are buying, they respond more positively to an educational, informative approach than a socially geared page. Therefore, choosing your web design elements is not a “one size fits all” issue, but rather, web design elements should be carefully selected depending on the nature of your product and brand which dictate the relevance of different experience dimensions.

### **Study Implications**

Previous studies had assumed that web design elements primarily conveyed cognitive and entertaining information. Our studies showed that sellers instead should also consider other dimensions in their web design such as social and sensory dimensions. Surprisingly, social dimensions of web design are shown to just as strongly impact purchase response as informative dimensions. As customers yearn for human contact in a digital world, these needs should be considered by sellers as they consider adding features such as AI chatbots and user-generated content in their online stores.

Managerial conclusions for these studies are straightforward. First, sellers should understand whether the products they are selling fit categories of “search” items—which can be evaluated based on factual information—or “experience” items which need more direct physical, sensory interaction. If sellers determine that their products are search items, then a more informative approach, with clearly delineated bullet points and descriptive language will be helpful. If a seller is using an online platform to sell a more experiential product, more social and sensory approaches with large lifestyle pictures, videos, and conversational language may increase sales. In all, we advocate for more care and thought to be put into the online product listing. Just because your web site has the capability to have certain design elements does not necessarily mean those design elements will lead to higher sales, and no amount of online novelty can hide poorly written descriptions and low-quality product pictures or video. Therefore, sellers should use the results of our studies to determine which design elements will showcase each product best; then, produce and employ excellent content that leads to sales.

We have summarized our findings and suggestions on when and how to emphasize the four website experience dimensions in the following table:

	Experience Dimensions			
	Informative	Entertaining	Social	Sensory
<b>When to emphasize:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pages for search products</li> <li>• Trusted brands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pages for less trusted brands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pages for experience products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pages for experience products</li> </ul>
<b>How to emphasize:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide descriptive detail by adding product attributes</li> <li>• Compare to other related products</li> <li>• Suggest other related products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No particular design element has its strongest effect on this experience dimension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use conversational style, adding adjectives and pronouns</li> <li>• Include a lifestyle picture</li> <li>• Avoid content filters, which require customers to decide what content appears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a video with audio and visuals to present product</li> <li>• Use a product feature crop that highlights key characteristic by zooming in on an attribute</li> </ul>

### Real Estate Implications

Though real estate properties are not yet available on Amazon.com, many of the same findings could be applied to a real estate agent’s web site design. First, understand what kind of buyers you and your properties usually attract; then spend time with every property you list considering what kind of buying experience is most appropriate. For example, you might ask how trusted your name is in the local market. If you have carefully built a local brand which inspires trust, our findings suggest clients may be willing to process more information and benefit from a cognitive experience. Similarly, if you conclude that a property you are listing may better fit the “search” category, as clients show flexibility in their preferred home type, other cognitive experiences may be more beneficial in driving sales. As mentioned before, informational web pages are best designed with bulleted feature lists, descriptive detail, and comparison matrices.

On the other hand, if you are a newer or less-trusted name in the local market, we suggest focusing on designing more entertaining web pages which engage client attention. For example, large pictures of a property or the dramatization of sales through prominent customer star ratings could be helpful. If you discern that a particular property more closely fits our label of “experience” products, targeting more social and sensory experiences with web design may be beneficial. To create these experiences, our findings suggest that conversational language, “lifestyle” pictures of the property in use, and videos may be the most helpful in helping clients envision themselves living in such a beautiful and prestigious home.

You may notice that our findings don't call for a complete, expensive overhaul of your website or for you to purchase cutting edge new web design elements. Indeed, we completed these studies using mock Amazon websites and with actual Amazon web pages: powerful, but not particularly groundbreaking examples of innovative web design. Our studies show that you don't have to have a particularly new or creative site to increase sales; rather, you can use the site you already have and simple web design elements you already know how to use in smarter ways to target different demographics. Rather than throwing every fancy new web trick at an e-commerce site, we encourage you to save that time, and invest it in creating better strategic content to showcase through simple, targeted web design elements. With a bit of intentional work and a few simple changes to what you put on individual web pages, you can target potential buyers and reclaim some competitive advantage in this client focused market.

### **Recommended Reading**

Bleier, Alexander, Colleen M. Harmeling, Robert W. Palmatier (2019), "Creating Effective Online Customer Experiences," *Journal of Marketing*, 83(2), 98-119.

### **About the Authors**

#### **Alexander Bleier, PhD**

##### **Assistant Professor of Marketing, Frankfurt School of Finance & Management**

Dr. Alexander Bleier's (PhD – University of Cologne) primary research interests lie at the intersection of digital marketing, customer relationship management, and consumer decision making. A particular focus concerns the investigation of marketing communication and personalization strategies. His work has appeared in leading academic and practitioner journals such as *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, and *Harvard Business Manager*. Before entering academia, he gained practical experience with two international top-management consultancies and a major retail and banking system provider as well as the German-Argentine Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

#### **Colleen M. Harmeling, PhD**

##### **Assistant Professor of Marketing and Dean's Emerging Scholar, Florida State University**

Dr. Colleen Harmeling's (PhD – Saint Louis University) research focuses on customer relationship development, managing key events, and facilitating customer engagement and brand advocacy. Her research has appeared in *Journal of Marketing*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *MSI Working Paper Series*, and has been presented at numerous marketing conferences. She has co-authored book chapters on relationship development and customer engagement. Her work on online engagement strategies has been funded by the Marketing Science Institute. She has provided consulting and worked on collaborative research projects with firms in various industries including Emerson Electric, Belkin, Wells Fargo, SC Johnson, Schneider Electric, and World Vision. Colleen has taught

undergraduate and graduate marketing courses including Marketing Strategy, Marketing Management, Consumer Behavior, and Marketing Research. Before entering academia, Colleen worked as the community relations manager for Barnes and Noble where she specialized in event marketing, sales management, customer relationship development, and government contracting. Colleen has additional experience working in non-profit marketing, sponsorship management, and tradeshow marketing.

**Robert W. Palmatier, PhD**

**Professor of Marketing and John C. Narver Chair of Business Administration, University of Washington**

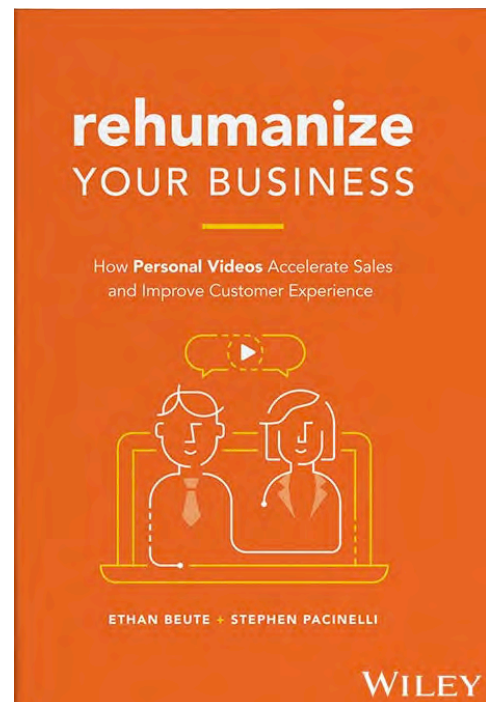
Prior to entering academia, Dr. Robert Palmatier (PhD – University of Missouri) held various industry positions, including President & Chief Operating Officer of C&K Components and European General Manager at Tyco-Raychem Corporation. He also served as a U.S. Navy Lieutenant onboard nuclear submarines. His research has appeared in *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, and *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. He is the editor-in-chief for the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* and Area Editor for *Journal of Marketing*. He has received the Harold H. Maynard, Lou W. Stern (3 times), MSI Young Scholar, Varadarajan Award for Early Contribution to Marketing Strategy Research, and the American Marketing Association Best Services Article awards. He has received numerous teaching awards for EMBA and MBA teaching including MBA Professor of Year, Robert M. Bowen EMBA Excellence in Teaching Awards (3 times), and PhD Student Mentoring Award (2 times).

# INSIDER: Rehumanize Your Business

Maria Arauz, MBA

Do you use email every day for work? Most of us do. Today, email is the standard method of business communication. However, when you are trying to reach new customers or close a deal, traditional emails do a poor job in getting across what makes you a great real estate agent. How can you overcome this problem? In *Rehumanize Your Business: How Personal Videos Accelerate Sales and Improve Customer Experience*, authors Ethan Beute and Steve Pacinelli present a solution: restoring a face-to-face element through personal video.

Personal video refers to simple video you can use to reach out to customers—primarily via email, but also through texts and social media. These videos are not highly produced, polished marketing videos; rather, they are authentic, imperfect videos of yourself meant to create and cultivate relationships. Video allows customers to see and read your emotions, which helps build rapport and trust and makes you more approachable than if you sent a plain text message or email.



## THINK POINT #1: How Personal Video Makes a Difference

Personal videos can be impactful. Sending videos results in significantly more and better responses, lead conversions, and referrals. In fact, authors Beute and Pacinelli explain that, according to a survey of 500 customers at BombBomb (a video email marketing platform), after sending at least 10 videos, 81% received more responses and 68% saw an increase in lead conversion.

Video makes a big difference because this movement is still very young. Imagine if you received a video in your inbox where you are greeted by name with a friendly smile and a wave. It is certainly out of the ordinary. It breaks a pattern, leading to increased attention and action. People do not expect to receive a personal video, and, when they do, they are surprised, delighted, and respond favorably. Video allows you to differentiate yourself by proving that you work differently and display a higher level of care.

Video also helps you better connect and persuade. Instead of hiding your personality and interpersonal skills behind a voicemail or email, you are showcasing these strengths when you use video. Like with face-to-face communication, with video you are able to communicate more

clearly, influence more effectively, and convert at a higher rate because *you* become central to your message.

But... how time consuming is it to make these videos? You may be surprised to learn that it is almost always faster than sending an email. Because you do not have to worry about checking your grammar, looking for typos, and organizing your ideas to craft the perfect email that is not too pushy but still persuasive, hitting “Record” and talking to the other person through video is usually faster.

Personal videos are similar to voicemails in that they do not require a script and are simple and conversational. At the same time, people can play a video at their convenience, unlike when they receive a regular phone call, making video less intrusive and more respectful of their time. Markedly, video is superior to voicemail because it includes elements that cannot be delivered through faceless communication.

### **THINK POINT #2: The Right Time to Send a Personal Video**

So, when is the right time to use video? The authors mention 10 situations that are ideal. Prospecting is one of them. As previously mentioned, video improves results by helping you differentiate, build trust, and catch the attention of the recipient. This is especially true when you are sending one-on-one videos, but it can also work with automated videos. If you cannot justify all custom sends due to volume or price, automated videos made for specific lead sources, such as when a person requests a quote, are an alternative. Even if true personal video is more effective, you are still leveraging relational benefits of video to generate a response.

Another instance that is ideal for sending video is to express gratitude. Seeing the words “thank you,” on an email is so common that their genuine tone is easily lost. In contrast, to say “thank you” with a smile, eye contact, and kind, spoken words brings back warm, human elements missing in text and, thus, conveys your sincere gratitude better. Expressing appreciation effectively is important because it helps establish, maintain, and advance relationships. A “thank you” video is, in fact, one of the easiest and highest value videos you can send.

There are eight other instances that are perfect for sending video, including to nurture leads and to share bad news or an apology. All of these situations benefit from the face-to-face element and convenience of video, which help build relationships better than faceless, digital messages. Video is a great method to incorporate in a healthy mix of communications as it humanizes and diversifies your touches.

### **THINK POINT #3: You Can Start Today**

There are several ways you can start sending video emails: the screenshot method, the mobile method, and the pro method. All of these approaches have their pros and cons. For example, with

the mobile method, video attachments will be large, but it is very convenient, since all you need is to record and send videos from your phone. The screenshot method, which involves embedding a screenshot of your video that links to your website or YouTube channel, is inexpensive but requires more steps, while the pro method, or hiring a third-party video management company, provides several benefits, including tracking and analytic capabilities, at a cost similar to that of traditional email marketing platforms.



The bottom line, though, is that you can start sending video emails today with any of these approaches. You should start simple: pick one or two scenarios in which you commit to send a video email. For example, to say “thank you,” or if someone gives you a referral. As you send more of these types of videos, you will get better, gain more confidence, learn what works, and refine your approach, eventually being able to add other scenarios, one at a time. This

deliberate execution will help you get started and grow naturally.

As you get started, remember that these videos don’t have to be perfect. In real conversations, you don’t get do-overs. Video should be similar. The more authentic your video is, the more you add a human quality to your message and the better you will be able to connect.

## Conclusion

As authors Beute and Pacinelli’s put it, “We’ve relied too long on faceless digital communication to get important and valuable jobs done.” Video is a great alternative that adds back human elements to your message and helps improve your work communications and results. *Rehumanize Your Business: How Personal Videos Accelerate Sales and Improve Customer Experience* is an excellent guide on how to start using personal video to do just that. If you are already using video, this book is also a great resource to learn best practice and ways to further improve your opens, plays, and replies. In short, Beute and Pacinelli’s book is a useful read filled with anecdotes and lessons to help you make the most of video in your everyday communications.

## Recommended Reading

Beute, Ethan and Stephen Pacinelli (2019), *Rehumanize Your Business: How Personal Videos Accelerate Sales and Improve Customer Experience*, Wiley.



## **About the Author**

### **Maria Arauz, MBA Baylor University**

Maria Arauz earned her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Towson University and her MBA from Baylor University. Before beginning graduate school, Maria served in roles for corporations such as Procter & Gamble and Dell. She is currently a Project Manager at Dell.

# INSIDER: Conversational Marketing

Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA



Picture walking down the street and seeing a beautiful store. You've seen ads for this store; they sell a product you're interested in buying; and the storefront looks attractive. As you walk through the door though, you look around and are shocked to find no salesperson—just a few tables of brochures about products available. Where a cash register might normally be, you see a sign that says “Leave your name and number, and we'll call you when we can.” How interested would you be in buying from this store? Now, take an honest look at your sales website. Is it much different?

For many years, the marketing and sales playbook for those who sell online has been the same—describe the property or product in detail, throw in a few pictures, then have a form for potential clients to fill out expressing their interest. These online forms were revolutionary years ago, but the process seems antiquated in today's online culture.

If you already have a potential customer on your website, why make them wait for you to respond to an email days from now, when you could have a conversation with them right now?

In their book *Conversational Marketing: How the World's Fastest Growing Companies Use Chatbots to Generate Leads 24/7/365 (And How You Can Too)*, David Cancel and Dave Gerhardt share why online conversational marketing creates a better, more natural, and more profitable sales climate. By the end of this book, even small, one-employee businesses will be encouraged to add conversational marketing to their website, supported by chatbots and a new paradigm for online sales in our current context.

## THINK POINT #1: Your Clients Would Rather Talk Now (And You Would Too)

If you're like many busy agents, there are probably several emails sitting in your inbox, waiting to be read, deleted, or acted upon. Though email is an invaluable tool, you probably don't use it to plan dinner with a friend or check on your kids during the day. You likely use Facebook Messenger or iMessage to respond quickly and efficiently. What if your initial conversations with clients could be more of a friendly chat than an endless chain of emails?

Cancel and Gerhardt spend much of their book showing how readers can do just that. They do not advocate getting rid of your email address or phone number; instead, the authors propose adding a live chat widget, right there on your website, as your primary initial form of client

contact. In this method, simple issues are resolved quickly; more complex issues can receive a scheduled video call appointment with the client within the next day or two; and clients leave your site feeling valued and worth your time and attention.

Of course, the technology behind implementing live chat on your website can seem intimidating, but modern chat widgets can easily integrate into your pre-existing systems. The authors explain that chat widgets can be implemented in WordPress or SquareSpace-powered websites easily; they even suggest integrating chats into the messaging services you may already use at work, such as Slack. Even more amazingly though, some chat services can integrate seamlessly with your sales system, such as Salesforce, and make appointments in your Outlook calendar. There is a learning curve, but we mastered it with email 25 years ago, and can do it again with quick messaging.

### **THINK POINT #2: You Can't Always be Available (But a Chatbot Can!)**

The problem, of course, with instant messaging, is that you are not always available. Unless you have a dedicated 24-hour virtual receptionist staff trained and ready to field complex questions on your website, there will be times when humans simply can't get to a smartphone or computer to reply to a client. What are you to do about chats in those times when you are at a property showing, in a meeting, or at home and wish not to be disturbed?

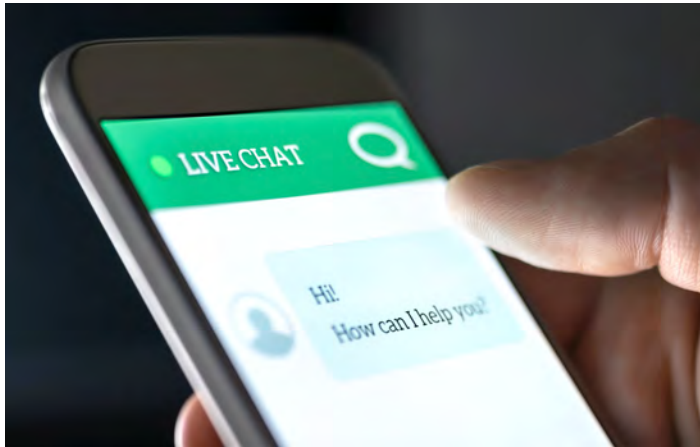
Cancel and Gerhardt suggest intelligent chat bots for your site. These bots will not replace human contact—these bots are coworkers. A chat bot can be trained to capture the kind of basic information you would gather as you initiate a conversation, such as name, business needs, and contact information, and they could then use openings in your calendar to book a meeting. Chat bots can also work as a sort of gatekeeper. A chatbot can be trained to triage initial conversations, answer basic questions, schedule appointments, and direct clients to the appropriate department without your input. The authors emphasize that these bots should present on the site as very obviously non-human, so that your clients don't feel deceived. This does not mean, however, that every response a chatbot gives has to sound robotic. The chatbot should take on the same kind of language the humans on your website will use—professional but friendly, at times playful, if that fits your company culture.

Again, this concept may seem new, or so technically advanced that you could never implement it well. With today's technology, that simply isn't the case. The chat software you install on your website may come with chatbot options built in, or you may choose to purchase bots from a third-party vendor. Regardless, most chatbots require no coding for a basic implementation. The chat bots, of course, need to be trained and customized, like any other widget on your website, but this can be done in your website editor. In this training, you teach a chat bot how to initiate conversations, collect data, answer questions based on keyword responses or multiple-choice answers, and direct conversations to the right person. When humans and bots work together, we can realize value we didn't expect. For example, the authors quote a 2018 study which showed

66% of millennials and 58% of baby boomers were willing to engage with a chatbot for 24-hour service, even if they seemed averse to the idea at first.

### **THINK POINT #3: The Goal is Conversation (The “Hard Sell” is Dead!)**

In most cases, fully implementing Cancel and Gerhardt’s vision will require a drastic shift in your workflow and how you connect with customers. Why is it worth it? Because online sales



are changing. In a world where most buyers have access to the Internet, you no longer hold a monopoly on information about your properties (or knowledge of your competitors). If you withhold helpful information until a key moment or lock your premium content behind an email subscription form, your customers can simply search for a company more willing to be upfront with them.

Cancel and Gerhardt put these chat solutions in service of what they deem “conversational marketing.” Instead of consistently upselling, the authors envision salespeople utilizing these new tools to form better relationships with their clients. The authors recommend a conversational tone based on getting to know the business needs of a client and then finding solutions to those needs together from the salesperson’s knowledge of properties. This may mean that clients don’t always end up with the most expensive solutions, but they will have built a trustworthy relationship with you, ripe for a return sale.

Of course, these conversations differ a bit from our normal “water cooler” chat about sports or politics. The goal in conversational marketing is to get the clients talking about themselves and what needs they’re looking for you to meet. The authors recommend empathy statements: repeating back your understanding of the client and their needs, along with a brief comment validating their frustrations or dreams. At this point, you can show the value of available homes, tailored to fit the needs your client just shared. You may not want to repeat every well-crafted line from your company’s website or brochures, but instead deliver custom conversation which shows that you were listening and that you can help the customer.

Finally, the authors suggest harnessing the power of data to personalize marketing. For example, if your chatbot can tell that a customer has come to your website after clicking an ad, the chatbot can welcome a client in that specific way. Personalized chat boxes can appear for the user who visits your site often or who has clicked back onto the site from an email you sent. Different chat boxes can appear on different screens, allowing different departments to play to their strengths.

These subtle, non-invasive customizations help put the customer at ease, without playing too much with their data.

### **THINK POINT #4: Keep the Conversation Going**

Imagine now that you have implemented all of the changes Cancel and Gerhardt suggest. You've installed chat capabilities on your website with attentive chatbots ready to respond. Your sales and marketing team are working on adopting a conversational approach with customized solutions. After all these changes, you're beginning to see results... and then lose all communication with your customers! Not only would the sudden end to the relationship leave your customer feeling that their conversations with you might have been disingenuous, you are going to miss out on valuable feedback and the potential to drive future sales.

Therefore, the final recommendation from these authors is no less important: build a continuous feedback loop. After you sell, set up a meeting two to three weeks later to see how the client is liking their situation, and what questions or comments they have. Elicit feedback through additional conversations and by checking in with a customer before they have problems—then keep the lines of communication open to address issues they do have. As you collect this customer feedback, don't just let it sit on a hard drive. Take time to look at it and understand it.

However you choose to keep up with your customers, make sure that you incorporate this ongoing feedback loop through time, and maintain the relationships you've built. When it comes time for the client to buy again, they'll already know who to contact.

### **Conclusion**

Though it may seem revolutionary to some, Cancel and Gerhardt's approach to conversational marketing uses technology to put the humanity back in business. Rather than forcing customers to wait for your availability, you can design your website to host conversations. Through these conversations, often with a human, sometimes supported with a chatbot, you can begin to build the kind of relationships that boost your business and sell properties. You come out of the experience with a deeper knowledge of what your customer needs, and they come out of it with a product tailored to their needs and a relationship with someone always willing to help. Conversational marketing, in short, is the human way to allow bots to help you build relationships, sell, and support.

### **Recommended Reading**

Cancel, David and Dave Gerhardt (2019), *Conversational Marketing*, Wiley Publishing: Hoboken, New Jersey.

## **About the Author**

### **Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA**

#### **Baylor University**

Jacob Brenton is Master of Divinity/Master of Business Administration dual-degree graduate student from College Station, Texas. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Computer Graphic Design from the McLane College of Business at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in 2014 and then worked in a non-profit before returning to school. Jacob enjoys studying the intersections of faith, business, ethics, and technology, and he currently serves as Acting Interim Pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Robinson, Texas.

---

## **Keller Center Research Report**

Baylor University » Keller Center for Research » Hankamer School of Business  
One Bear Place #98007 » Waco, TX 76798  
[www.baylor.edu/kellercenter](http://www.baylor.edu/kellercenter) » [Keller\\_Center@baylor.edu](mailto:Keller_Center@baylor.edu)

*Keller Center Research Report is a trademark owned by Baylor University.  
© Baylor University. All rights reserved.*