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Research
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Keller Center Research Report

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Why Saying "Thank You" is Better than "Sorry"

Yanfen You, PhD, Xiaojing Yang, PhD, Lili Wang, PhD, and Xiaoyan Deng, PhD

Have you ever been kept waiting by a service provider well beyond the proposed arrival time? Your answer is likely "yes." In many instances, once the provider ultimately arrives, they say something along the lines of, "Sorry for the wait." While an apology statement, such as "I'm sorry," by service providers means they recognize their fault in the situation and thus may help restore customer satisfaction to a certain degree, our research suggests that a statement of appreciation, such as saying "Thank you for waiting," could increase customer satisfaction even further. In real estate, if service providers address customers with appreciation rather than an apology, it can significantly improve a customer's self-esteem, which in turn, will boost post-transgression customer satisfaction with your service.

Appreciation vs. Apology

Service companies can use symbolic recovery, such as an apology or an expression of appreciation, to regain customer satisfaction after a service failure occurs. Once a customer becomes dissatisfied with a service, a domino effect ensues that can lead to customer complaints, product returns, and ultimately customers switching to another company.[1] Researchers have discovered that symbolic recovery is a cost-effective method that can restore customer satisfaction[2]. Therefore, it is important to understand how to best utilize symbolic recovery to maintain positive service provider-consumer interactions.

While symbolic recovery can be used in many forms, our research focuses on why appreciation is better than an apology. An apology conveys that the service provider recognizes and takes responsibility for the service failure. Although an apology serves as a cost-effective method of boosting customer satisfaction, it requires that the provider admit fault and take accountability for the transgression. Directly after the provider apologizes, the customer will likely have a positive response. However, this positive response will often dissipate, and lingering negative thoughts about the service transgression will likely surface and hinder future positive provider-consumer interactions. After a service failure, service companies can use an apology to boost customer satisfaction; yet they should recognize the long-term consequences of admitting fault.

What makes an expression of appreciation better than an apology? Appreciation highlights customers' merits and contributions after the transgression occurs. Therefore, appreciation shifts the customer's thoughts from the mistake made by the service provider to an acknowledgement of the customer's sacrifice. For example, if service providers keep their customers waiting for an extended period of time, instead of saying "sorry for the wait" they can say "thank you for the wait." This expression of appreciation recognizes customers' positive qualities (such as being patient) but also signals an admission of guilt. In essence, appreciation acknowledges the service failure but does so in a positive manner that increases the self-esteem of the customer.

Both an apology and an expression of appreciation are symbolic recovery mechanisms that increase customer satisfaction. Our research finds that service providers should shift their focus from emphasizing the service providers' fault (apology) to highlighting customers' contributions and merits (appreciation), which in turn can increase consumers' self-esteem.

How Does Self-Esteem Play a Role?

Appreciation is better than an apology due to its ability to use customers' contributions to their self-esteem. But what if the pursuit of self-esteem isn't a dominant motivator for an individual? The desire for heightened self-esteem varies depending on the level of narcissism of a person. Narcissism is a concept that implies an inflated sense of self [3] and captures the strength of people's desire to pursue self-esteem[4]. An individual's level of narcissism moderates the effects appreciation has on self-esteem. That is, individuals high in narcissism have a strong desire to pursue self-esteem. As a result, they will use the acknowledgement of their contributions and merits to increase the way they value themselves. However, if an individual is low in narcissism, an expression of appreciation is often less effective. For these individuals an expression of appreciation is not necessarily better than an apology. Our research suggests that it is important for service providers to informally assess a person's narcissism (e.g., are younger, those who use social networks more) to determine whether appreciation will be better than an apology.

Real Estate Implications

For all service providers, including those in real estate, altering your linguistic framing from saying "sorry" to "thank you" can greatly affect a customer's satisfaction after a service failure occurs. Although both apology and appreciation address the mistake made, appreciation does so while also increasing the customer's self-esteem. Appreciation acknowledges fault while also highlighting the customer's merits and contributions. As a real estate professional, transitioning from an apology to appreciation can be a vitally important tool that can be used to increased customer satisfaction after a transgression occurs. If service providers are able to implement "thank you" into instances of redressing service failures, then they will enhance the satisfaction the customer has with their services, their interactions, and the organization as a whole.

Recommended Reading

You, Yanfen, Xiaojing Yang, Lili Wang, and Xiaoyan Deng (2020), "When and Why Saying "Thank You" Is Better Than Saying "Sorry" in Redressing Service Failures: The Role of Self-Esteem," *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 133-150.

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Aligning Motivation for a Value-Based Sales Strategy

Ryan Mullins, PhD, Bulent Menguc, PhD, and Nikolaos G. Panagopoulos, PhD

Selling strategies in many organizations are shifting away from promoting a product's features and benefits to, instead, engaging in value-based selling (VBS). Now more than ever, customers expect real estate agents to quantify value, such as resale value for consumers and rental value for investors. Firms that communicate value win over tentative customers to new products and services at a higher rate than those who promote features. Beyond winning over tentative customers, engaging in VBS leads to increased customer retention, growth, and salesperson performance.

About Our Study

Implementing VBS in a firm, however, is challenging—most managers point to a sales force's inability to articulate the offering's unique business value. This study examines the influence of different motivational sources – self, supervisor, customer, and team – to uncover how to motivate and benefit from implementing VBS in an organization. Through this research we uncover a framework of motivational mechanisms that explain salesperson motivation for VBS.

VBS Framework

Self: Real estate agents will likely be motivated by one of two self-regulatory motivational systems—a promotion or a prevention focus. A real estate agent with a *promotion focus* will strive to attain positive outcomes and stretch goals. These individuals are willing to try riskier strategies to achieve desired outcomes. *Prevention-focused* real estate agents, on the other hand, desire to avoid negative outcomes and will implement more conservative strategies to avoid potential losses.

Both motivation systems help motivate real estate agents for VBS, but they create value through different routes. Because promotion-focused agents tend toward the use of creative strategies and are best suited for risk and growth, they will be motivated towards VBS by the prospect of creating financial value by increasing property value or revenue growth. Prevention-driven agents will be less motivated by revenue growth than by by focusing on preventing loss or quantifying cost reduction. It is important to note that an individual could have high levels of both prevention and promotion motivation strategies.

Supervisor: If agents perceive that their manager displays empowering leadership (e.g., offers autonomy in performing activities, asks for input in defining goals) – employees will demonstrate greater intrinsic motivation and engagement, often going above and beyond minimum job requirements. As a result, supervisors who demonstrate empowering leadership behavior will motivate agents to create value for customers by innovating offerings, assisting in facilitating transactions, or matching goals between buyers and service providers.

Customers: Understanding the customer's goals is an essential element of VBS. A customer's willingness to share value-relevant knowledge influences the salesperson's effort to uncover and realize value. Empowering customer behaviors might include expressing confidence in advice during decision making, delegating control, or expressing confidence in an agent's ability to provide value.

Teams: Our study reveals that sales team monitoring, a form of informal peer evaluation, increases awareness of individual members' activities. Sales team monitoring has the potential to motivate a sales team's goal pursuit, such as working together to achieve a shared quota. When sales team monitoring is in place, agents display increased communication and feedback behaviors to help members reach individual goals that contribute to the team's collective goal.

Managerial Implications

Motivating VBS involves a careful balance of salesperson and sales team-level motivation factors. For this reason, firms should consider the agent, their environment, and their team when implementing VBS. Prevention-focused (loss-avoidance) agents will be more motivated when they perceive lower levels of monitoring from their team and higher levels of empowerment from their customers. Promotion-focused (gains-oriented) agents, on the other hand, are more motivated by higher levels of team monitoring and lower levels of customer empowerment. It should be noted that lower levels of team monitoring will lead to lower motivation among sales teams and lower team performance and customer adoption. An efficient way to identify whether an agent is promotion or prevention-focused is to conduct a short survey during hiring and later during employment. Based on results of the survey, managers can design training sessions specifically geared toward each motivation style.

Empowering leadership behaviors can also motivate VBS. Sales leaders can increase agents' motivation by offering more opportunities to express opinions, showing confidence in agents' abilities, and increasing agent autonomy. For this reason, firms should also consider VBS coaching for leadership. Leaders can also use survey results from each agent to create benchmarks and team assignments based on identified levels of motivation factors.

When real estate agents perceive customers giving them some influence and autonomy with respect to important decisions, preventative salespeople will be motivated for VBS. Many customers limit communication with agents during the purchasing context, which can be

perceived as a lack of influence with the customer that ultimately hampers VBS implementation. Using survey results, managers should segment customers based on perceived customer willingness to empower salespeople. Using this information, real estate managers can better support individual agents' selling approaches for customers who may hamper the agent's efforts to act on their goal motivations during customer interactions.

Conclusion

VBS clearly increases customers' acquisition of desirable properties that match buyers' goals. Don't underestimate the influence of individual agents, supervisors, teams and the customer when implementing VBS. Sales managers should regularly monitor sales team dynamics, specifically, whether team members collectively exert effort toward team goal achievement, such as collecting and sharing customer insights.

Recommended Reading

Mullins, Ryan, Bulent Menguc, and Nikolaos G. Panagopoulos (2019), "Antecedents and Performance Outcomes of Value-Based Selling in Sales Teams: A Multilevel, Systems Theory of Motivation Perspective," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48, 1053-1074.

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How to Communicate During Organizational Change

Linjuan Rita Men, PhD, APR, Marlene Neill, PhD, APR, and Cen April Yue, PhD

Researchers often attribute unsuccessful organizational change initiatives to poor internal communication.[1] Our research focuses on analyzing the importance of symmetrical internal communication during the organization change process. Specifically, we examine how two-way, open, and responsive communication between managers and their employees can have an impact on employee engagement, their commitment to change, and their behavioral support for

proposed change. In real estate, it is important to integrate employee-centered, symmetrical communication into change management in order to yield employees who are engaged in the change process. Brokers and team leaders should initiate dialogue and listen to their employees to reach mutual agreements and build relationships[2] that can, in turn, facilitate the change process.

Leveraging Symmetrical Communication

As stated previously, poor internal communication is a leading factor causing organizational change to fail.[1] Defining effective internal communication, especially in the context of organizational change, is vitally important for the success of an organization. Our research explores the strategic importance of symmetrical communication throughout the change process.

Effective symmetrical communication is a strategy that organizations can leverage to implement successful change management. Symmetrical communication occurs when managers and employees engage in meaningful two-way communication. Managers and employees interact and listen to one another in a manner that builds understanding and relationships.[2] In order for symmetrical communication to be successful there must be trust, openness, reciprocity, feedback, and negotiation delivered in an employee-centered style by managers.[3] Organizations that utilize symmetrical communication in their day-to-day interactions create channels of effective communication, which can, in turn, greatly benefit change implementation.

During the change management process, organizations should foster two-way, open, and responsive communication that makes employees feel as if their interests and concerns are being addressed. Examples of such communication between managers and employees include using both formal channels, such as committee meetings and town halls, as well as informal channels, such as breakfasts, coffee, and lunch meetings.[4] When utilized effectively, these channels can

mutually benefit employees and managers. Employees can ask questions to reduce uncertainty regarding the change process, and managers can address concerns in a timely manner to reach a mutual understanding.[4] Overall, symmetrical internal communication between managers and employees leads to employees who facilitate and champion successful organizational change implementation.

Employee Engagement

Numerous studies have found that employee engagement has a substantial impact on organizational success.[5] Our research digs deeper into the relationship between employee engagement and organizational success to include the impact employee engagement has on organizational change implementation.

Engaged employees have been characterized as people who have high levels of energy, are willing to invest effort into their work, and are persistent in overcoming difficult situations.[6] Engaged employees are attentive and immersed in their work environment. Our research showed that when employees are engaged with their organization physically, cognitively, and emotionally, they tend to not only commit to change but display behaviors that support the change throughout the change management process. Employees who are engaged are more likely to appreciate and see the additional value the change can add than less engaged employees. Particularly, engaged employees are more willing to champion the change both inside and outside of the organization.

Increasing employee engagement can occur during the change management process via symmetrical communication between managers and employees. Specifically, during the change management process, employee concerns should be legitimized, and employees should be encouraged to participate in organizational processes. Engaged employees have a greater willingness to become facilitators for change implementation and overall move an organization toward its change goals.

Real Estate Implications

The impact of symmetrical communication on employee engagement and organizational change outcomes can be applied to real estate professionals. Firms often have to go through change in order to stay current. Therefore, real estate brokers and team leaders can use two-way communication, such as agent meetings over coffee, lunch with employees, or initiating a town hall meeting with agents and support staff, to increase the success of the organization's change management process. The change management process is one that often requires vast amounts of effort; yet symmetrical internal communication between managers and employees that emphasizes openness, responsiveness, participation and relationships can provide practical ways to increase employee engagement regarding the change process. The majority of organizational

change fails;[1] however, actively pursuing two-way communication with employees can prove to be a powerful tool a firm can use to improve organizational change outcomes.

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Consumer-to-Brand Sharing: Will Your Clients Share the Bad News?

Chris Hydock, PhD, Zoey Chen, PhD, and Kurt Carlson, PhD

Every successful firm knows that understanding consumer sentiment is essential for success. Thus, there is a significant body of research regarding consumer-to-consumer (word-of-mouth) sharing that examines how an attitude toward a brand influences consumers' willingness to share their opinions with other consumers. However, there is limited research regarding the relationship between consumers' attitudes toward a brand, both positive and negative, and their likelihood of sharing their opinion with the brand. Thus, our team conducted multiple studies to uncover tendencies concerning consumer-to-brand sharing and steps managers can take to receive unbiased information that is vital for a firm's success.

U-Shaped vs. Hockey Stick-Shaped Relationships

In consumer-to-consumer (word of mouth) sharing, the majority of opinion sharing occurs among individuals with a very positive or very negative attitude towards a brand, thereby generating a U-shaped relationship (_/) of extreme data points when graphed.[1] Extrapolating from this consumer-to-consumer trend, one might assume consumer-to-brand sharing follows a similar trajectory. Further, data indicates that managers echo this intuition, as 63% of managers expect a U-shaped relationship. However, counter to this intuition, we demonstrate that consumers' likelihood of sharing their opinion directly with a brand depends on several psychological mechanisms that exhibit what we deem a hockey stick-shaped relationship (_/ as opposed to _/).

The hockey stick-shaped relationship reflects one side of the U-shaped relationship, increased sharing among individuals with a very positive attitude. Their behavior is due to reciprocity norms – as attitude become more positive, consumers are more likely to share their opinions with brands to reciprocate for benefits provided by the brand.[2] In contrast to the U-shaped pattern of sharing consumer-to-consumer, this hockey stick-shaped relationship does not show elevated sharing among consumers with a very negative attitude. Among individuals with a very negative attitude, there are two counteracting factors that result in a null relationship between attitude and sharing. First, as attitudes towards the brand grow increasingly negative, consumers become more likely to share due to their desire to vent, in order to regulate their emotions. However,

more importantly, because the attitude object and audience are one and the same (the brand), people avoid sharing negative information with the attitude object, as doing so induces social discomfort.[3,4] Overall, this aversion to criticizing counteracts the desire to vent, ultimately explaining the flat left side of the hockey stick (which differs from the _/).

Our Research and Findings

Our team conducted seven individual studies that examined the intricacies of consumer-to-brand sharing. First, we conducted a field study regarding consumer attitude and sharing with a brand. More specifically, we studied the results of a survey sent by a campus retailer to observe the relationship between participants' attitudes and their propensity to share their opinions. These results indicated a hockey stick-shaped relationship between attitude and sharing. Second, our team studied the robustness of our results, by testing different sharing contexts (an online comment form on the brand's website) and product categories (a wireless provider). This study provided additional evidence for the hockey stick-shaped relationship, allowing our team to focus on the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining this relationship and various moderating variables.

Our third, fourth, and sixth studies examined other influences on willingness to share negative attitudes with the brand. In our third study, our team sought to understand the role of anthropomorphism in the opinion sharing process. Previous research provides evidence that consumers ascribe human-like traits to brands, formally known as anthropomorphizing.[5] Our research applied this psychological concept and found that among those with negative attitudes towards a brand, greater anthropomorphizing led to decreased sharing, demonstrating a moderating effect of anthropomorphism. Fourth, our team conducted a study to examine the moderating effect of individual differences in aversion to criticizing. We found that as an individual's aversion to criticism increases, those in the negative attitude condition became less likely to share. In our sixth study, we examined the implications of the ability to exit the relationship with a brand. Our results indicate that when consumers are unable to exit (e.g. returning the product or brand switching), those with a negative attitude became more likely to share, thereby making the ability to exit an additional moderating effect.

Our fifth study examined additional psychological processes driving the relationship between attitude and sharing. We found significant evidence to suggest other factors can drive consumer-to-brand sharing, such as the effort required by consumers. Additionally, our research indicates some consumers feel compelled to share negative attitudes due to self-benefit, as opposed to a desire to vent. Finally, our seventh study examined the contrast between sharing with brands versus sharing with customers. We discovered that consumer-to-consumer sharing is less affected by an aversion to criticism relative to consumer-to-brand sharing, because the attitude object is different from the audience. On the contrary, when the object and the audience are the same (the brand), the hockey stick-shaped relationship appears.

Real Estate Implications

As a real estate agent, understanding consumer sentiment is one of the most essential business operations. Real estate is a people-based industry and feedback is indispensable in order to produce meaningful changes within your organization. Furthermore, the effects of anthropomorphism and consumers' aversion to criticism are heightened in real estate, considering the 'brand' consumers are evaluating is a real person. Thus, it is probable to assume the likelihood of receiving positively biased data is even higher for real estate agents.

It is essential that agents and brokers ensure they are not missing out on negative feedback that might serve as constructive criticism. In order to do so, our team's research indicates that incentives are effective, particularly, when sufficiently large. Specifically, large monetary incentives for feedback may overcome psychological catalysts and deterrents of sharing. Potential cost-effective approaches to increasing sharing on a large scale from all clientele include lottery-based incentives or tying feedback to future discounts.

Additionally, we have identified a few non-monetary incentives including explicit encouragement of critiques or guaranteeing that the brand will analyze all data at the aggregate level, thereby ensuring that no individual customer will be singled out due to their feedback. Overall, if these recommendations are adopted, a more representative set of feedback is likely, and your understanding of consumer sentiment will be maximized.

Recommended Reading

Hydock, Chris, Zoey Chen, and Kurt Carlson (2020), "Why Unhappy Customers Are Unlikely to Share Their Opinions with Brands," *Journal of Marketing,* 84(6), 95-112.

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Advertising in 360 Degrees
Yang Feng, PhD, Quan Xie, PhD, and Chen Lou, PhD

New possibilities in digital marketing for real estate agents using 360-degree videos are expanding as these types of videos become more accessible on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. Thus, 360-degree videos have been dubbed the "ultimate empathy machine" due to their interactivity, brilliant images, and sound experiences that change as the viewer changes the direction of a video feed.[1,2]

An advantage of 360-degree videos is that they record a scene in every direction synchronously using a set of specialized cameras. Viewers can watch the videos on personal computers, tablets, or smart phones using a regulator, such as a mouse, a keyboard, or by tilting their device to change the direction of viewing. Research confirms that 360-degree video ads increase click rates by 29% compared to similar videos in standard format.[3,4]

Our Study

Despite the growing popularity of 360-degree videos, designing content for these types of videos has remained extremely difficult. The freedom viewers have to self-navigate through scenes causes producers to lose the control needed to direct concentration in a way that influences the audience's ability to understand the plot. It becomes challenging for video creators to know whether the audience will turn their attention to the areas they intend to highlight. Without proper oversight, an audience can become confused or irritated as they attempt to figure out the "correct" viewing path. If an audience is not able to understand a video's timeline because of poorly constructed content, the ad will fail to communicate its message.

Our study is unique in that it is the first to identify the optimal scenario and mechanisms in which 360-degree video ads outperform standard version videos. We provide an explanation for the supremacy of 360-degree ads and propose a new approach for testing the effects of 360-degree ads with varying degrees of narrative structure.

Results revealed that the superiority of 360-degree video advertising, compared to standard video advertising, is amplified only when the standard version features a moderate degree of narrative structure. When the narrative structure is low or high, 360-degree video advertising holds no advantage over standard video advertising.

Narrative Advertising and Structure

Narrative advertising is defined as an advertisement of compiled narratives, or, simply put, an ad that tells a story. Stories in ads usually develop around the experiences of product use, such as consumers drinking an energy drink when exhausted to gain a tireless feeling.

An essential component of story ads is "narrative structure," including chronology and causality. *Chronology* simply means the scene must take place over time—the story has a beginning, middle, and an end. *Causality* necessitates that the story is presented in an organized structure that shows a causal connection between the scenes; the characters' goals produce actions, and finally, results. The degree of narrative structure establishes how well scenes are constructed to form a well-developed story that links characters' goals, actions, and outcomes over time to establish causality.

Narrative structure in story ads varies as chronology and causality are incorporated on a continuous scale, ranging from low to moderate to high. A story ad with a low degree of narrative structure does not have a clear timeline or causality between scenes, characters or narrator. On the other hand, a moderate degree of narrative structure has multiple scenes with some level of causality between scenes without a narrator. A high degree of narrative structure has a main theme, character, and scenes that follow a timeline of how the characters' goals lead to actions and eventual outcomes. As noted above, 360-degree video advertising is maximized when the standard version features a moderate degree of narrative structure.

Managerial Insights

Our research has significant implication for digital marketing within the real estate industry. The outcomes of this study support the critical role of narrative structure in the effectiveness of 360-degree video ads. Loosely associated story lines, or at the opposite end of the spectrum a heavily narrated ad, can cause an audience to experience cognitive overload and, as a result, can negatively impact ad and brand attitudes. To prevent cognitive overload, real estate firms should cautiously draft the story line when developing a 360-degree video ad. Firms should consider summarizing the different situations of product ownership or use in multiple brief stories rather than one longer story.

Real-estate firms should consider working closely with technology specialists to confirm a balance between the intricacy of the story narrative and the application of 360-degree technology. To avoid cognitive overload, firms should empower the ad's audience to opt out of 360-degree video viewing at any point or to convert to the standard mode of video viewing.

In addition, our results suggest that 360-degree ads may influence a viewers' sense of presence and perceived ad novelty. The Interactive Advertising Bureau suggests content creators should first consider all the possible ways that a viewer may interact in the 360-degree video experience

and from that point sketch a story from multiple end-user perspectives. Real estate firms should consider using creative ways to include captions into a story to share context about the home ownership/rental and firm services. Leveraging the novelty of 360-degree videos by sharing content on social media and encouraging viewers to do the same, is helpful.

Conclusion

The 360-degree version of a standard video ad with a moderate degree of narrative structure has the potential to drive engagement in promising new ways. Our findings highlight the dynamic nature of narrative structure in 360-degree video ads because users can manipulate the point of view and control how they approach the ad story. Digital real estate advertisers need to find effective ways to help audiences manage fluid story lines within 360-degree video ads such as shortening video length and providing on-screen or audio instructions for how to navigate through scenes. As the technology continues to develop 360-degree video format, its value will only become stronger for real estate firms.

Recommended Reading

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Dr. Yang Feng's (PhD – Southern Illinois University Carbondale) research focuses on advertising effects in the interrelated contexts of culture, politics, and communication technologies. She has published scholarly articles in the *Journal of Health Communication*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Advertising and Society Review*, and *Journal of Children and Media*, among others.

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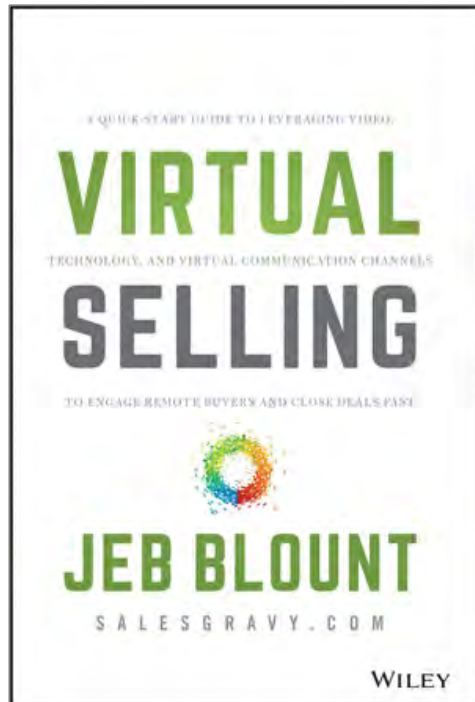
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Dr. Chen Lou's (PhD – Michigan State University) research focuses on consumer psychology and advertising effects. From this perspective, she has investigated how consumers process information and the mechanisms through which marketing communications affect consumer behavior. Generally, her research utilizes information processing as a central mechanism to explicate the role of marketing communication experiences in consumer behavior. Dr. Lou is a mixed-methods researcher with a strong quantitative focus, experienced in a broad range of research methods, including lab and online experiment, survey, in-depth interview, focus group, and data mining; In her recent publications, she has used eye-tracking and psychophysiological measures, as well as topic modeling and sentiment analysis through a big data approach.

INSIDER: Virtual Selling: A Quick-Start Guide
Kayla Wilson, MBA

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was faced with an unprecedented tremor that necessitated a transition from a physical world to a virtual one, immediately altering life (and sales) as we knew it. The professional selling industry was significantly impacted, as the pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual selling. In *Virtual Selling: A Quick-Start Guide to Leveraging Video Technology, and Virtual Communication Channels to Engage Remote Buyers and Close Deals Fast,* Jeb Blount provides techniques that turn virtual communication platforms into powerful and effective sales tools, making virtual selling more human and helping organizations acquire a distinct competitive advantage.

It is vital to note that the application and opportunity of virtual selling extends beyond the lifetime of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sellers must continue to leverage the productivity-related advantages of virtual selling, as virtual sales success is independent of the geopolitical, economic, or health climate of the world at large.

THINK POINT #1: Does Virtual Selling Work?

Virtual selling is defined as leveraging virtual communication channels in place of physical, face-to-face interaction. Virtual selling is not about revolutionizing the way you sell, but rather a laser focus on applying virtual selling tools more effectively to engage and connect with other humans while boosting sales productivity. With that, it is vital to emphasize that despite industry misconceptions and seller biases, leveraging virtual selling can boost sales productivity. Prospects will accept virtual sales calls, but first, sellers must ask.

Along the sales continuum, several channels connect sellers to stakeholders. These channels can be largely classified as synchronous and asynchronous channels, defined as talking *with* people versus talking *at* people, respectively. Blount explains it is essential to understand that both techniques are equally important, and their impact is amplified when blended. *Blending* leverages multiple communication channels, which improves the probability of gaining stakeholder attention and improving sales productivity.

THINK POINT #2: Emotions Matter

Defined as the ability to perceive, correctly interpret, respond to, and effectively manage your own emotions and influence the emotions of others, emotional intelligence is the key that unlocks virtual selling excellence. Considering scientific evidence for the significance of emotional touch, sellers must remember that prospects are buying you before the product or service. They will forget what you said and did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

Further, the widespread misconception that relationship building is "old school" is plaguing the sales industry; sellers who believe this dangerous narrative turn to the siloed deployment of asynchronous sales channels. Blended strategies maximize sales productivity. However, utilizing synchronous channels provokes natural feelings of discomfort and vulnerability. As such, sellers frequently retreat to asynchronous channels alone and fail massively as sales agents, considering robots can execute these asynchronous touches more efficiently than humans. Thus, sales individuals must build an emotional discipline muscle to assure blended strategies are reflexively deployed. With practice, sellers will disrupt and neutralize the anxiety associated with synchronous communication, their emotional self-control will improve, and blended virtual selling will become more routine.

THINK POINT #3: Video Calls

One of the most highly effective synchronous communication channels is video calling. Video calls represent the closest thing to in-person communication and are immensely cost-effective. Further, video calls make relationship building, problem-solving, and collaboration easier and more effective. To maximize sales success through video calls, sales professionals must remember that humans feel first; as such, it is imperative to provide stakeholders with an ideal emotional experience. Several technical and human elements contribute to the prospects emotional experience:

Technical
- *Audio* – High-quality audio is essential. Invest in a robust internet connection and a professional microphone, and avoid locations with background noise and echoes.
- *Lighting* – Great lighting makes sellers appear natural and accessible, and it illuminates their facial experiences to appear more human and trustworthy. Ideal lighting is attained when sellers face towards natural lighting sources or invest in professional lighting sources that are placed behind the camera.
- *Backdrop* – A seller's backdrop represents their brand and professional image; consider a virtual backdrop replacement that includes the prospect's logo for a personal touch.

Human
- *Body language* – There are several elements of body language that must be managed to communicate approachability and trustworthiness including facial expressions and eye contact. Smile with intention and look directly into your camera to communicate eye contact across any physical distance.
- *Attention control* – One inherent weakness of virtual interactions is the ease of distraction, and nothing makes prospects feel more unimportant than being ignored. As such, it is essential to be empathetic and practice active and deep listening.

THINK POINT #4: Telephone

During the beginning stages of the coronavirus pandemic, the *New York Times* ran a story about how individuals suddenly rediscovered the telephone, as phone calls deliver a level of intimacy. However, this rediscovery of the humble telephone is disappointing at best, as it illustrated how far the sales profession has fallen. On a large scale, sellers had replaced this virtuous, synchronous communication channel with the siloed use of asynchronous channels. While it is easy to grow content in the misbelief that stakeholders prefer asynchronous communication, sellers must adamantly resist this temptation. Sellers' new golden rule should be, "when in doubt, pick up the phone."

One of the most valuable applications of telephone selling is the prospecting phase of the selling cycle. However, the fear of interrupting prospects is a significant hesitancy of sellers in their deployment of telephone selling. To overcome this fear, sellers must remember that the very nature of selling revolves around interruption; therefore, when you fail to interrupt, you fail to sell. Instead of fearing interruption entirely, sellers must prioritize minimizing the extent of this interruption. Adhering to the following framework can help sellers achieve this goal:

- *Attention* - Get the prospect's attention by using the sweetest word in their world, their name.
- *Identify* - Tell the prospect your name and your company's name.
- *Reason* - Tell the prospect what you want.
- *Because Statement* - Provide the prospect with a compelling reason why they need to meet with you. This statement must be focused on the needs and reasons of the prospect, not yours. Merely providing an elevator pitch will only heighten the prospect's frustrated feelings of interruption.
- *Ask* - With relaxed, assertive confidence, ask for what you want, and stop talking.

THINK POINT #5: Video Messaging

To capitalize on the value of blending, sellers must supplement these synchronous channels with the highly effective, yet frequently underutilized asynchronous channel of video messaging. In

video messaging, sellers send short, personalized video messages to their prospects. Considering the most insatiable human need and craving is to feel important, appreciated, and significant, personalized video messages are an immensely powerful and compelling communication channel. Further, virtual messaging is truly unparalleled in its ability; research indicates firms who deployed this method enhanced their closing rate by over 75%.

Video messaging is versatile and can be leveraged throughout the entirety of the business development, sales, and account management journeys. Its promising applications include prospecting, invitations, confirming appointments, and follow-up messages. Regardless of the application, the potential of video messaging is maximized when messages are short, spontaneous, and authentic. As such, sellers must provide thoughtful messages that are not excessively produced. Thirty to 60-second messages are optimal, and the message must contain a compelling, attention-grabbing hook, relate to the prospect on a personalized level, bridge the prospect's problems and the seller's solutions, and conclude with a clear call to action that communicates future contact.

Real Estate Implications

At its core, real estate success revolves around effective selling. Real estate professionals must take the invaluable virtual selling advice of Jeb Blount to heart and implement his practical advice in daily sales ventures. Remember the imperative of attaining an emotional connection with your prospect and utilizing blended virtual communication channels at all times. Video calls, telephone calls, and video messaging are a few of the valuable communication channels available to sellers. When leveraged and deployed together, sellers can attain profound sales success.

Recommended Reading

Blount, Jeb (2020), *Virtual Selling: A Quick-Start Guide to Leveraging Video Technology, and Virtual Communication Channels to Engage Remote Buyers and Close Deals Fast,* John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ.

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Kayla Wilson received an MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Administration and a Bachelor of Business Administration in Baylor Business Fellows from Baylor University. Her work experience includes conducting administrative research at Genesis Physicians Group, an Independent Physicians Association in Dallas, Texas. Kayla is currently a medical student at University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School with plans to become an emergency physician and healthcare administrator.

INSIDER: The Catalyst: How to Change Anyone's Mind

Kristen Koehler, MBA Candidate

Change is hard. People often tackle change by attacking the problem head on and pushing through obstacles no matter the amount of resistance. In *The Catalyst*, Jonah Berger explains why roadblock elimination is the most effective way to pursue change in your organization. In order to become someone who facilitates change, known as a change catalyst, one must seek to reduce the amount of energy required to enact change. This can be done by locating the "parking brakes" that are prohibiting your organization from moving forward. There are five ways a catalyst can reduce roadblocks: reactance, endowment, distance, uncertainty, and by finding corroborating evidence. Implementing change by reducing roadblocks is especially important to organizational success in industries that are in constant fluctuation, such as real estate.
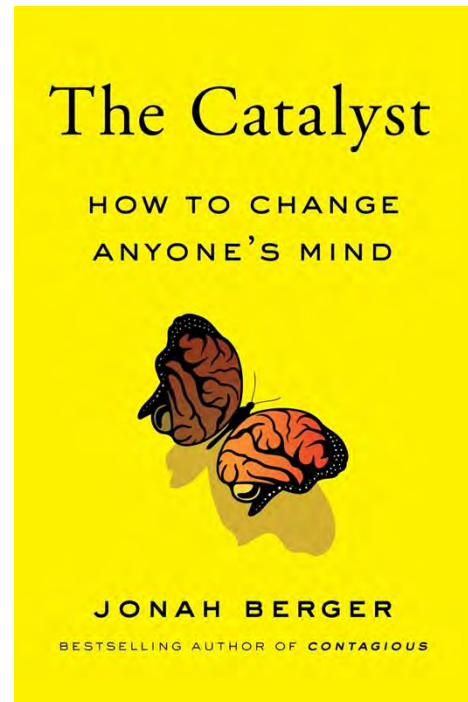
THINK POINT #1: Reactance

People value their freedom. When people's freedom is hindered, they push back. This phenomenon is known as the anti-persuasion theory. If you are going to be a successful facilitator of change, you will need to fly under their anti-persuasion radar. In order to do, so you must get people to persuade themselves. This can be done with the following four-step approach.

1. Provide a Menu: Let people decide which path they would like to choose.
2. Ask, Don't Tell: Ask people questions instead of making statement.
3. Highlight a Gap: Help people understand that their thoughts don't always align with their actions.
4. Start with Understanding: When people are understood, trust is built.

This four-step approach provides the change catalyst with a benchmark to get people to convince themselves. If managed successfully, change catalysts can eliminate reactance and reduce the amount of work required to change someone's mind.

THINK POINT #2: Endowment

People prefer the status quo. Whether we are talking about your company's current software system or your old, stained coffee cup, people like what they know. To get people to change from the old to the new, the advantages of the new have to greatly outweigh the disadvantages of the old.

Berger explains that there are two different methods established to reduce people's attachment to the status quo—to realize the cost of inaction and to burn the ships. As a change catalyst, it is important for you to express how much inaction is costing others. People often see the status quo as costless, but in actuality there is always a cost associated with it. Revealing the cost differential between the status quo and a changed strategy will greatly decrease the desire to stick with the status quo. The other method that can be deployed to enact change in your organization is one that is rather drastic. Sometimes people are so enthralled with the status quo that there is no possible way to convince them to change. When this occurs, it is in the change catalyst's best interest to remove the possibility of going back to the old way of doing things by "burning the ships." If there are no ships to return to, it makes the goal of changing to the new the only option. While burning the ships does accomplish the goal of change, it should only be used when it is impossible for your organization to see the benefit of the change in front of them.

When asked to change, people often cling to what they know. It is your job as the change catalyst to reduce the impact of inertia by surfacing the costs of inaction and, when necessary, burning the ships.

THINK POINT #3: Distance

People will listen, but only when they are close enough to the issue. The further removed from the problem at hand, the more difficult initiating change will be. It is important to remember that distance isn't always whether a person is not physically close to you or not. In this case, distance often refers to whether the information presented compares to that person's existing point of view.

Berger proposes that different people have different zones of acceptance. If the information being put forth falls within that person's zone of acceptance, they will likely process the information as being reliable and accurate, and therefore, rely on the change catalyst for more direction. However, if the information is too far removed from their zone of acceptance, they will likely deem the information as unreliable and immediately reject the idea. As a change catalyst, it is important to avoid this region of rejection by finding middle ground or a place of agreement and then explaining your idea for change in a way that fits into their zone of acceptance. When people are removed from a situation, they are unlikely to change. Reducing the distance between the catalyst and the proposed change will remove yet another parking brake on your journey toward being an effective change agent.

THINK POINT #4: Uncertainty

People value what they know. To initiate change, people often require a risk-free trial before they embark on a change journey. Virtually every decision people make includes some component of uncertainty, and it is up to the change catalyst to reduce the *amount* of uncertainty people perceive.

Trialability is a proven tactic to diminish the uncertainty a person feels. There are four tools that change catalysts can deploy to increase trialability, including harnessing freemium (e.g., allowing consumers to try your product/service for free), reducing up-front costs, reinventing your brand messaging, and making it reversible. These tools decrease the observed cost of changing and let people know they are not stuck with their decisions. As a change catalyst, the more ways you can incorporate risk-free trials into your organization, the more likely people will believe that the proposed change is worth the effort.

THINK POINT #5: Corroborating Evidence

People need evidence and a way to verify that the change journey will be effective. If there is no evidence to corroborate initiating change, people are unlikely to do so. First, the change catalyst must determine whether they are dealing with a large or a small change process. If it is a large change, also known as a boulder, people are going to require more evidence that the new will be significantly better than the old. Whereas if it is a small change, or a pebble, people will generally need less proof. Determining whether the change you are initiating is a boulder or a pebble is the first step to providing the proper amount of evidence. It is equally as important to provide similar evidence from multiple sources, regardless of whether you are dealing with a boulder or pebble. The more sources that deliver closely related findings, the more likely the individual will use that evidence to enact change. A change catalyst is able to reduce barriers to change by deciphering the type and amount of evidence required to begin the change process.

Conclusion

Change is hard, but a change catalyst's ability to reduce these roadblocks will help change anyone's mind. In industries under constant change, such as real estate, a change catalyst can deploy techniques to enact change in their organization. Whether it is directly within their organization or with their clients, real estate organizations should implement change by looking at what people value and know before introducing means and reasons for them to change. Overall, anyone can be a change catalyst. The key is to refrain from using brute force to push through issues. Rather, locate and release the parking brakes to reduce roadblocks and create opportunities for growth in your organization.

Recommended Reading

Berger, Jonah (2020), *The Catalyst: How to Change Anyone's Mind*, Simon & Schuster.

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