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The Sales Organization of the Future

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Contents

1. About Econsultancy	4
1.1. About the authors	5
2. The Sales Organization of the Future	6
2.1. The Context	6
2.2. What will determine winning B2B sales organizations in the future?	9
2.2.1. Problem solver	9
2.2.2. Value added support	9
2.2.3. Channeling the conversation	9
2.3. The new roles of the future salesperson	10
2.3.1. Information funnel?	10
2.3.2. E-socialite?	10
2.3.3. Coach and train?	11
2.3.4. Warm caller?	11
2.3.5. Co-innovator?	11
2.4. Consequences for the organization	11
2.4.1. Social sales	11
2.4.2. Sales management	11
2.4.3. Virtual sales meetings?	12
2.4.4. Distance working (or telework)	12
2.4.5. Sales as a team (SAAT)	12
2.4.6. Blended sales	12
2.4.7. IT	12
2.5. Human Resource Challenges	13
2.5.1. Profiles and skills	13
2.5.2. The Gen Y salesperson	13
2.5.3. Elearning	13
2.6. Technology questions	14
2.6.1. Working in the cloud	14
2.6.2. Payment	14
2.6.3. Reporting	14
2.6.4. Mobility	14
2.6.5. Return on investment	14



1. About Econsultancy

Econsultancy is a [global independent community-based publisher](#), focused on best practice digital marketing and e-commerce, and used by over 400,000 internet professionals every month. Our hub has 185,000+ users worldwide from clients, agencies and suppliers alike with over 90% member retention rate. We help our members build their internal capabilities via a combination of research reports and how-to guides, training and development, consultancy, face-to-face conferences, forums and professional networking.

For the last ten years, our resources have helped members learn, make better decisions, build business cases, find the best suppliers, accelerate their careers and lead the way in best practice and innovation.

Econsultancy has offices in London, New York, Singapore, Sydney and Dubai and we are a leading provider of digital marketing training and consultancy. We are providing consultancy and custom training extensively in Europe, the United States, the Middle East and Asia. We trained over 5,000 marketers and ran over 200 public training courses in 2012.

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1.1. About the authors

Minter Dial, President of [The Myndset Company](#), is a professional speaker and consultant specialized in brand strategy and digital marketing, with blue chip international companies, such as Samsung, BNP-Paribas, PPR and Orange. Prior to the Myndset, Minter led a 16-year international career with the **L'Oréal Group**. In his last post with L'Oréal, Minter was a member of the worldwide Executive Committee of the Professional Products Division, responsible for Business Development, education, e-business (eCommerce, internet, intranet...) & communication.

Previously, Minter was Managing Director of the Canadian subsidiary and General Manager worldwide of the brand, **Redken, 5th Ave NYC**. For inquiries and engagements, Minter can be reached via email at [Minter Dial](mailto:Minter@themyndset.com) (Minter@themyndset.com). Come follow him at [@mdial](#) on Twitter or join his (new) network on [Facebook](#).

Eric Mellet – Building on a wealth of experience in sales and sales management in France, Eric Mellet took on wider responsibilities as European Zone Director for the launch of the Redken NYC 5th Avenue and Matrix brands. Today, he is the Sales & Education Development & Training Director for the L'Oréal's Professional Products Division (L'Oréal's B2B2C structure). He created the Matrix Sales University in 2005, followed more recently by the L'Oréal Sales Academy, with the aim of professionalizing sales teams and organizations, and to support the management of a change to an ever more client-centric model.

Minter Dial and Eric Mellet previously co-wrote *The Brand University*, which was initially published on the [BrandChannel](#) and has been republished, translated and quoted in dozens of publications across the world.

2. The Sales Organization of the Future

*Elegance is the ability to render the complex simple.
A great salesperson will make the purchase decision a simple afterthought.
He/she must first be able to provide cohesive and powerful evidence of added value.*

We believe there are four major questions which companies that are looking to reinvent their sales processes need to ask. These questions are linked to relatively recent paradigm shifts that have materially changed the way in which consumers buy and the way in which organizations need to function.

1. How to transform a product-oriented company into a value-added *services* company?
2. How to reduce the sales force and render salespeople to be more effective and efficient?¹
3. Where and how to *influence* most effectively my customers?
4. What are the right *technologies* to embed into the sales process?

We believe that the confluence of economic pressures, the mainstreaming of social media, mobile technology and a general need to refocus on the customer will radically change the sales landscape over the next 10 years.

If the human relationship remains central to the decision-making process and the act of consuming, we are fast approaching a new era where the virtual and real world will live seamlessly together, complementing one another in a form of blended existence.

2.1. The Context

Sales is an old fashioned *métier* and there will always be a need for superior attitude, skills and knowledge, as well as process in the act of sales. However, the arrival of the internet coincides with three fundamental paradigm shifts that are ineluctably altering the way business must transpire.

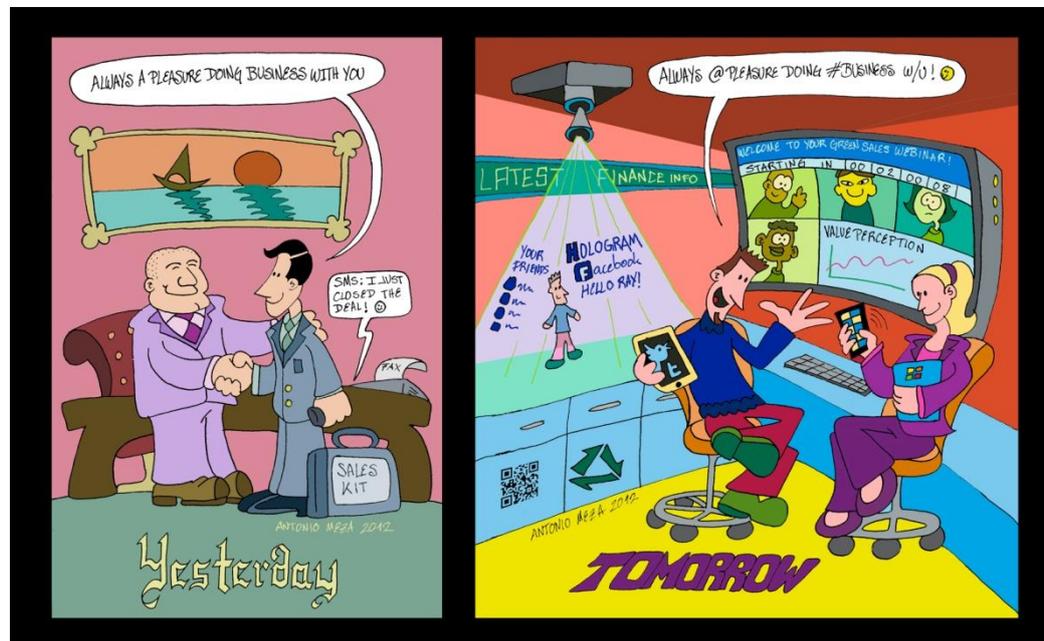
The consumer at all levels has grown aware of the threat of global warming, leading to a greater concern for waste and energy consumption. The consumer is looking for safer alternatives, with greater attention to the impact on the environment, as well as safer in terms of security and health. The second shift is a result of the recessionary times, which have reminded people of the frailty of their economic position. People are more likely to verify the added value of a more expensive alternative.

If luxury continues to be desirable, it is not at any price and certainly not if the product or service does not deliver a sufficiently superior experience. The third, born of the post-9/11 world, is a return to values, a need for sense (and security) and leading to a more grounded consumption with a stronger degree of ethics. There is a well-documented heightened level of mistrust -- of corporations, in general, and of marketing messages in particular. Excess and hyped-up marketing are not desirable.

The impact of these three paradigm shifts for the sales organization is manifold. Certainly, the product or the service must be on a par with expectations; but, that is not sufficient. Consumers will be, in varying degrees, attuned to the carbon footprint. They will scrutinize the value added, especially as it regards the service surrounding the purchase. And, they are more likely to seek a

¹ A renowned sales expert and consultant, Gerhard Gschwandtner, has projected that of the 18 million sales jobs out there today, there will only be need for 3 million by 2020.
<http://blog.sellingpower.com/gg/2011/03/how-salesperson-20-will-grow-your-business.html>

deeper meaning and relationship with the goods and services they are buying. The combination of the recession, global warming and terrorism has also led to a renewed appreciation of “local” commerce, less attracted by the impersonal, massive and distant experience at the hypermarket store.



Above the brand’s promises, the moment of truth is the customer experience and this experience becomes the point of difference and, ultimately, the reason why he/she will value the product or the service. As Robin Lewis and Michael Dart said in their book, *The New Rules of Retail*: “Because of demand shifting towards experiences, the new rules of retail are being led by those who want to blur the distinction between a material purchase and an experiential purchase...from needing stuff to demanding experiences.”

For more and more of us, the benchmark stretched over the years from just consuming to “chilling out” with an espresso at a Starbucks Coffee, “rock and shop” for a shirt in the club-like Abercrombie & Fitch, or just “enjoy learning” as part of the buying experience of an Apple store.

When these fundamental shifts are added to the effects of the internet and the arrival of the more demanding “Generation Y”² in the workforce, there are a number of key points that will need to be addressed.

1. **Relevancy.** A brand must have a higher degree of relevancy and be charged with emotion in order to connect with its clients and staff. What is the higher mission of the brand? How is it improving life on this earth? How is it giving back to the local community? How does it connect with *me* on an emotional level? And are the company’s values shared and lived throughout the organization? A key *modus operandus*: hire and fire by values to create a congruent and coherent link between the stated and *de facto* “lived” values.

Consistency between words and acts is key and staff need to get better in tracking and bringing to light the gaps or the breaches or duty between the company claims and what actually transpires. Over the 10 past years, corporate social responsibility has become a major challenge and a growing consciousness that “the business” could not justify certain kinds of

² Alternatively known as “Digital Natives” or “Millennials,” the Generation Y is typically considered to include those born between 1980 and 2000, having always known the personal computer (1981) and having been educated in the era the Internet (1993).

behavior, from ethical issues (such as child labor) to animal testing to ecological, unhealthy practices.

2. **Service.** A brand must deliver on its promises at a broader level -- not just on its product, but on the complete package along the lifecycle of the product, including before, during and after the purchase act. A good product or service yesterday is just today's average. The consumer seeks an outstanding, unique experience that will give him/her the "euphoric moment of the unexpected," as expressed by Dr. David Lewis, the director of Mindlab International. That exceptional experience can be delivered along the whole value chain, all the services surrounding that product.

Such value-added service should include trustworthy information online, transparent and well ordered peer reviews, superior service at the store and, most emphatically, customer service (e.g., after-sales). The opportunity for people – inside and out the company – to criticize poor performance with such ease has made the need to be good a *sine qua non*.³

3. **Transparency.** In an age where trust is one of the most valuable currencies for spreading positive word of mouth, companies need to eliminate unnecessary gaps of information and strive to create an environment where there is optimal fluidity in sharing of information. To the extent a brand's equity is at stake, sales can no longer rely on "mystique" or obscure terminology.

Safety, eco-friendliness and ethics are increasingly central to the decision-making process. Sustainability is less and less a "nice to communicate," but a gradually shared matter both by the consumers and employees. Obscurity on such issues may be considered tantamount to avowed guilt. Transparency is a key ingredient to gaining trust.

4. **Timing - Real Time.** Whether it is an online forum message board, on a Facebook wall or a voice mail left with customer service, the need to respond in a timely fashion is imperative. The level of impatience matches the evolutions in technology that have enabled immediacy. This means being able to have easy access to the right information (or access to the respective expert). Timeliness is a critical factor in good service. As said by Tom Peters, execution is strategic, and timing is a corner element of execution.

As mentioned above, there are a number of indicators that suggest that the number of salespeople on the street will diminish. The reasons for this include (a) the perceived cost (i.e. return on investment) of the handshake; (b) the rising cost of fuel and cars; (c) the opportunities to 'optimize' via alternative methods which are more suited to the buyer's needs. As a result, the act of sales will need to adapt in dramatic fashion to compensate for the "friendly body" as much as the lack of a sales 'push.'

The transformation in the more mature industries will certainly involve a slower, more painful process due to the installed rites and routines. In the case of industries that have been slower to digitalize (i.e. artisans, kiosks...), the mainstreaming of mobile internet access will inevitably bring enormously different opportunities for *all* Business to Business (B2B) environments.

³ As a consequence, one might see more companies evolving or pivoting, whereby the revenue model shifts from sheer product sales to service sales and valorization. Relevant examples include IBM (from computer manufacturer to consultancy) and Schneider Electric (from supplier of energy products to a solution provider in energy management).

2.2. What will determine winning B2B sales organizations in the future?

2.2.1. Problem solver

We all have in mind the cliché of the talkative, pushy salesman persuading his client that the latter must *do* the deal to meet his own consumer's expectations in order to "survive," all the while intentionally over-stocking him. This is a telltale sign of a company that is programmed for driving all things "new." With a deep belief in products, such companies focus on developing new products to replace older products, often for the sake of the product.

This type of mindset subscribes to over investing in acquiring new clients, new territories and other brands. As Joseph Jaffe wrote in his latest book, *Flip The Funnel*⁴, "acquisition mindsets prompt us to try to talk our way out of our problems instead of just solving them and letting our actions do all the talking."

These "good old days" are over with the mass distribution-mass marketing model and the *sell out* strategy must now trump the *sell in* urge. A healthy, organic and repeat business, which is emphatically cheaper to sustain than "new" business, becomes evermore vital in a business to business environment, where the clients' livelihood may also be at stake. Thus, the supplier should be asking itself what are the real problems that the buyer is facing?

As opposed to thinking solely about what are the new products that fit into one's own portfolio, the supplier must be concerned, first and foremost, with resolving the buyer's problems.⁵ If a buyer's true problems can be resolved, then the purchase of products becomes an easier decision.

2.2.2. Value added support

In these difficult economic times, business has never been more difficult. A winning supplier must be able to provide true value-added services, which enable the customer to be more successful. Push or alibi marketing is tantamount to fraud marketing; pull marketing is no longer optional. Promotional material must be relevant and meaningful. Posters and showcards that are immediately thrown into the trash by the buyer are not only a waste of resources; they are proof of not being client centric. Are the salespeople giving credible information about industry trends or are the "trends" just an excuse to introduce a new product?

When we get into the era of customization, away from the boring "standard", the final experience is more than ever the result of the right balance between the marketing talent to communicate and promote and the commercial talent to "make it happen" on the point of sales.

2.2.3. Channeling the conversation

B2B communities are typically fairly tight-knit and well defined, making them ideal candidates for social media marketing and social commerce. Moreover, the passion is usually high, making for customers that are prone to want to engage. Winning the word-of-mouth battle in tight-knit communities is paramount. However, you can't just buy it or own it. It must be earned.

⁴ Joseph Jaffe, *Flip the Funnel* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010) p. 23.

⁵ What are the real problems for a client/business owner? What are the pink elephants in the room? For example, in the salon (hairdresser) industry: Should I carry more than one color line? How many retail lines to make a viable retail business? How to find and keep quality staff? How to avoid allergic reactions to the product? How to avoid varicose veins which cause so many women to abandon the job? How to effectively recruit new customer via the web? How to install online reservation system?

2.3. The new roles of the future salesperson

2.3.1. Information funnel?

Originally, the salesperson was “the traveller” and as such, he/she was the one to carry on the news about what was happening outside the scope of the more stationary client. Part of his/her power lay in the fact that he/she knew more about what the client’s competition was doing or the client’s new demand and purchase behaviours.

Over the past decades, the balance of power has drastically changed in favour of the buyer, as the client now “travels” as well and exchanges more and more with peers through online forums, social networks, fairs and professional organizations, in addition to the traditional media (TV and radio). The turning point has been the internet revolution, which has flourished, not in spite of, but *because* of the first bubble explosion. Since then, an unassailable shift has been taking place in business.

With the abundance of information on the web, one of the challenges for any business owner is to stay current with what is going on. A customer will ask him or herself who are the trustworthy sources? Can they trust their main supplier for relevant and sound advice? How can they efficiently read up on what they need to know for their business needs? Is there a reliable trade magazine or website bringing the clients what they *need*, not just what they want? There is a new opportunity that has been created by the easy access to too much information: *the curator*.

The curator could provide a one-stop place to find all the relevant news on consumer trends. The salesperson could, in this manner, provide material to feed a client’s blog, Facebook page or website. *Can a salesperson become a curator of a topic that his/her customer base wants to know about with specific local content?* Knowledge is basically becoming a commodity. Effectively and efficiently filtering the *right* information in a timely manner is where the value lies.

2.3.2. E-socialite?

Good salespeople are social beings. One of the qualities that set great salespeople apart is the ability to listen well. With the mainstreaming of social media, the opportunity to “mix” with one’s clients and listen to their perspective and understand their needs has never been easier. Word of mouth happens by definition through conversations – mostly informally. Those conversations are happening in many distinct places, asynchronously and in a diffused, if not confused fashion. Managing (at best) and influencing the conversation in social media poses very real challenges for organizations – especially in large organizations. A good salesperson in the future will be able to monitor, if not participate with his/her clients when the conversation is taking place, wherever that might be on or offline.

This amounts to true “*social selling*,” which is the use of sales 2.0⁶ tools and targeted communication with the right people at the right time within social networks. Such sales intelligence will inevitably help capture leads quicker, convert intention into action. Studies show that sales intelligence will tend to increase sales wins by more than 10 percent.⁷ Of course, a great salesperson has mastered his/her network and has his/her clients actually promoting the business for him/her. Why not have salespeople learning to create offline professional communities as well?

⁶ *Sales 2.0 is the use of better sales practices enabled by technology to improve speed, collaboration, accountability and customer engagement.*

⁷ *The purchase of [Radian6](#) (a platform to help listen, measure and engage across social media) by Salesforce.com in March 2011 speaks volumes to this important trend.*

2.3.3. Coach and train?

In the new paradigm, the salesperson will have to develop new skills and attitudes in order to coach and foster the development of a client. Consequently, salespeople will need to move from a standardized approach to an ever more customized solution. They will need to invest more of their time in the *Why?* and the *How?* versus the *What?* In a B2B environment, this will require salespeople to be able to adjust and adapt the products and/or services to the special framework of the client. In sum, the role of the salesperson must be to facilitate and promote sell-out through strategic counsel, management coaching and staff training.

2.3.4. Warm caller?

Is there a place for the cold caller? The cold caller is, by definition, interruptive in nature. A salesperson calls *out of the blue* and attempts to get an appointment or make a sale. Like push marketing, there will always be a market for such a method; however, with the diffusion of “opt in” options, the increasingly important role of personal and professional networks and a transparency on who knows whom, it is likely that the cold call will continue to play a less effective role in the future. Via the “link” of a professional network such as Viadeo or LinkedIn, one can imagine that all first calls will become “warmer” calls.

2.3.5. Co-innovator?

Acting like a “sensor” or radar, the salesperson will need to keep a finger on the pulse of an ever more complex and fast changing field. The salesperson will have to be able to detect the “local” initiatives, decode the client or consumer usage and decipher the “emerging trends.” With a fluid channel through which to give feedback up through the ranks, this information must be fed back up to help make a difference at a corporate / global level.

One of the keys will be the delegation and empowerment accorded to the salesperson. On the one hand, he/she will need a degree of freedom to adapt to a fast paced and complex environment in the field. On the other hand, the marketing arm must be able to receive, decipher and act on the incoming messages with a conviction that comes from a well-defined understanding of the brand’s values and direction.

2.4. Consequences for the organization

2.4.1. Social sales

To enable social sales means learning to work through the boundaries of personal and professional networks. In order for social selling to be effective, one must be able to create and participate in authentic and meaningful conversations. Social sales mean learning how to listen, collaborate and help.

Give before expecting in return – the greater the perceived value of what you give, the greater the return should be. For example, in a B2B environment, a socially wired salesperson should know how to help a customer create an effective Facebook page, to show how to generate traffic, create specific promotions and engage with his/her client base.

2.4.2. Sales management

Given the new scope and skills required, the First Level Sales Manager’s role will need to evolve. As the model shifts from selling to “*consulting*”, managers will need to help sharpen the salesperson’s soft skills (listening, empathy...) and inject effective business acumen into the daily business organization and processes. For sure, it will require coming up with new ways of appreciating and evaluating the salesperson’s impact within a more sophisticated role to achieve

the final results. What will be the new Key Performance Indicators in a more complex, multi-tasking and informal commercial paradigm?

2.4.3. Virtual sales meetings?

Just as the number of salespeople may become reduced, the geographic proximity of salespeople could make the ability to carry out in-person sales meetings uneconomical. Purely understanding the product (knowledge) can be done effectively by distance. Even demonstrations may be shown rather effectively by distance (live teleconference or video). To the extent there is nothing more powerful than role-playing, perhaps an avenue of development will be *serious games*? Nonetheless, the need for in-person reuniting will remain vital to fortify relationships, team bonding and encourage informal learning. To compensate for fewer sales meetings, these meetings would likely have to be spread out over the course of the month, in bite sizes such that the learning and updating become an ongoing process.

2.4.4. Distance working (or telework)

The sales function systematically involves distance working. The “telework” concerns the salesperson’s interaction with the client, on the one hand, and with the head office on the other. In his/her communication, he/she is confronted with technology on a daily basis. At the same time, he/she runs against the same challenges that accompany telework. A culture of tight controls and a sense of mistrust are not conducive to good distance working or an emancipated, *intrapreneurial* salesperson.

The principles that underpin an effective distance working culture are also relevant for driving a sales team: trust, clear objective setting, time management, and easy access to the right information (including the right technological infrastructure). Sales people *on the road* must be involved from the outset in the creation of the information systems infrastructure for the sales team.

2.4.5. Sales as a team (SAAT)

If the number of salespeople is to be reduced, the overall number of personnel involved in the sales act may well not decrease. The sales process could potentially involve more people, specifically with an accrued importance in the sales support services: customer service, after-sales support, technical support, billing support, etc. The consequence will be a need to be more coordinated. Perhaps the salesperson’s role will evolve into a higher degree of support coordination, overseeing the various parties that surround the client’s needs and driving a more refined Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system with all the spokes tied into the client.

2.4.6. Blended sales

With the arrival of ecommerce, clearly the trend will be to allow customers to fulfil their sales requirements via online purchases. Blended Sales, like blended learning, will involve transformation. Ownership and responsibility – much less tracking – of the sales figures will be more diffuse. The role of the salesperson in face-to-face encounters will be further focused on the “service” angle (the business consultancy, etc.) rather than the *push in* of sales. As Peter Senge says, the only knowledge that is important is **know-how**. In this case, it is know how to help the client progress and fulfil their professional ambitions.

2.4.7. IT

In the web 2.0 world, one of the major shifts that needs to take place is the involvement upstream of IT in the sales process. Sales and IT departments must work together to create better and seamless processes. With technology changing every day and with the number of options for sales

2.0 tools⁸ continuously growing⁹, IT must play a key role. They need to help at a strategic level in selecting and integrating the new tools with a shared vision of the future sales strategy, to be more mindful of the appropriate infrastructure, support and training resources needed.

2.5. Human Resource Challenges

2.5.1. Profiles and skills

As the sales function shifts, the profiles and skills of the salesperson will necessarily need to evolve. The transformation of incumbent sales teams, consisting of “older generation” salespeople and managers, will certainly require a significant investment in training.

2.5.2. The Gen Y¹⁰ salesperson

The new generation of workers and salespeople, “Gen Y-ers” have some characteristics which stand out and, notwithstanding the danger of generalizations, they are driven by certain motivational forces that need to be integrated into the sales job if they are to be retained. While money remains an element that cannot be overlooked, the five key non-monetary drivers are¹¹:

- *Learning*: they want to satisfy their curiosity and feel like they are learning something new and valuable.
- *Diversity*: different tasks and roles, to avoid monotony and give a sense of adventure.
- *Flexibility*: to be able to work flex hours, which fortunately does not mean any less hours. The Gen Y are more comfortable working late at night or on weekends than being obliged to come in for *facetime* at a regularly prescribed time at the office.
- *Community*: the company should give back to its community or, for example, support its employees local/charity efforts.
- *Meaning*: the purpose (‘mission’) of the brand must resonate within. Gen Y wants to feel that their job and the company for which they are working makes sense for them in a broader sense (matching their values).

2.5.3. Elearning

With travel costs likely to continue to increase, and with ever greater needs to train and adapt the sales team, the option to create distance learning becomes increasingly obvious. This can take many forms: podcasts for the car, webinars at “team meetings,” serious games for simulated role-playing, one-on-one instruction over *Skype*, an online repertoire of educational material relating to skills and knowledge acquisition. Naturally, elearning alone will not suffice – requiring the individual learning levels and methods to be complemented with in-classroom sessions at the in-person sales meetings. Optimally, you will see technology – and the online material – being integrated into the onsite meetings and trainings to reinforce the blended quality of the learning (blurring the boundary between elearning and in-class learning).

⁸ There are now more than 2,000 Sales 2.0 tools on the market.

⁹ I continue to believe that the B2B supplier that manages to own the “software” in the client’s space will gain an invaluable tool. Concretely, I see a salesperson’s role of implementing a multi-media control center into the heart of the client’s workspace being elemental. Opportunities include: business software, media messaging, lighting and music, distance/blended learning...

¹⁰ Generation Y, also known as Digital Natives or Millennials, is defined as those people born between 1980 and 2000.

¹¹ These factors are taken from research by Tammy Erickson, President of The Concourse Institute (the research and education arm of BSG Alliance) and Sylvia Ann Hewlett, President of Centre for Work Life Policy, Harvard University.

How can the processes and HR systems be adapted for the sales function, to ensure constant learning and improvement?

2.6. Technology questions

2.6.1. Working in the cloud

With access to information in real time being ever more necessary, having ready access to the same and most up-to-date information is vital. To carry out effective CRM, it is more than likely that all the client and sales data will be stored “in the cloud” meaning that sales teams will increasingly need to have “state of the art” connectivity (the internet will be everywhere, in any event).

2.6.2. Payment

Payment techniques and technologies are evolving. With the ability to use one’s mobile phone, virtual banks, systems like *Paypal* -- and maybe *Facebook* dollars tomorrow -- buyers are likely to request more flexibility from their suppliers in the means of payment.

2.6.3. Reporting

With blended sales (in-person and ecommerce), the challenge of clear reporting becomes more difficult. Moreover, with the arrival of affiliate marketing and social selling, the ability to identify origination and commission structures may be a source of constant turmoil.

2.6.4. Mobility

From order taking and presentations to communication and mcommerce (mobile commerce), the mobile phone and the tablet iPads – as well as the next generation of connected items, such as cars, watches and wallets – will become standard equipment for salespeople. Training on technology will become a must for salespeople.

2.6.5. Return on investment

Given the new investments in technology hardware and accompanying training, it will be important for businesses to find new ways to judge the efficiency and effectiveness of their sales force.