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Driving Revenue For Organizations Through Multiple Sales Channels

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Driving Revenue For Organizations Through Multiple Sales Channels

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the sales industry from how sales became a profession to sales as we know it today. Driving revenue is the main goal of a for profit company or organization and how this goal can be achieved using one or more sales channels will be discussed within this research. This research seeks to determine if by utilizing multiple sales channels within an organization to sell its products and services, is that organization more profitable as they have more avenues to be able to reach more potential customers? While there are many sales channels that can be used to drive revenue for an organization, the two most common sales channels used today are direct sales channels and indirect sales channels. The success of the organization, the leadership team, and the sales team will depend on multiple variables discussed within this research such as hiring and keeping the right salespeople within the organization, the traits of great salespeople as well as the benefits and downsides to having multiple sales channels. The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the sales industry as well as the future of the sales industry will also be discussed within this research.

Keywords: sales, direct sales, indirect sales, channel sales, sales channels

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Introduction

According to LinkedIn, "selling is one of the oldest recorded professions" (Mehra, 2017, para. 2). LinkedIn goes on to explain that in the 1780s snake oil selling is documented as the earliest mention of sales as an actual profession (Mehra, 2017). The profession of sales though, continues to evolve at a rapid pace as a talented salesperson can generate large amounts of revenue for an organization and a lot of cashflow for themselves at the same time while also solving problems and assisting customers in a meaningful way. A well trained, passionate, salesperson is a true asset to any company or organization so finding the right people for these sales roles and keeping those people within the organization remains a high priority for sales managers across all selling channels and all industries.

While there are various sales channels which can be utilized to sell a company's products or services, there are two main channels that drive the most revenue for the company – the direct sales channel and the indirect sales channel. Though each channel has a different focus and strategy, both channels have the same objective at the forefront of their mind – to drive revenue for their team and their company. Along with the direct sales channel and indirect sales channel, there are many other sales channels a company can use to grow revenue for their business such as inside sales, marketplaces, subscription services, and more. Indeed.com can provide fifteen examples of common sale channels immediately! Why multiple sales channels exists and what each of those channels bring to the company, as well as what motivates salespeople in each channel and how channel conflict and payouts are handled for salespeople in these roles will be discussed as this research takes a deeper dive into the history of sales in general with an emphasis on the direct sales channels and indirect sales channels more specifically.

How Sales Become a Profession

       The Father of Modern Sales

       In the 1880s, John H. Patterson, President of the National Cash Register, is credited as the person to professionalize sales as an actual profession (Mehra, 2017, para. 4). It is thought to be believed that large companies ranging from GM to IMB would not be as successful as they are today without the contributions of John H. Patterson and his sales methods. "Patterson was one the greatest business builders in American history" (Hoover, 2021, para. 1) which earned him the title of Father of Modern Sales according to the American Business History Center (2021). John H. Patterson, a Dayton, Ohio native born in the 1840s, was one of eleven children in his family. He briefly joined the military and can be quoted as saying "I believe that a business ought to be like a battleship…in cleanliness, in order, and in perfect discipline of the men, in the readiness for use of every part of the plant" (Hoover, 2021, para. 2). Once Patterson returned from his military duty he attended Dartmouth College in the 1860s after which he then returned to Ohio and went into business for himself.

       One of Patterson's earliest ventures included a general store which he shared with his brother. The general store was selling "$50,000 worth of goods, on which there was a large margin, but they still found themselves in debt" (Hoover, 2021, para. 3). The Patterson brothers quickly realized that their employees were not always taking or receiving payment for the goods they were selling, and they were also giving items away to friends and family. This led Patterson to purchase four wooden cash registers from James Ritty, a Dayton, Ohio saloon owner. Once these registers were implemented at Patterson's general store, the losses went from "$16,000 to $3,000 in six months and help him show a profit of $5,000" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 13). John H. Patterson then began investing more time

and money into the cash register business and by 1884 he owned all of the rights and patents for the entire company which he then renamed the National Cash Register Company and made himself President (Hoover, 2021).

Patterson's Big Ideas

The National Cash Register Company (NCR) may be what much of the business world will remember John H. Patterson for in the long term, but he is also credited as being the inventor of modern selling due to his other contributions to the sales industry. The "sales-training manual, canned presentation, protected territory, and quota system" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 4) can all be linked back to John H. Patterson as well as "sales meetings, direct mail, testimonials, industrial advertising, and publicity" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 4).

John H. Patterson took his personal experience of seeing the value that the cash register brought to his own general store, and he was adamant that he would create awareness and demand for the product after he had bought what became The NCR. Patterson stunned business owners throughout the Midwest community in Ohio with his heavy and relentless use of advertising, direct mailers, and publicity though. The way he went about his advertising efforts specifically, "raised advertising and promotion to unprecedented levels of sophistication and created models still in use today" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 18). One of those promotional ideas was direct marketing. John H. Patterson's first direct mail campaign did not produce even one response! He sent 5,000 potential prospects a direct mailer, spending thousands of dollars in the process, but he failed to even put an image of the cash register on the mailer to grab potential customer's attention. John H. Patterson continued to send mailers using different methods which occasionally included "using plain envelopes and

often had the pieces mailed from cities other than Dayton" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 18). Soon his promotional ideas grew into including testimonials from real customers inside those direct mailers. This marketing tactic proved to be one of the greatest ways to sway potential customers into purchasing the cash register. Stockholders and employees began to get frustrated with the expenses Patterson was racking up with his mailers though, and the post office even had to hire additional employees to handle the amount of mail going out for Patterson's advertising (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010).

John H. Patterson, the brilliant man he is characterized as being, quickly dived into print advertising as well. Print advertising at the time was stuffy, lengthy, and quite a process to copy but Patterson was able to simplify the ads as well as make them easier on the eye for the copiers and the potential customers. Patterson is noted as vastly improving the effectiveness of print advertising with his simplifications. Patterson also specifically encouraged the National Cash Register to 'be direct and simple' in their advertising. They kept their ads brief to the point using plain typing styles and blank space. Patterson maintained the idea that he wanted his ads to focus on the customer's need and not the product itself and he also stated that "no ad is big enough to sell two ideas" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 21).

John H. Patterson's next big idea was the industrial publicity release in which he hired multiple publicists to create articles regarding the NCR products and activities happening within the company. Using this idea and his previous successful promotional ideas, Patterson ensured potential prospects would regularly see the NCR name throughout the community either by direct-mail flyers, print ads, and/or the NRC's own published articles. In direct response to John H. Patterson's bold efforts, people immediately developed a need for the cash register in their

businesses, just as Patterson desired. Thanks to Patterson's tenacity and high intensity selling efforts, the first professional salesforce was created to assist with the demand for this new cash register product. John H. Patterson, a military style man as we have learned, was concerned about quality throughout the sales process though stating, "one half of our [NCR] salesmen are so ignorant of their product that they will actually prevent a man from buying, even though he wanted a cash register" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 2, 2010, para. 1). In efforts to assist the salesmen and also to have more control over the information being provided to potential prospects and customers, Patterson decided to write up every known aspect and selling point of the cash register he could think of. "The document became one of the first canned sales presentations – the NCR Primer" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 2, 2010, para. 2). Patterson used the Primer to weed out sales representatives who refused to follow his guidelines and tactics within the NCR Primer.

The NCR Primer "divided a sale into four steps: approach, proposition, demonstration, and close" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 2, 2010, para. 4). According to John Henry Patterson (2010) the steps a salesperson should follow are:

- Step 1 - Approach: This phase included never even mentioning the cash register to the prospect but instead explaining how they, as a salesperson, wanted to help the business owner increase their profits.

- Step 2 - Proposition: The salesperson would describe the cash register to the prospect and tell them how it could benefit their business when it came to theft prevention and the accurate record keeping aspects the cash register could provide for the business.

- Step 3 - Demonstration: The goal at this point in the sales process would be to lock in a demonstration of the cash register with the prospect, showing them the product itself and a brief overview of how it works.

- Step 4 - Close: Sealing the deal with the prospect is the final stage according to the NCR Primer. (para 4)

John H. Patterson then followed up The NCR Primer with the Book or Arguments which later became turned into the official NCR Manual. This sales manual was the "first ever systematic approach to handling customer objections" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 2, 2010, para. 6) and it also discussed other topics helpful to the sales representatives such as how to make proper introductions to potential customers, interviews with customers or being interview by customers, critical sales situations sales representatives need to be aware of, and finally, how to close the deal. The NCR Manual existed to "help the prospect understand the value of the solution, not merely to batter and cajole the prospect into placing an order or to win in a series of arguments" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 2, 2010, para. 6).

Next up on Patterson's list of accreditations to the industry is sales training. Patterson found the need for training sales representatives within his own company once he attended the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago where he happened to drop in on the salespeople at the National Cash Register booth. To his demise, he learned that the salespeople working the booth knew hardly anything about the cash register at all. Patterson took his work from The NRC Primer and The NRC Manual and reviewed the information with those sales representatives immediately. The results of the sales training session were astonishing, so this led Patterson to begin providing training schools for all salespeople within the National Cash Register company. Patterson was

able to open the first sales training school the following spring. In these sales training schools, John H. Patterson is well known for writing 'Think!' on a flip chart before every class as well as having a plaque on his desk stating the same motto and even having large posters made to ensure visitors to his classroom were aware that they needed to think before speaking to him. This same idea was then used by a colleague of Patterson's, Thomas Watson Jr., when he started his company, IBM. IBM used this 'Think!' slogan and actually went on to create the ThinkPad laptop which later became the iPad (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 1, 2010, para. 12).

John H. Patterson used a selling approach towards potential customers that focused on the prospects needs versus the actual product. This concept was a very contemporary concept for its time. Patterson also taught the salespeople how to communicate with their potential customers and truly understand their needed. He practiced and preached to his salespeople how to ensure that potential customers understood the message they were trying to convey. It is estimated that Patterson's training schools were "directly responsible for doubling business in the first year" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 2, 2010, para. 14).

John H. Patterson is also well known for being able to increase productivity of his salespeople by creating and using methods that pertained to that salesperson's quota numbers, their specific territory which he coined as protected territories as well as how a sales conversation should go, in theory, overall. Attending these sales conventions such as the Worlds' Fair, gave Patterson and his team time to brainstorm and exchange ideas to increase sales for the company and selling in general. A revolutionary concept during this business era was protected sales territories which were created in efforts to attract talented sales representatives and have them maintain the customers in those areas as well as sell to new

customers. The implementation of this innovative idea cut down on bickering between salespeople as well as turnover and even combatted poor productivity. For a sales representative to keep their protected sales territory they had to reach a set sales quota. This sales quota became "the first effort to obtain measurable results in selling" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 3, 2010, para. 20). Salespeople also had to return to old customers in attempts to sell them again which Patterson termed 'using the user'. While many salespeople thought this idea was impossible, past customers were quick to bite with new sales and also provided great testimonials for future advertising and promotional campaigns (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 3, 2010, para. 20).

Patterson's Legacy in Sales

John H. Patterson paved the way for salespeople and sales managers in today's world with his innovative ideas and sales tactics which earned him the title of Father of Modern Sales. Patterson's contributions and selling techniques at the time were far more advanced than much of what is used in sales today surprisingly. Many of his 'wild ideas' like maintaining quota and protected sales territories are generally still used in the sales industry today though. Patterson proudly taught that "good salespeople are made; not born" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 3, 2010, para. 24). This takeaway from Patterson that you can mold anyone off the street into a gifted salesperson should be a reminder for the sales managers and the company when looking to hire new salespeople to generate revenue for the company. John H. Patterson transformed sales into an honorable profession and provided "salespeople the professional skills to earn a great living in exchange for creating customer success" (John Henry Patterson: The Father of Professional Selling Part 3, 2010, para. 24).

Without Patterson's brilliant mind that officially started it all for the sales industry, more than 15 million people in the United States would be without a job today. The direct selling industry alone is worth over $35 billion dollars (Beeler et al., para. 3). Many are unaware that sales can actually include "everything from informing your doctor about new medications to bringing you a different size of pants in the dressing room" (Renzulli, 2019, para. 1).

The sales industry has many different sales roles, as well as sales channels, that companies will use to sell their products and service in order to increase revenue for the company. Focusing on sales channels which are used to drive revenue for the company, Indeed.com explains that "sales channels are methods a business uses for selling a product or service" (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021, para. 3).

Sales channels can be established in multiple ways according to Indeed. One way for a company to increase the amount of selling boots on the ground without increasing the company's overhead is by using a third-party providers such as "affiliate partners, strategic partners, retailers, and product vendors" (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020, para. 3):

- Affiliate marketers. This type of partner sells a company's products to consumers in exchange for commission.

- Strategic partners. These partners have aligning interests with another business, and they partner together to benefit both businesses at the same time.

- Retailers. Retailers will buy products in bulk at discounted pricing then sell individual items to the consumer at a higher price as they must take into consideration store overhead.

- Product vendors. These vendors are company representatives who sell products to other businesses.

Hiring the Right People for a Sales Role

  Education versus Experience

  Sales managers often ponder the idea of whether hiring a new salesperson with or without sales experience produces greater performance outcomes and if it requires less investment for the company when it comes to training if this person already has sales experience. Hiring the right people for the right roles will in turn lead to retaining those people in those sales positions for a longer period. To hire the right people, a sales manager must find quality applicants or qualified people to hire for their salesforce. This is one of the most important responsibilities of a sales manager in the sales industry. "The sales profession is expected to be among the fastest growing occupations in the United States over the next decade" (Bolander et al., 2019, para. 1). There is also a large number of people from older generations that are inching their way towards retirement. This will drive demand for new salespeople to replace those to intend to retire in the near future. If businesses are to thrive in their respective industries moving forward, the right hiring decisions must first be made by the company's leadership teams. While there is much discussion and research that has been done on turnover rates of people in the sales industry, very little research on hiring the right salespeople has been completed at this time (Bolander et al., 2019).

  Bolander et al. (2019) suggests that "present research considers the effect of two such heuristics: prior sales experience and formal sales education. Prior sales experience is the most popular hiring heuristic used by sales organizations" (para. 3). Arguably by most sales managers, experienced salespeople produce greater performance outcomes and require less investment from the company when it comes to sales training. In efforts to move the sales profession in the right direction and attract additional talent, more colleges and universities are

offering formal sales programs to their students. These programs are becoming more prevalent nationwide and give the student a head start with training and understanding the sales industry. This shift in colleges offering formal sales programs provides sales managers more qualified applicants for sales roles within their company. These programs create awareness that a sales education can provide the same benefits as prior sales experience and still allow the salesperson to adapt successfully to a new company (Bolander et al., 2019).

Bolander et al. (2019) research data was collected by two firms who concluded the studies on "coaching newly hired salespeople with prior experience" and "coaching new hired salespeople from formal sales education programs" (para 3). In Study One (S1), Bolander et al. (2019) used:

80 salespeople hired in the past five years who had tenure of at least three years with the organization. Each salesperson was asked to complete a survey and quarterly performance figures were then provided for each salesperson and matched to the survey data. Of the 80 salespeople, 50 completed responses were received. The researchers were not able to collect data on sales manager coaching behaviors from sample one because these salespeople regularly switch sales managers. (para. 46)

In Study Two (S2) completed by Bolander et al. (2019), 202 salespeople hired in the past 24 months were asked to complete a survey. "In contrast to S1, salespeople worked under a consistent manager throughout their tenure. Monthly performance figures were then provided and of the 202 salespeople asked to participate, 86 individuals completed responses" (Bolander et al., 2019, para. 50). In their studies the authors measured time, sales performance, prior experience and educational background, manager feedback and role modeling, and covariates. Overall "results indicate that the performance of new hires without prior experience of sales

education increases gradually over time as one would expect" (Bolander et al., 2019, para. 50).

Bolander et al. (2019) research sheds new light on hiring heuristics and helps assess new hire

performance taking into consideration their prior sales experience or formal sales education.

Changing Sales Stereotypes

In addition to looking at a potential salesperson's formal education and list of

qualifications, "salesperson stereotypes are shown to be consistently negative across cultures and

to negatively impact…recruitment" (Cummins & Peltier, 2021, para. 2). Changing the

perception of sales roles can be challenging but exposing people to the sales industry early in

life, especially students early in their college careers, could create a positive impact on their

desire to want to pursue a career is the sales industry. A good way to introduce the sales industry

to college students would be to bring in real world salespeople who can offer insights about their

own personal role in the sales industry while also offering countering advice to any of those

stereotypes about sales currently held by any of the students. Interventions designed to motivate

beliefs and attitude changes in the sales world is key to gaining these young adults in future

salesforces across the globe. According to Cummins and Peltier (2019) and consistent with

previous research as well showing that perceived self-efficacy positively impacts performance:

> Expert salespeople in the classroom would be able to present new and applicable
>
> information to students about the reality of sales careers and, thus, change the students'
>
> decision-making process for choosing a sales career. The results supported the hypothesis
>
> as the direct path from perceived sales knowledge to intent (H12a) was the strongest after
>
> exposure to salespeople ($p < .01$). The fact that this was the strongest moderation effect is
>
> somewhat surprising since the summated means for perceived sales knowledge pre-
>
> versus post-exposure to expert salespeople in the classroom was lower than any of other

summated changes (.21). Even a small change in the students' level of self-efficacy and

perceived behavioral control leads to significant changes in intent to pursue a sales

career. (para. 53)

Traits of a Successful Salesperson

Grit and Determination

Grit, as defined by Dugan et al. (2019), is "perseverance in pursuit of long-term goals"

(para. 2). "Grit has its origin in positive psychology" (Dugan et al., 2019, para. 2). This field of

scholarly research suggests that individuals can improve their own lives. This is particularly

helpful in the sales industry because a talented salesperson with true grit can directly affect their

own success, their own paychecks, and many times their own schedules. "There is also

additional research proving that gritty individuals do enjoy better performance outcomes than

their less gritty counterparts" (Dugan et al., 2019, para. 2). The sales industry places much

importance on the value of grit and determination in their salespeople. Sales representatives must

be able to handle heavy workloads, high competition, rejection, lengthy buying cycles and more.

They can preserve and survive through these challenges thanks to their grit and determination.

Self-Efficacy

"Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to perform well in a

specific task domain" (Dugan et al., 2019, para. 13). For a salesperson with high self-efficacy,

they are able to easily create their own motivation and locate the resources necessary to meet the

demands of the company and their clients. This self-efficacy trait is exceedingly helpful for the

company as self-starters and highly motivated salespeople will produce more revenue for the

company which also benefits the sales representative personally based on their compensation

package. Research completed by Dugan et al. (2019) "suggests the importance of self-efficacy

in developing grit consistent with the findings of Wolters and Hussain (2015), who found an association between grit and self-efficacy in samples of college and high school students" (para. 14).

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is another trait associated with successful salespeople within the industry. As described by Dugan et al. (2019), competitiveness in a sales role is "an enjoyment of interpersonal competition and the desire to win and be better than others" (para. 17). Highly competitive salespeople are going to monitor their sales pipelines and perform at a higher level more consistently for the company; they will focus on outperforming others, and they will also put in the extra effort required for their work-related tasks (Dugan et al., 2019, para. 17). This competitiveness will in turn increase the salespersons performance and increase revenue for the company and the salesperson themselves. "The positive association between grit and various performance outcomes has been demonstrated across a series of domains" (Dugan et al., 2019, para. 16).

Brand Attachment

Brand attachment is an additional trait also associated to the success of someone in the sales industry. Brand attachment is directly connected to a salesperson's thoughts, their emotions, and the prominence of thoughts associated with the brand they are promoting and selling. This brand attachment trait, while having many positive qualities and outcomes for the salesperson and the company, may also appear as inauthentic to customers in some instances though. According to Beeler et al. (2021):

Strong salesperson brand attachment increases salesperson effort on behalf of the brand. While extant research generally affirms the wisdom inherent in encouraging salespeople

to develop a strong attachment to the brands they represent, anecdotal evidence suggests that strong employee-brand bonds may also have a dark side. For instance, Kruse (2015) suggests after examining the culture of Chick-fil-A's, not all potential customers appreciate the brand culture Chick-fil-A has created amongst its employees. One reader commented on the article saying, "I can't stand the Chick-fil-A people. They are obsessed! It's just chicken!" Exploratory interviews conducted for this study suggest a similar sentiment regarding salespeople with a strong attachment to the brands they sell: "I literally avoid him now ... I bought stuff from him when he first started selling ... but now I regret that $200 purchase. He believes in [brand name] and their products so much I almost feel sorry for him. We [their group of friends] now make fun of him because he thinks what he sells is the cure for everything, including cancer." (para. 1)

Unfortunately, a sales representative can often become so blinded by the brand they are working to sell that it could lead to that salesperson acting in a manner that may not be in the customer's best interests, but their own. According to Beeler et al. (2021) , who conducted their study using interviews of direct selling representatives, it is suggested:

Over-passionate salespeople sometimes get into the customer role instead of assuming the position of the sales advisors. This may likely depreciate their credibility. Thus, strongly attached salespeople may act as emotional zealots for the brands they sell because of their own brand relationship, leading customers to question the credibility or trustworthiness of the salesperson's brand-related claims. (para. 13)

A salesperson who presents an 'over-the-top' sales strategy to their prospect may lead that potential customer to question whether the company itself can live up to the promises being made by that salesperson. Customers can often shut down or lose interest in the company or

product when as they begin to see the salesperson as 'a broken record' constantly repeating how much they themselves love the company or product, or how well it worked for them so it will definitely work for the customer in the same manner, which may not always be the case. Many potential customers see this type of behavior as trying too hard and it can feel dishonest or not genuine coming from someone in a sales role. More preferrable, salespeople with low to moderate levels of brand attachment are noted as being able to remain more objective throughout the sales process as they are able to dissociate themselves more from the brand itself (Beeler et al., 2021).

Keeping the Right People in Sales Roles

> **Turnover**

Sales managers must always be on the lookout for performance issues with their individual sales representatives but also turnover rates within the company's overall salesforce. "The turnover rate among professional salespeople is double that of other professions" (Mallin et al., 2022, para. 1). Bande et al. (2021) states that according to "The Bridge Group (2018), the median annual turnover sits at 39% among business-to-business salespeople" (para. 1). Likewise, according to this same report, "the annual tenure of salespeople has dropped from 2.5 years in 2010 to 1.5 years in 2018" (Bande et al., 2021, para. 1).

There are many factors that can contribute to representative turnover in the sales industry. One determining factor a salesperson should consider when making the decision to stay or leave their current sales position is their work meaning. "Work meaning is defined as the degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile" (Hackman & Oldham, as cited in Bande et al. 2021). Work meaning can provide salespeople with empowerment as well as motivate them in their roles. "The meaning of work is

found to be related to important work outcomes such as job satisfaction, well-being, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and individual performance" (Bande et al., 2021, para. 17). Bande et al. (2021) also explains that job position "meaningfulness reduces strain perceptions and reduces turnover intention" (para. 17).

An additional factor to be explored when working to deter salesperson turnover is maintaining a manageable workload. This is typically set by the representative's sales manager. A large or unmanageable workload can be a major psychological stressor for any salesperson. According to the JD-R theory:

> Work overload is a job demand that depletes employees from their energy and can lead to employee strain. Overworked salespeople feel as if they cannot complete job tasks adequately and in a timely manner Work overload increases emotional exhaustion, reduces job satisfaction and commitment, and ultimately leads to higher turnover. (Jaramillo et al., as cited in Bande et al., 2021)

Most sales industry roles are already fast paced, high pressure, and very competitive to begin with but adding additional workload to that salesperson could potentially affect their commitment to their position and their customers, their job satisfaction, and their overall performance for the organization. It has been studied and noted that if a sales representative has access to more resources in their sales position in general, they are more capable of meeting the demands of their sales role. "When salespeople are confident in their abilities and skills, they can prioritize and allocate effort, which minimizes the perception of overload" (Bande et al., 2021, para. 26).

In an additional study of the sales industry, it was examined that a salesperson's perceived identification with their supervisor could be directly related to sales position turnover within the company. According to Mallin et al. (2022):

In the work environment of professional sales, this salience may be driven by perceptions and observations that a salesperson has of his/her immediate sales supervisor or manager, on sales task-related activities and performance-related behaviors and outcomes. Such perceptions are important for influencing salesperson work attitudes, behaviors, and learning. Through perceived personal identification with their supervisor, salespeople develop a sense of respect and pride through their association and seek to emulate those behaviors they view as aspirational. (para. 6)

A further study expounding upon salesperson turnover indicates specifically "that Mexican and Indian salespeople differ in how their level of trust in supervisor, regulation of emotion, interpersonal conflict and felt stress" (Onyemah et al., 2021, para. 3). These are all factors that can relate to their intention to quit their current sales roles. This study also found that "a strong positive relationship between felt stress and turnover intention" (Onyemah et al., 2021, para. 3) applied. This study continued to elaborate on the notion that while the direct costs of salesperson turnover can be quite substantial for the organization, indirect costs such as losing formed customer relationships and revenue loss may be even greater (Onyemah et al., 2021).

Travel friction can also be added to the list of reasons that a salesperson may leave their current sales position. Many sales roles in the industry require significant amounts of travel time but not all sales positions. "Travel friction is found as a significant antecedent to both work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, through emotional exhaustion both travel

friction and work-family conflict ultimately manifest in reduced job satisfaction, diminished organizational commitment, and increased attrition risk" (Ambrose et al., 2021, para. 1).

Job Satisfaction and Burnout

In efforts to curb salesperson turnover rates, the company must also take into account a salespersons' job satisfaction and the burnout they may experience in these high demanding sales positions. Burnout is very common for representatives in the sales industry. According to Matthews and Rutherford (2021):

The impact of skill discretion and work demands on salesperson job satisfaction: the mediating influence of the burnout facets' aims to support the findings that skill discretion and hindrance demands impact burnout, although to differing degrees. Skill discretion had the largest influence on personal accomplishment, while hindrance demands had the largest influence on depersonalization. When examining the influencers of job satisfaction, personal accomplishment had the largest total effect, while emotional exhaustion had the largest direct effect. Skill discretion had the largest indirect influence on job satisfaction, followed by depersonalization (para. 1).

"Better understanding of salesperson burnout may be key for firms in reducing, in part, some of these changes to the ideal customer-salesperson relationship" (Matthews & Rutherford, 2021, para. 2). Burnout is an employee's psychological response to prolonged work demands which involve emotional and interpersonal responsibilities on the job (Matthews & Rutherford, 2021). Burnout is comprised of three facets:

- Personal accomplishment or lack thereof, and ineffectiveness

- Depersonalization or detachment from their job

- Overwhelming emotional exhaustion

"While it is well understood that burnout creates an overall adverse effect on employees the emotional exhaustion facet of burnout is often the only facet studied within a sales context" (Matthews & Rutherford, 2021, para. 3). This lack of research specifically hinders the sales manager's and the company's understanding of the full impact that salesperson burnout really creates (Matthews & Rutherford, 2021).

Within the sales industry, depersonalization and the lack of personal accomplishments are equally as experienced by sales representatives as emotional exhaustion. Diminished personal accomplishments or ineffectiveness as a salesperson can in turn lead to depersonalization. "Depersonalization or emotional exhaustion is the first step in the burnout" (Matthews & Rutherford, 2021, para. 7). As salespeople begin to distance themselves from their potential customers or their company in general, they also begin to feel overwhelming emotional exhaustion. However, this salesperson withdrawal due to chronic job stressors only has an indirect impact on job satisfaction. According to Matthews and Rutherford (2021):

> Personal accomplishment has a negative relationship with both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. As self-perceptions of accomplishment decrease, feelings of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion tend to increase. Prior studies on salesperson burnout indicate that emotional exhaustion increases when levels of personal accomplishment are reduced and increases when depersonalization occurs. (para. 7)

Incentives

Once the company has hired the right person for a sales position, how do they plan on keeping that person long term while reducing turnover rates and keeping job satisfaction high? Homburg et al. (2021) provided insight on how different types of incentives, including financial and non-financial, affect the performance of the inside sales team. Homburg et al. (2021)

questioned 366 salespeople working in 118 inside sales units and used empirical testing to see if

unit incentives positively effect salesperson performance more than individual incentives, which

occasionally create a negative correlation with the unit's performance as a whole (para. 7).

Homburg et al. (2021) obtained "data from a global fastening and assembly technology

firm" (para. 39). A single-firm research design was used for this research and the sales units

involved were all located in different geographic locations. "To motivate the inside salespeople

working in these units, the firm employs unit-based financial and non-financial incentives as well

as individual-based non-financial incentive offering a suitable context for the examination of our

research questions" (Homburg et al., 2021, para. 39). The researchers of this study invited 637

salespeople from 236 inside sales teams to participate in this informational study.

Questionnaires were obtained from these salespeople and after much analysis by the

researchers, many salespeople were eliminated altogether. The researchers also examined the

exclusion procedures used within this study. Once the elimination process of sales

representatives was completed "366 salespeople within 118 inside sales units remained"

(Homburg et al., 2021, para. 39). Results of this empirical study by Homburg et al. (2021) show

that:

> Unit incentives are positively related to unit performance, whereas individual incentives
>
> notably have a negative relationship with unit performance. Results further reveal that
>
> both density and centralization influence the incentive–unit performance relationships.
>
> Overall, findings indicate that the effects of various incentives in the inside sales unit
>
> context differ from those in other contexts, resulting in important implications for
>
> managers. (para. 1)

In the end, this study can be seen as an advance in the sales industry in a major way. This specific study was the first of its kind to focus specifically on the incentives of the inside sales team of companies. The researchers concluded during this study that individual incentives for salespeople working within an inside sales unit generally correlated to lower unit performance overall even if the individual's performance improved. This empirical research was also "the first to scrutinize the interaction of different incentives for inside sales units and their unit structure, measured by social network analysis" (Homburg et al., 2021, para. 8). Also identified during this study was that "inside sales units' structures affect incentive–unit performance relationships and that managers should employ incentives that correspond with underlying unit structures" (Homburg et al., 2021, para. 8).

This same research study regarding incentives also suggests that sales managers should identify unit structures and find the most incentivizing approach for their salesforce. The researchers also advise sales managers to "adapt both unit structure and incentives to reach the best overall inside sales unit incentivizing and structuring solution; Altogether, the findings of this study provide managers with actionable guidelines for incentivizing the growing number of inside sales units" (Homburg et al., 2021, para. 67).

Sales Manager and Sales Leadership

Monetary incentives will always play a large part in keeping salespeople in their current sales positions as commission is one of the main reasons people pursue careers the sales industry, but a sales manager's leadership worthiness can also affect the turnover rate of salespeople in their salesforce. According to the pull-to-stay effect, the influence of sales managers' leadership worthiness on a salesperson's turnover intentions is the well-known idea which explains that "employees don't quit their jobs, they quit their bosses" (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021, para. 2).

Badrinarayanan et al. (2021) further noted that leadership worthiness and a bad boss will negatively impact salesperson turnover, as one would assume. They go on to elaborate that turnover in a sales departments and sales roles are substantial issue that sales organizations must face frequently. They further investigated manager related behaviors, such as leadership style, which was determined to be directly correlated to salesperson turnover. Going even further in the framework of their study, the researchers "find that leadership worthiness mitigates turnover...via personal identification and trust in the manager" (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021, para. 1). The researchers relate this specific happening to a pull-to-stay effect on the salesperson (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021).

The pull-to-stay effect study indicates that "managers who are perceived to demonstrate leadership worthiness are more likely to gain follower acceptance" (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021, para. 3). Leadership worthiness, in a sales manager role, can be characterized by "possessing appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as exercising influence when setting goals and motivating with confidence, while outwardly showing behavioral integrity" (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021, para. 3). The researchers of this study hypothesize that "the immediate boss affects the employees' daily work life" (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021, para. 14). Therefore the sales manager must be perceived as a worthy leader if they want their salespeople to stay within their specific organization and salesforce. For a sales manager to outwardly represent their leadership worthiness to their sales team, the sales manager must be able to show these specific characteristics:

- competent in their own selling skills

- charismatic

- motivating

- fair

- truthful

These five characteristics enhance the employee's perception of the sales manager's capabilities in the industry. When a salesperson's manager is perceived as competent, the salesperson themself is less likely to let problems fester with customers or other sales representatives and they will also look towards their sales managers for guidance and support more often (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021).

Indirect Sales versus Direct Sales

While the leadership teams of both types of sales channels discussed within this research paper must consider the salesperson's experience and formal education when making hiring decisions for people in their salesforce, sales managers must also have an understanding of which type of sales role fits that person best. This notion is as equally as important for the salesperson, the sales team, as well as the company in general. Focusing on direct sales, indirect sales, and inside sales within an organization, there are many factors to be closely looked at when determining which sales channel a sales representative can best utilize their perceived skills and talents. In the telecommunications industry specifically, products and services are sold through the company's direct sales channel or indirect sales channel, also known to those within the telecommunications industry as The Channel. While an organization can also have an inside sales channel or team, which also plays a role in driving revenue and profits for the company, the impact of this inside channel is much smaller so this research paper will remain focused on the two main selling channels – direct sales and indirect sales. Each of these sales channels has a different focus and selling strategy though the objective of both sales channels remains to drive revenue and increase profits for the company.

Simply put and generally accepted in the business world, direct sales channels circumvent the middleman while indirect sales channels involve middlemen that the indirect or channel sales team leans upon to continue to sell their products and services in the most efficient and effective manner (Scott, 2019).

Best Sales Model for Certain Business Types

"The direct sales model is often a good fit for smaller businesses, as it allows for more personal interactions with customers" (Scott, 2019, para. 27). It is stated that the direct sales channel may be best for new and developing businesses so that they are more able to combat customer questions and concerns directly and in a more timely manner than the indirect sales channel may be able to. The direct sales model also allows the company to gather feedback on their products and services and make changes where needed, correct problems, and even save unhappy clients were issues to arise. "Customer service influences the brand loyalty of 96% of consumers, and direct sales allow small businesses to reach their target audience and control their marketing message" (Scott, 2019, para. 29). The direct sales channel may also be best for industries with perishable products that need very quick turnaround times.

"If your company has offices in multiple cities, a channel sales model may be ideal" (Scott, 2019, para. 30). A channel sales strategy, also known as an indirect sales strategy, can be ideal for "companies selling complex products that require a great deal of troubleshooting" (Scott, 2019, para. 31). This is specifically the case in the telecommunications industry where IT Vendors, phone vendors, and technicians are involved with the sale of a product or service, especially complex network configurations.

While there is no right or wrong answer to which sales channel a business should utilize or how many sales channels are used within an organization, pros and cons should be weighed

for each sales strategy to see which model(s) best fit with that specific product or service the company to trying to sell as well as the industry in which they sell these products and services. It is also not necessary for an organization to only choose one sales strategy as it is well researched that multiple sales channels can drive additional revenue for an organization.

"You can also drive customer success by implementing a cross-selling strategy. A cross-sell occurs when you sell an additional product to an existing customer" (Scott, 2019, para. 37). An example of a cross-sell strategy used in the business world would be a telecommunications provider selling internet access to a customer. The telecommunications provider has a great internet product perfectly suited for this customer, but this specific customer also needs a new security system. The telecommunications provider may not be able to supply a security system product though, but when that provider uses a cross-selling strategy, a third-party agent or reseller would be able to assist the telecommunications provider with selling the customer a security system that works seamlessly in conjunction with the internet service provider's product (Scott, 2019).

While no single sales strategy is perfect, each sales strategy will be ever evolving for the specific type of business and its size as well as the products or services the business is making an effort to sell. For new businesses especially, but truly for all businesses and organizations in general, every member on the sales team should be aware and fully prepped for the sales strategy they should be following to ensure the sales team and company is set up for success now and in the future. There are also other departments within the organization that will need to be made aware of the sales strategies chosen to be used by the sales team so that they can also be on board with that sales strategy and provide support for that strategy as needed. These collaborative departments can include, but are not limited to, the marketing team and finance team of the

organization. Creating and implementing a full organization inclusive plan is key to ensuring

revenue increases and long-term success for the business (Scott, 2019).

Channel Strategies in a Retail Setting

In many retail settings, the company will use a channel sales strategy to unburden

themselves from distribution and shipping costs and offload those onto a partner that may

already have supply chains and an established presence in the company's target market(s). An

example of a retail store using this type of channel strategy would be TJ Maxx, Home Goods and

Marshall's which are all owned by their parent company, TJX Cos, Inc. The TJX Cos, Inc. entire

business model is "buying items from supplier and vendor partners and then selling them via

their popular retail (and online) locations" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 25). This

channel sales strategy also allows the TJX Cos, Inc. partners to grow their own client base,

expand their reach, and get their business name in front of clients that may not normally seek out

their brand or item since this partner is now getting their product into a big-name store(s) heavily

visited with foot traffic. TJX Cos, Inc. also uses a channel sales strategy to distribute

merchandise to all of their retail locations. "Rather than hiring, training, and maintaining a

distribution fleet of their own, they use the services of partner companies that already have a

fully functioning distribution chain" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 25). Using a

channel sales strategy in both directions, as TJX Cos, Inc. does, allows the company to save time

and money as well as combat operational oversight and employee errors (Pipedrive Inc /

Pipedrive OÜ, 2020).

If an organization is trying to grow their profits and revenue streams, partnering with

established brands such as TJX Cos, Inc., "creates a sort of halo effect for your company as you

rub shoulders with bigger names in your industry" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para.

28). As research has also confirmed, technology companies that have their products featured in retail locations such as Best Buy or online at NewEgg.com, get much more credibility for their product when going up against a company that is working to sell their technology products independently (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020).

Types of Indirect Partners

A direct sales team will continue to utilize salespeople who are employed by the company directly to sell their products or services while the indirect sales team will use a third-party approach with resellers, affiliates, system integrators, etc.

- Reseller: A reseller will buy a product in bulk and at a lower than market value price due to the amount of product they buy each time. Resellers use this practice with the expectation of receiving a specific prize. Reseller(s) will also increase the price of the product and sell it as their own. In most circumstance a reseller will drive a 10-20% margin for each sale they make. Reseller programs may be smaller than affiliates programs, but they practice many of the same techniques. Reseller partners focus more on promotions to make a sale though. This reseller channel is very popular specifically in the technology industry. Apple Company is a recognizable name that uses a reseller approach. Though they also have multiple other sales channels to drive revenue for the company, Apple also relies on their third-party partners to promote their products through all promotional channels (Ogórek, n.d. para. 9).

- Affiliate: Within the indirect sales channel a "person or a company that sells the product and takes a commission for every sale made" (Ogórek, n.d. para. 8) is known as an affiliate. The commission percentage per sale will depend on the affiliate, the company they are selling products for, as well as the product or service being sold. Affiliate

partners will promote the company's products and services using their own methods such as their website, their social media, and email marketing or cold calling that occurs at the affiliate level (Ogórek, n.d.).

- System Integrator: A system integrator is a company that advertises fully integrated solutions to potential customers. System integrators are most commonly found in a business-to-business format. System integrators do exactly what their name states; they specialize in system integration to bring together all of a customer's sub-systems into one centralized system creating a more efficient environment for their customers. IBM is an example of a company that helps its business customers find the perfect technology solutions for their type of business specifically. IBM can be seen as an example of how a system integrator can take products or services from multiple service providers and platforms and deliver a fully integrated and personalized system solution for that business customer's needs (Ogórek, n.d. para. 11).

- Master Agent: A Master Agent is a distributor of services specifically in the telecommunications industry. To be considered a Master Agent, the company must have contracts with multiple service providers in the telecom industry and process orders and commissions for sub-agents of their company. Master Agents can provide pricing for multiple carriers and providers, and they also process orders on behalf of other agents and resellers who are considered to be sub-agents when a Master Agent is involved. A sub-agent who processes their sales opportunities through a Master Agent is able to sell any product or service for any provider in which the Master Agent has a contractual agreement with. This allows that sub-agent to open their suite of products and services offerings up more broadly to their client base (Master Agent, 2018).

Many groups within the telecommunication industry have called for change regarding the Master Agent terminology used by these larger telecommunications distributors. These groups have come together demanding for a rebrand of the title that these Master Agents hold. According to James Anderson (2021):

A debate has raged in the IT/telecom brokerage channel in 2021 about deciding on a new name for the companies previously referred to as master agents. These firms, which provide supplier contracts and sales enablement resources to channel partners, have gone by the moniker for decades, but partners and vendors have spoken out about their discomfort with the term. Some are calling it racially insensitive; others call it a misnomer. (para. 3)

The Xposure Inclusion & Diversity Council decided to take the initiative and coin a new term that the entire telecommunications industry could use once the term Master Agent started to be retired. The masters themselves were unsure what to call their business model and each 'Master' ended up calling themselves something different for a short amount of time so Xposure's assistance with rebranding this term was very helpful to everyone in the industry.

Xposure, a business resource group, drafted a letter to the Master Agents and other firms calling on them to lead by example and adopt the new terminology – specifically rebranding the term 'Master Agent' to 'Technology Services Distributors' now and looking forward towards the future. The resource group did not always receive positive feedback when it came to making this overdue change. "Not everyone was 100% on-board. Not everybody thought this was a task worth taking up" (Anderson, 2021, para. 11). Many others in the telecommunications industry also did not like the new terminology as there are already other groups labeled as 'distributors' within the same industry. At the end of the day, the largest and original Master Agent of the

industry decided to go with 'Technology Solutions Brokerage' or TSB. This same initiative would also change the label of 'sub-agent' to 'broker'.

According to Anderson (2021), Mike Onystok of one of the most recognizable names in the Technology Solutions Brokerage space:

> This is a long overdue change for the industry and our team is excited to be using a term that is more inclusive in support of all communities. As technology evolves and adapts, we need to change with it. We have come a long way and acknowledge there is still a long way to go. Moving forward, we are proud to call ourselves what we are: a technology services distributor. (para. 22)

Indirect versus Direct Sales Strategy

The indirect sales team uses a channel sales strategy which "involves using partners and third parties – such as referral partners, affiliate partners, wholesalers, distributors, managed service providers [also known as MSPs], marketplaces or value-add resellers – to sell your products or service" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 5). Though there are many names for these third-party intermediaries that act on behalf of the indirect sales team as previously noted, throughout this research these third-party vendors will be referred to as partners and resellers, or agents, sub-agents, and master agents (recently rebranded as Technology Solutions Brokerages).

An organization using the channel sales strategy differs from an organization's direct sales team's strategy where the company's direct employees are solely responsible for selling their products and services to customers. "Channel sales or selling through partners represents 75% of the world's commerce" (*The complete guide to channel sales*, n.d. para. 1). Using this type of channel sales strategy will help a company accelerate their sales and grow their revenue

without adding to their official headcount or business overhead in general. This a move that is increasingly important during economic uncertainty. "This business model is also called indirect selling, because the company doesn't have a direct connection to the end customer" (*The complete guide to channel sales*, n.d. para. 3). An organization utilizing a channel sales strategy allows their business to grow at a much faster pace as they are now able to reach a new customer base by using these third-party partners and resellers. While the indirect sales team for the company acts as a go-between, the direct sales team does not. This is the key difference between the two selling channels. As a direct sales representative for an organization, that salesperson is tasked with selling straight to the end user who requires the product or service while the indirect sales team relies heavily on their third-party partners and resellers (*The complete guide to channel sales*, n.d.).

Benefits of an Indirect Sales Strategy

There are countless benefits of an organization utilizing an indirect sales channel strategy or Channel Sales Team and it is widely accepted as highly profitable to organization globally. Third-party partners and resellers that work with these indirect sales teams are considered an extension of that organization's salesforce while not actually working directly for the company creating additional overhead. The company specifically is not paying the partner or reseller a salary or benefits, such as health insurance and 401K, which they would normally pay out to their direct sales team members and direct company employees. The partners and resellers also bring amplified reach and can help magnify marketing efforts for the company (*The complete guide to channel sales*, n.d.). Partners and resellers can also assist the company with creating much larger networks as they can introduce the company's products or services to potential customers who are not fully aware of the company currently or lack the knowledge about what

the company can offer them personally. Partners and resellers can also act as a conduit to new markets given the fact that they usually have the inside scoop on their geographic region in relation to what the company can offer that area. The partners and resellers normally have an established relationship and rapport already with their end users and customers since they are or previously have worked together for other product and service solutions. This already established relationship makes it easier for the partner to sell the company's products when the information to the end user is coming from a trusted advisor instead of a salesperson directly working for the company trying to sell that product or service.

The company's indirect sales team having a true channel sales strategy can have the company reaching new heights as that indirect sales channel can help "aim your channel sales at target markets and demographics that your direct sales team can't reach" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 3). While a company's direct sales team will always rely on salespeople inside the company to increase revenue and profits for the business, the indirect sales team allows the company to have more boots on the ground at a lower cost that direct sales representatives and also provides access to potential customers who do not or are unable to normally purchase directly from service providers or vendors. Many times this includes schools, medically facilities, government facilities, and more. "This creates new revenue streams over time" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 6) as Pipedrive's Vice President of Channel Sales & Partnerships states.

Having a channel sales strategy or creating an indirect sales team within an organization with the right salespeople monitoring the partners and resellers allows the company to scale more quickly as these third-party partners will generate more leads for the organization and get the company's brand in front of more potential customers in a convenient and efficient manner.

"Channel programs are a low risk and low-cost approach to opening new geographic regions where a company does not have existing resources, or where they want to test or establish the market" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 18) explains Pipedrive's VP of Channel Sales & Partnerships. It should be celebrated that one company even took their client base from zero to over 10,000+ clients within two years simply by implementing a channel sales strategy in their organization. This company notes that "channel sales helped him attract long-tail clients or clients that had a deep need for his product or service but were difficult to find and thus sell to" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 19). "Once you amass several long-tail clients through channel sales, they could end up making up the bulk of your revenue" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 18) as documented by Pipedrive Inc as well. The majority of retailers also rely on a channel sales strategy to expand their brands. According to one survey, "37% of medium-sized businesses prefer buying through a reseller or managed service providers" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 18) for their telecommunications needs.

An additional benefit of utilizing a channel sales strategy is that it can remove some of the pressure normally associated with a direct sales role such as cold calling, door knocking, and unattainable quotas. The channel sales strategy allows the indirect sales team to focus on building relationships with their partners and resellers while "nurturing them along the customer journey" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020, para. 35). Should the indirect salesperson, also known as a Channel Manager, become overwhelmed or burnt-out in their sales position and not able to build meaningful and lasting relationships with the third-party agents, resellers, and protentional prospects, it will hurt the organization's credibility in the long run as the relationships will begin to fizzle out. "Channel partners are essentially salespeople, marketers, service providers, and brand advocates rolled into one" (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020,

para. 35) so the loss of a partner can be detrimental to the salesperson themselves as well as the company.

The Need For Channel Managers

Employing a channel sales strategy within an organization can drive revenue in an upwards trajectory, but it also requires diligent members of the indirect sales team called Channel Managers to closely work with the partners and resellers to ensure that they are properly presenting the company's products and services to their own client base. If a proficient Channel Manager is not in place to monitor the channel activity, this is where the company can lose some control of their salesforce unfortunately, which John H. Patterson, the Father of Modern Sales experienced with his first salesforce as well. "A Channel Manager is responsible for creating and sustaining new sales, contracting, establishing, and keep a good working rapport with resellers, various departments and dealing with channel programs" (*Channel Manager job description*, 2016, para. 1).

In efforts to keep the partners and resellers on brand and on the same page as the actual direct sales representatives for the company, the Channel Manager must provide these third-party partners and resellers with the sales training and tools they need to also be successful. This partner or reseller of the company's products and services will need to be trained on all of the features of those products and services exactly how the Channel Manager and company's direct sales team have been trained. The Channel Manager must also keep the partners and resellers up to date on new geographic locations the company is moving in to and when those areas are ready to be prospected and sold so the partners and resellers can hit the ground running to generate more new business for themselves, the indirect sales team, and company. The partners and resellers will also want to ensure that they are updated in a timely manner on new areas so that

the direct sales team does not reach the partner's clients before they have a chance to. There is an understanding in the sales industry that the direct sales team and indirect sales team, while both working to generate revenue for the same company in the long run, are actually competition to one another within their own organization.

The sales tools used within the indirect sales channel will often differ from tools that the direct sales team would use to close a comparable sale. For example, the direct sales team may have a promotion running for three months free of telecommunications services for the potential customer but in comparison, the indirect or channel sales team would offer a 2X SPIFF promotion, in addition to monthly residual payments that the partner or reseller is already contractual obligated to receive. This promotional 2X SPIFF offered to the partner or reseller in exchange for advocating for the organization's products or services (*Metronet business agent portal*, n.d.).

Other duties required for being a proficient Channel Manager is planning and presenting information to partners, resellers, and potential customers when needed, overseeing the partners and resellers and their client base within the company, monitoring competitor activity within the industry, having excellent written and verbal communication skills, and more. Channel Managers must consistently stay up to date within their respective industries and their sales territories to provide a more personalized experience to their partners and resellers. Channel Managers must also attend conventions, trade shows, networking events, and more to stay up to date on their industries newest and hottest products and services as well as to network with other similar vendors and providers who may need the company's products and services or vice versa (*Channel Manager job description*, 2016).

Channel Manager Salary

While the compensation plan for any salesperson is going to vary by industry, company size, location, qualifications, and more, the average salary a Channel Manager could see yearly is $101,000 - $210,000 (*Channel Manager job description*, 2016). Other sources such as Glassdoor (2021), which generates salary estimates using "data from millions of employees and third-party sources using machine learning algorithms" (para. 1) provides more specific data stating:

> The estimated total pay for a Channel Manager is $151,172 per year in the United States area, with an average salary of $87,839 per year. These numbers represent the median, which is the midpoint of the ranges from our proprietary Total Pay Estimate model and based on salaries collected from our users. The estimated additional pay is $63,333 per year. Additional pay could include cash bonus, commission, tips, and profit sharing. (*How much does a Channel-Manager make?*, 2021., para. 1)

Glassdoor has also comprised a list of the top 10 highest paying companies for Channel Manager positions within the United States. Coming in at number one is Brocade, an American technology company, whose average Channel Manager compensation is $344,453. More recognizable names such as Meta, previously known as Facebook, and Google who both have average Channel Manager compensation in the lower $300,000 range while Adobe makes the list at number ten with an average compensation plan of $292,074 (*How much does a Channel-Manager make?,* 2021).

Partner and Reseller Compensation

Channel Managers and the indirect sales team are paid as employees of the company directly, but partners and resellers must also receive compensation for their contribution for the sales they bring in for the company as well. When utilizing the channel sales strategy, the

company will have a contractual agreement with the partner or reseller on the profit share per sale of the product or service. The percentage of profit share will vary by company but can also vary by product, service, or item being sold. As an example, some telecommunications service providers may pay out SPIFFs. SPIFFs or Sales Performance Incentive Funds are commonly known as "a bonus or other form of remuneration given to salespeople for promoting the products of a particular manufacturer" according to Collins Dictionary (n.d.). SPIFFs add incentivizes for partners and resellers for continued engagement and participation in the company's channel sales program. SPIFFs are also designed in a way to assist the company with meeting sales goals in the short term (Fuchs, 2020).

Along with SPIFFs, a service provider in the telecommunications industry specifically may also provide residual payments for the sale of products or services. These residual payments could be for a set period of time or for the life of the customer, meaning as long as the customer stays with the provider, the company will continue to pay the partner for the sale. This compensation information would be explicitly spelled out in the company's agreement with the partner or reseller. If the partner's Agent Agreement contains an Evergreen Clause, the partner will be paid residual payments on that sale for the life of the customer. If the partner or reseller's Agent Agreement does not contain an Evergreen Clause, the company can stop paying that partner or reseller their residual payment at any time they choose and at their own discretion. According to Prives (2013):

> An evergreen clause provides that the term of an agreement will automatically renew for some period of time unless one party provides the other party with notice before the end of the current term that it does not wish to renew the term of the agreement. (para. 3)

Furthermore, a partner or reseller having an Evergreen Clause in their third-party Agent Agreement with the company also allows the partner and the company itself to continue their relationship without having to renew or write new terms every time the term ends. An Evergreen Clause should be looked at as protection for the partner and reseller. If the partner or reseller is unable to have an Evergreen Clause writing into their Agent Agreement with a specific product or service provider, the partner should look into processing their sales order for the company through a Master Agent to ensure protection on their end for their own revenue stream.

The Downside of Indirect Sales

While operating a channel sales strategy within an organization can skyrocket it from zero to hero in a short amount of time, there are challenges associated with this sales strategy as well. While the organization can do its best to put the right people in place to ensure the partners and resellers are properly trained and have all of the necessary tools at their disposal, the company cannot fully control what these partners and resellers are truly saying or doing when they are interacting with their own customer bases. By using this channel sales strategy, the company does have less control over the customer experience from beginning to end considering the partner or reseller is the one actually representing the brand for the company. The company is linking their reputation to these partners and authorized resellers and when issues arise, it is the company itself instead of the partner or reseller, that may have to deal with the consequences of the third-party agent's actions.

When using a channel sales strategy, an organization will also lose additional control because the company's employees of the indirect sales team and the Channel Managers are not able to follow the lifecycle of the entire sale from start to finish as a direct sales representative would be able to in comparison. The company must heavily rely on the partner or reseller to

provide accurate updates and ensure they are following up with the potential customers on a regular basis. Should the partner or reseller not follow up in a timely manner or not provide accurate information, the sale of that product or service may not close at the same rate as it would if the company's direct sales team were monitoring the sale from beginning to end. A channel sales strategy should increase the company's bottom line, but this is not always guaranteed due to loss of control at points throughout the sales process (Pipedrive Inc / Pipedrive OÜ, 2020).

Channel Conflict

When a company has multiple sales channels within their organization, the chance of internal or external channel conflict is always prevalent. Internal channel conflict would include conflicts over customers or contracts between the company's own direct sales team and the indirect sales team. To the outside world, these individual sales channels appear to be players on the same team [company]. In fact though, these two separate sales channel teams are competitors with each other internally within their own organization. In the instance of internal channel conflict, it is important that every company have a very clear set of Rules of Engagement to minimize channel conflict among its employees (*The complete guide to channel sales*, n.d.). A Rules of Engagement document should outline the rules and policies governing how each sales channel should interact with one another when attempting to secure business or additional revenue for the company. The Rules of Engagement document should also detail how these conflicts will be handled (*Business Rules of Engagement*, 2021).

For one telecommunications company, their business Rules of Engagement document specifically outlines that "The Business Sales Team that brings a signed contract to [the company], wins the deal and owns the account" (*Business Rules of Engagement*, 2021, p. 11).

This is also known in the telecommunications industry as a First to Ink Policy. Also within this specific company's Rules of Engagement document for its direct sales teams and indirect sales teams are key rules for who is authorized to make changes to customers' accounts, who can provide approvals when necessary to make the decision on which team wins the deal, and who can handle any channel conflicts if they were to arise. As in most cases of internal channel conflict, it is normally up to the appropriate sales manager(s) to make the final judgement call in the conflicting matter (*Business Rules of Engagement*, 2021).

Channel conflict may also arise in external forms as well though. External channel conflict can take shape in the form of third-party partners and resellers finding out about each other and/or targeting the same customers, whether intentionally or not. In this instance, it may require the Channel Manager for that third-party partner or reseller to step in to deescalate the issue or involve the company's leadership team if necessary. External channel conflict can also occur when there are incompatible goals among the channel partners, lack of communication between the Channel Managers and the partner or reseller, and marketing misalignments (Morningstar, 2021, para. 3).

The most common types of channel conflict are "vertical level conflict, horizontal level conflict, inter-type channel conflict, and multi-channel level conflict" (Higgins, 2022, para. 1).

- Vertical level conflict: "occurs when two or more channel members – operating at consecutive levels of a distribution channel – have a dispute" (Higgins, 2022, para. 6). Higgins also notes that "if a wholesaler consistently fails to deliver the proper volume of a manufacturers product to a retailer, a vertical level conflict between the two parties might arise" (Higgins, 2022, para. 6).

- Horizontal level conflict: "occurs when two channel members, operating at the same level of a distribution channel, have a dispute or disagreement that impedes the flow of the broad operation" (Higgins, 2022, para. 8). This type of channel conflict can be seen when one wholesaler or distributor moves in on the other's sales territory. While horizonal level channel conflict can be a good thing in some instances like when driving competition among partners, when this type of conflict occurs, the Channel Manager or Sales Manager would need to intervene to avoid compromising the channel, the customer, or the deal itself.

- Inter-Type channel conflict: "occurs when two channel members at a similar level have a disagreement…however inter-type channel conflict occurs when channel partners of different sizes or nature have a dispute" (Higgins, 2022, para. 12). This type of channel conflict can occur when large businesses expand their range and encroach on a smaller retailer's segment of the market (Higgins, 2022).

- Multi-Channel level conflict: "occurs when channel partners at various levels of the distribution chain compete with one another by selling to the same market" (Higgins, 2022, para. 14). This type of channel conflict could occur if a retailer that owned a brick-and-mortar storefront was to sell a product or service at a lower price than an e-commerce outlet (Higgins, 2022).

In a true channel sales model, the Channel Manager and the third-party partner or reseller win and lose together. To avoid channel conflict, it is necessary to establish clear boundaries, have open conversations, set terms for the partnership, and review the partner relationship regularly to ensure it stays in good standing for both the company and the partner or reseller (Higgins, 2022).

Channel Growth

Driven by several industry forces, the channel sales strategy is quickly growing and drawing the attention of many sales managers and companies across the globe. Dell Technologies' Senior Vice President of Global Partner Marketing, Cheryl Cook, maintains that Dell's "channel business is growing faster than the market and the competition" (Horton, 2021, para. 3). She also explains that "our channel business is growing faster than our direct business" (Horton, 2021, para. 4). As Cook mentioned to Channel Futures, the leading source information, perspective, and connection in the telecommunications industry and the entire channel ecosystem, "Our deal registrations are up, the number of new buyers are up. I usually let results speak for themselves. Our commitment and engagement with the channel has never been stronger" she continued (Horton, 2021, para. 5). "And all the opportunity around multiple lines of business, expanding into the breadth of the portfolio holds true. So we're going to keep focusing on our strategy that seems to be working" (Horton, 2021, para. 6). Cook said, "the channel is outpacing the market, our competition and direct" (Horton, 2021, para. 7).

Effects of COVID-19 on the Sales Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic caused economic disruption for most, if not all industries globally bringing along with that bankruptcies, high debt, tight budgets, and more prolonged purchasing decisions from customers. The pandemic also led to large shutdowns of businesses across the globe in 2020. "Estimates from the Current Population Survey, for example, indicate that the number of active business owners dropped by 22% from February to April 2020" (Fairlie & Fossen, 2022, para. 1). Active business owners during the pandemic specifically dropped "from 15 million in February 2020 to 11.7 million in April 2020" (Fairlie & Fossen, 2022, para. 4). Business sales in most industries also dropped by 17% on average due to the COVID-19

pandemic. Sales in all of the industries that were affected by mandatory lockdowns due to the pandemic were hit the hardest, as one would expect. This includes businesses such as hotels, bars, the arts & entertainment industries, the recreation industries and more. JP Morgan Chase indicates that small business revenue specifically "dropped 30-50% at the end of March and early April and 40% into May of 2020 based on the financial transactions of the customers" (Fairlie & Fossen, 2022, para. 7).

Not all businesses reported losses during the COVID-19 pandemic though. Consumers changed their purchasing habits quickly from in store to online once many stores had to close due to government or health department guidelines. Industries such as agriculture, building material, pharmacies, garden centers, supermarkets, and liquor stores were all deemed essential and experienced positive growth from 2019 to 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether a business or industry was considered essential, or nonessential played a major role on positive or negative sales growth for the organization (Fairlie & Fossen, 2022).

In attempts to recover financially from these unprecedented times, sales efforts must become even more strategic than before. "Effective selling requires an understanding of where customers are, how they navigate between various streams of activity, and when to interact with them" (Cespedes, 2021, para. 5).

Digital Sales Channels During and After COVID-19

E-commerce sales are becoming increasingly more prevalent especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. E-commerce "refers to transactional digital sales channels that enable the entire procurement process mainly for non-complex, off-the-shelf offerings and/or well-defined buyer needs" (van Weele, 2018 as cited by Bongers et al., 2021, para. 1). It can be noted that "global B2B e-commerce gross merchandise volumes increased from $5.826 billion in 2013

to $12.216 billion in 2019. Furthermore, 17% of all U.S. B2B sales are predicted to be generated

digitally by 2023" (Clement, 2020 as cited by Bongers et al., 2021, para. 1).

Digital sales channels can benefit an organization and their sales teams as well by

alleviating some of the salespersons resource constraints. This can in turn compliment the non-

digital, personal selling of the direct sales team or indirect sales team of the company. Digital

sales channels can also increase the buyer's independence by no longer, or not always, needing a

sales representative to assist with the selling process. This can be the case with simple orders but

buyers with complex needs – specialized, customized, tailored needs - will still need assistance

through one of the personal selling channels, whether direct or indirect, to ensure all of their

needs are being properly met (Bongers et al., 2021).

Bongers et al. (2021) who interviewed informants with strategic insights into the e-

commerce world as well as the sales industry in general revealed:

That the introduction of digital sales channels reinforces the strategic reorientation of

professional purchasing. In many buyer firms, professional purchasers increasingly focus

on strategic activities (e.g., targeted sourcing and supply chain optimization) instead of,

for example, executing straight, standard rebuys. Digital channels accelerate this strategic

reorientation by unlocking the resources that professional purchasers require for strategic

activities. Specifically, we found that many contemporary applications allow purchasers

to shift less-complex purchases directly to individuals in the buyer firm who actually

experience the respective demand (e.g., technicians in need of new tools). Notably, these

Individuals do not form part of the professional purchasing department. These non-

purchasers (e.g., technicians or administrative assistants) can order directly (e.g., tools or

office materials) through buyer firm-internal purchasing platforms. (para. 32)

Bongers et al. (2021) also noted in their research that:

The opportunity for professional purchasers to pit digital and personal channels against each other at the expense of salespeople. Specifically, some purchasers seek to use personal interactions to circumvent the highly buyer-specific conditions that the parties have agreed on and that are displayed openly in the digital channel context. This threat stems from potential channel misalignments: Whereas digital applications rest on pre-negotiated, thereafter-fixed conditions personal interactions favor concessions. (para. 41)

This implies in terms of concessions though, that real life salespeople have more room to offer discounts, free services, add-ons, faster delivery time, and a more personalized selling experience than the digital sales channel. With that being said, a salesperson's margins may be lower than the digital channel margins due to the authority to grant these additional product and service concessions to their customer base (Bongers et al., 2021).

The Future of Sales

With much uncertainty still widespread globally, even during the decline of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the sales industry included, one important notion remains true – people and businesses alike are always going to have the need or want to buy a product or service so there will always be a need for talented salespeople in the sales industry. Customers have taken more control over the sales process themselves though, thanks to the digital revolution. Customers tend to look at product and service provider reviews before making decisions in the buying process and they also look to influencers or people in their inner circle whom they trust to provide honest feedback before making purchases these days. Customers are relying more heavily on this type of information rather than the advertising efforts of the company itself. With this in mind though, direct and indirect sale teams must change up their sales tactics and

determine how to best reach their potential customers and fully listen to their needs. It is imperative for a sales representative in today's world to "understand when, where, and how their customers want to interact" (*The future of sales*, 2022, para. 1). "To optimize touchpoints, sales functions need to embrace a fundamental shift where they provide different interactions, engaging in direct conversations that deliver on customer value propositions and advance the customer lifetime value calculation that is built into performance metrics" (*The future of sales*, 2022, para. 2).

Women are the Future

When one thinks about the future of the sales industry, a normally male dominated industry, women should not be overlooked in this career category. "According to 2019 Bureau of Labor Statistics data, women are underrepresented in B2B [business-to-business] sales in most industries, including wholesale and manufacturing (27%) and financial services (30%)" (Zoltners et al., 2020, para. 1). Research shows though that women in sales roles often outperform men in the same respective roles. "A 2019 study by incentive solution provider Xactly reported that 86% of women achieved quota, compared to 78% of men" (Zoltners et al., 2020, para. 2).

According to Cespedes (2021), change favoring women in sales roles is shifting in the right direction. Zoltners et al. (2020) tells us:

Research by our consulting firm, ZS, shows women succeed in sales by excelling at different capabilities than men. The research looked at performance of 500+ salespeople across several industries, including financial services, industrial services, and health care. The assessment used a framework we developed that identifies seven capabilities that differentiate high-performing salespeople from average-performing salespeople. (para. 3) Both high-performing women and high-performing men used all seven capabilities to

some extent. But high-performing women were more likely to emphasize   connecting, shaping solutions, and collaborating, while high-performing men relied more   on improving and driving outcomes. For analyzing and influencing, there was no measurable difference between the genders. (para. 4)

Cespedes (2021) also tells us that:

Future sales success for many companies in the rebounding economy will hinge on attracting and retaining more women for sales roles. In traditionally male-dominated industries, this can require eliminating the perception of sales as an old boys' club and creating a more female-friendly culture. (para. 11)

There are several behavior changes that a company can put in place to become more female inclusive with their direct or indirect salesforce:

- Diversity-focused recruiting: Gender diversity should be a high priority goal of the recruiting team within an organization. Companies are now working to source more female job applicants, they are making job descriptions more attractive to women by using more gender-neutral language, and they are also including more women sales leaders in the recruiting and hiring process to get a more diverse perspective on candidates applying for sales roles (Zoltners et al., 2020).

- Female mentoring programs: It has been noted that females were more reluctant to speak to their male colleagues regarding some of their struggles in the sales industry. This can include travel concerns and meeting with male clients as well. Mentors are more able to assist females with these issues. "The firm also hosted lunch and learn sessions where female salespeople talked openly about challenges and solutions. Women built

relationships with others they looked up to and felt comfortable confiding in" (Zoltners et al., 2020, para. 13).

- Better coaching: Improved coaching for females, especially by male mentors, is an important aspect in hiring and retaining women in the company's salesforce. "This requires breaking down stigmas for male-female mentorship relationships and ensuring women get the same objective feedback their male colleagues would" (Zoltners et al., 2020, para. 14).

- More promotions for women: If an organization is actively promoting more women into sales management positions and leadership roles, this will reflect positively to potential applicants, attracting more women applicants and retaining more women in the salesforce as well. "A good way to develop female leaders is to champion women for stretch roles and responsibilities that test and develop their managerial skills" (Zoltners et al., 2020, para. 15).

Findings

Since conducting this research on the sales industry in general and how multiple sales channels can help drive revenue and profits in a positive direction for an organization, I have learned that there is not one single sales channel or a simple answer that will automatically contribution to a company's increasing profits but a culmination of these sales strategies and tactics are required for the organization to remaining profitable and increase profits through those multiple sales channels while also remaining relevant during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Hiring the right people, whether experience based, or education based, and including more female salespeople in the company's salesforce, is of the utmost importance looking towards the future of the sales industry. It is also vital for sales managers to understand, just as

John H. Patterson did, that great salespeople are made. With the right training, motivating, and leadership team in place for the salesperson to rely on, anyone off the street has the potential to become an outstanding sales representative if given the chance and the resources needed to do so.

Recommendations

As previously mentioned in this paper, much research has been completed on the turnover rates of people in the sales industry, but very little research has been conducted on hiring the right salespeople according to the research of Bolander et al. (2019). I recommend more research on the hiring practices within the sales industry to see how this correlates with driving revenue and profits for the organization.

In efforts to assist salespeople with staying more authentic, I also recommend that consumer surveys be created and used to determine what the public considers authentic in the year 2022. People of different generations and geographic regions, and other different types of publics included as well, are going to have differing opinions on what is considered authentic so completing additional research to help categorize these authentic or unauthentic salesperson traits will give salespeople and sales managers a better idea of how to handle situations in which their true intentions may be called into question by a potential customer. An organization should want their salespeople to have a certain level of brand attachment but as Beeler et al. (2021) tells us, salespeople with low to moderate levels of brand attachment are able to remain more objective throughout the sales process and they are able to dissociate themselves more from the brand itself giving the appearance of a more authentic salesperson in the customers point of view (Beeler et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Determining which sales channel - direct, indirect, or any of the other sales channels previously noted – that a specific business should use is not straightforward. Many factors must be considered when determining what type of channel is best for the specific business and their industry. While the direct sales channel allows the organization to maintain more control over its salespeople, customer base, and the sales process as a whole, the indirect sales channel has the potential to bring in much larger amounts of revenue with less overhead to the company as they rely on third-partner partners and resellers in their selling efforts.

An organization should also place more focus on hiring the right people and placing them in the sales roles in which they are most skilled in order to increase revenue and maintain meaningful relationships internally and externally. It is also imperative that leadership teams in the sales industry do not overlook women in sales roles as research has shown that women in sales roles often outperform men in those same type of sales roles. Creating a more diverse, more female friendly culture will benefit the organization in more ways than just increasing revenue.

One thing remains true – sales and salespeople will be needed for the foreseeable future. People and businesses alike will always have a want or need to buy a product or service. An organization should ensure that they have the people, the resources, and the ability to live up to their word if they want to become and maintain profitable in today's world.

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