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As Managing Partner and Faculty Member for PA Management Development Practice, Sundridge Park Business School (United Kingdom), he utilized his skills in strategy, management and marketing techniques to develop programs, lecture and consult with clients in a multitude of industries. At Cranfield University School of Management, he was Client Partner and Academic Director for customers from the insurance, banking, trading, manufacturing, retail, telecom and other industries. Keith holds a post-graduate Masters degree in Management Studies and two Masters qualifications in Marketing Behavior and Marketing Strategy, and a Masters in Music.

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## **Eight key characteristics of a high growth sales organization.**

**Summary:** There are tremendous pressures on the modern sales organization. Customers are becoming more powerful, more discerning and more demanding, and growth is an enduring theme in all vendor organizations big and small. The last ten years has witnessed more organizational and structural change in sales organizations than in the previous forty. Marketing is creeping ever closer to sales and many organizations are busy integrating. Product specialists, high touch, and strategic specialists are becoming embedded in customer facing sales engagement teams, and the pressures on sales managers and leaders have become enormous. Add to this the evolution to the many new routes and channels to market, principally driven by technological processing and delivery power and the moves to a totally integrating Marketing Communications strategy, both these radical changes are causing further structural and leadership pressures on sales organizations.

These characteristics are trends that have been noted by TLCN in the marketplace whilst working with some of their key customers. These eight key topics encapsulate the key characteristics which appear to lead to high growth and successful long term sales.

**One; Segment customers according to the value they place on sales coverage.** Organizations such as BofA and AT&T are starting to segment customers according to their needs, and what they are prepared to pay for. Both Best Buy in the retail space and Cisco in the B to B partnering arena believe that their ability to launch cutting edge products and offer value added services that will help customers to find new ways to improve and develop their business will surely translate into better margins for all. This means that sales people are becoming developed in strategic business skills, long term development planning and business visioning. A deep understanding of customer's needs, now and in a jointly business planned future also enables vendor organizations to develop advanced resource allocation plans which enhances their supply chain planning and enables early detection of market trends. AT&T are developing models beyond customer spending trends, and are considering key customers long term potential. Once these high value customers are identified, research is undertaken to find out what they value and how buying decisions are made. This leads to targeting customers with very specific value propositions at the right time, being conversant with all elements of their decision taking process.

**Two; Deploy Multiple sales channels to provide the coverage that will meet customer needs at a profit.** Each individual high value customer has complex needs that can be met through an increasingly large variety of channels, with different cost structures, different capabilities and in many cases different pricing models. Most modern sales organizations are



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using at least two channels. Cisco and IBM know that using Value Added Resellers not only helps them to reach more customers, but these VARs are seen by customers to be trusted suppliers and advisors. Dell has become heavily reliant on e marketing and e selling as well as telephone advisory systems. UPS uses a multi channel model to deliver value to customers who are banded in different service levels, but all these channels are coordinated by a Key Account Management style quarterbacking system. Different channels can mean different pricing models with slight sub brand differences to establish differentiation in the market. Many Universities charge up to a third less for an online degree when compared to a campus based one. Organizations that deliver exceptional results leverage multiple channels for added reach and expertise repackage products to suit local regions and specific verticals, which can lead to separate value added pricing models.

**Three; Action based organizations are winning the day.** Leaders that dispel old paradigms and drive change do bring results. This means staying focused on the transformation and taking some risks with new products and services as well as new routes and channels to market. Fast and dirty is becoming the name of many people's game, and ahead of the curve does suggest potentially higher margins for the time the offering is ahead. This does mean that some companies know that some product launches, some new market initiatives will fail and this is built into the Marketing and Sales Strategy. But it does make traditional ROI Business Planning a lot harder. Symantec's mantra is to stay very focused on progress by settling issues fast and ensuring clear direction for individual sales people is always there. IBM establishes clear change milestones with measurable result goals that tie back to appraisals. Lexmark closely co-ordinates the roll out of new products with multi channel activities, new sales methodologies and incentives. Their goal is to ensure clarity around this continuous change pattern, to keep the people totally engaged with driving the change. Change is becoming the mantra of all great sales organizations and they all have the ability to change rapidly and effectively to maintain a competitive advantage.

**Four; Leaders are making sales productivity a top priority.** For high growth sales teams, the days of administrative chores are past. Many organizations are engaged in 'project pushdown' when all but the most essential jobs which are directly related to customer relationships and needs are given to support staff in administration, marketing, training and development and service departments. Personal productivity hard and soft measures are put in place. IBM measures sales time and customer facing time and establishes benchmarks. Lexmark concentrates heavily on support processes and tools that enable sellers to be immediately productive in the new product launch arena. Cisco works very closely with selected channel partners to leverage jointly held value propositions to penetrating new geographies, verticals and segments by pre developed joint business planning processes. Many organizations now treat sales time and sales productivity as a valuable and easily misplaced asset. They surround the sales people with people and processes to ensure they maximize efficiency and effectiveness

**Five; Leadership has moved from charismatic to active and supportive.** Leaders are now team players as well as team leaders in the true sense of the word. They can be very supportive, ensuring the 'team back home' is delivering an exemplary customer relationship based service to customers in support of the needs of sales people. Leaders are also focused on goals, will defend sales activities within the administration of an organization, and are very knowledgeable, communicative and consistent. Leaders tend to be great coaches and mentors. Leaders make sure that everyone in the organization keeps completed focused on the prize of attaining the numbers and the goals. Oracle sales leaders make a point to 'be in touch by staying in touch', spending lots of time in the field, working alongside the sales



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force to call on customers. Some own their own strategic accounts. UPS attribute their success to 'committed leadership' who are constantly setting change agendas based on their knowledge and awareness of a changing customer need understood as a result of their high levels of in the field presence.

**Six; The right customer facing people matter more and more.** The Brand behavior as it is enacted through the people part of integrated marketing communications matters more and more. Oracle has articulated some key attributes for any customer facing person: Positive 'can do' attitude, strong work ethic, team orientation and willingness to listen to and serve the customer. Best Buy suggests that when you 'unleash your employees, you will be rewarded and even surprised'. At Dial, high sums are spent in developing the strategic, team, and creative thinking aspects of their customer facing teams. Their philosophy is to empower by giving decision taking authority, allowing risks and making individuals accountable. Cisco have pointed out that it is creating the right conditions to enable empowered people to make strategic entrepreneurial decisions is vital. And so the company processes and systems have to align with this 'unleashing of the customer facing organization' ethos.

**Seven: Sales must get closer and closer to Marketing.** Simply put, sales organizations do not have sufficient resources to effectively research customers, do customer targeting, research the competition, develop go-to market, develop sales messaging, design and develop sales collateral, or successfully complete all other 'tactical marketing' tasks. The most successful sales organizations are either partnering or have integrated with marketing. The Lucent prescribed seven step model that consistently links marketing programs with sales efforts is being rolled out worldwide in their new parent company. AT&T maps the sales process against specific marketing programs and makes marketing executives responsible for supporting all elements of the sales process. UPS enable marketing and sales to work hand in hand to enable sellers to deliver 'synchronized commerce' messaging to high level decision makers in pre nominated verticals.

**Eight: Dedicate Sales resources to delighting the customer.** The mantra is becoming 'understanding customers needs and wants intimately and delivering the package of products and services that will delight them'. Delight means going that one step further than any other value based marketing competition. Delight means knowing the customer so well you will constantly deliver something extra that they would not expect, but you know that they want. Best Buy focuses on customer 'domains'. These 'domains' really understand how their assigned customers really use their products and convert this into free advice and guidance on how to leverage that usage further. Lexmark and Cisco have verticalized their customer facing teams, often recruiting from within the vertical, to ensure they deeply understand the issues faced in a Bank or a Hospital etc. APL is very aware that value propositions are built by the customer not the marketing department and so they spend a lot of time listening to key customers to detect trends to ensure they deliver precisely what they need.

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