Turning Sales Excellence from a 'Black Art' into a Science

Martin Creaner talks to Ittai Bareket, CEO, Netformx Inc.

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Ittai Bareket, CEO of Netformx, is on a mission to help solution providers design and sell their solutions more effectively. Solution designers need to have a lot of knowledge and capability to deliver great solutions to their customers. What they often lack are some of the nuts and bolts that are required to sell profitably: How to generate a quote in an acceptable timeframe; how to maintain sufficient visibility of their overall process to understand the profitability of any specific deal; how to fully grasp the impact of any specific deal on partner programs; or where to focus their selling effort in the short-term to maximize return.

Ittai believes that successful sales performance is based on four key enablers. **Collaboration:** All the people involved in the sales process need to constantly communicate and collaborate with each other to ensure that the end customer solution has the best opportunity of success. **Standardization:** The only way to make decent long-term margin for any solution delivery is to maximize the level of reuse. There are huge similarities between different customer solutions so standardization in terms of templates, architectures and designs is not only possible but a pre-

requisite for a well-managed sales process. **Automation:** Removing the necessity for human interaction at as many stages as possible in the delivery process is essential to improve speed and reduce errors. And automatically verifying configurations and putting relevant knowledge at the user's fingertips reduces complexity and enables problem-free implementations. Finally, and maybe most importantly, **Analytics** are central to optimizing the end to end process in terms of risks and deal profitability. They are crucial to making sense out of the flood of data coming from a plethora of data sources.

In recent years, Netformx has assembled a strong portfolio of products that are focused on increasing the 'awareness' of the solution provider across all phases of the selling process – turning selling from a 'black-art' into a science. And by any measure they are having a significant impact. "For example," comments Ittai, "one of our larger customers used to take 30 days to generate a proposal for a cloud solution - using Netformx they now have taken that down to minutes. It's a huge impact in customer wins, responsiveness and competitiveness."

The Netformx portfolio addresses the full selling lifecycle from understanding the opportunity all the way through to designing a deployable solution – the holistic selling challenge. DesignXpert® enables a solution provider to create accurate and well-validated solution designs from simple to complex, while SalesXpert enables the sales expert, sitting in front of the customer, to validate and share designs. Together, these offerings help a solution provider get to market with well thought out designs and sell these effectively to the end-customer. ChannelXpert then helps Netformx customers to increase profitability through maximizing incentive program participation and providing a window to view exactly the status on current deals, while KnowledgeXpert provides a vast multi-vendor knowledgebase of industry products and services. Currently, The KnowledgeBase has 1 million+ devices and over 3 million rules from a wide range of vendors. ▶

▶ Managing this scope of information is hugely challenging and requires a constant deepening of relationship with partners.

It's all about the data!

Underpinning all of this is a huge focus on the central role that data analytics plays. We hear a lot these days about the importance of data analytics. Every company in every industry understands that business success rests in companies that have an intimate understanding of their data and an ability to put this data into the right hands at the right time. Most companies live in a world of ***descriptive*** (passive and proactive) analytics. They gather customer data, analyze it off-line or in real-time and then make changes to their business based on this analysis. The more ambitious companies carry this forward to ***predictive*** analytics – essentially adopting machine-learning techniques to identify the likelihood of future outcomes based on historical data. The really good companies use predictive analytics like a radar to navigate towards where the best business will be. The latest evolution of data analytics is to adopt ***prescriptive*** analytics. Prescriptive analytics automatically synthesizes predictive analytics and business rules to identify problems and opportunities and suggest decision options to take advantage of the predictions.

Netformx have really embraced the importance of predictive and prescriptive analytics and incorporated them at the very heart of their product offerings. For example, maximizing the return from rebate programs requires a detailed understanding of the impact of every sale on the overall program performance, including whether a particular sales threshold will be crossed, or whether a particular shipping date will meet requirements. Every day hundreds of thousands of dollars are being left on the table by solution providers through poor understanding of the implications of simple operational decisions on rebate programs. Netformx uses predictive and prescriptive analytics to help their solution provider customer understand the big picture and how relatively simple and seemingly unconnected decisions can put hundreds of thousands of rebate dollars at risk. In my discussions with Netformx they can rattle out dozens of examples of how their rules based recommendations to their customers to pull in a delivery date by a couple of days, or extend procurement by a few thousand dollars has resulted in orders of magnitude more return for their customers.

Efficient selling process is a win/win for both the seller and the customer

For Netformx, helping their solution provider customers save money is good, but it's not the only value proposition for their solution suite. Solution providers are discovering that improving the accuracy of their quotes and the timeliness of their solution delivery is having a tangible impact on their employee productivity and end-customer satisfaction. Typically, they quote a doubling of pre-sales employee productivity and a doubling of measurable customer satisfaction. In companies that are often competing in fiercely competitive markets and living on razor thin margins, increased customer satisfaction and employee productivity are critical.

Transforming the sales process

For some time now the communications industry has been obsessed with the challenge of digital transformation. How can companies adapt themselves to making money and being successful in a transformed digital economy where they are not only competing with other communications players, but with a whole plethora of OTT players and internet players? Most of this digital transformation focus over recent years has been on the significant challenges of transforming the network. What is not talked about enough is the challenge of transforming the core ways a business can most effectively, efficiently and profitably manage their wider ecosystem. This means optimizing its sales process and channel exploitation. Netformx is right at the cutting edge of this aspect of transformation and as far as I'm concerned this is where a lot of the transformation action is going to be over the coming years. I'm looking forward to seeing how this develops!

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