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The Business-Savvy Sales Professional

It's no secret that continuing economic uncertainty is changing the B2B selling environment. Nervous CFOs are hoarding cash, CEOs are more involved than ever in scrutinizing smaller purchases at all levels of their organizations, and many nice-to-have purchases are giving way to must-have purchases.

What is becoming clearer is that yesterday's sales professional is finding it more difficult to compete and prosper in today's selling environment. Customers are looking for solutions, not just products or services. The smart salesperson knows that he must move beyond selling. He must understand his customers' business models to determine how his solutions can impact a company's revenue, cost, efficiency, business strategy or brand, and he must learn how to articulate that to an increasingly sophisticated audience. Traditional selling skills aren't enough to prosper in these difficult times. Today's sales professional must acquire business acumen.

The business-savvy sales professional understands how business works. He knows that the two most critical factors in business are earning profits and generating cash, and he understands the difference between them. He knows that profits are not the ultimate goal of a business; rather, profits are a cost of doing business. Without profits a company cannot grow, and when a company stops growing, demise is surely just around the corner. He knows that cash flow is the lifeblood of business, and that without it the most profitable business on the planet is doomed to failure.

The business-savvy sales professional understands that business is ultimately a game of numbers. He knows that financial statements are the report card of business. Financial statements reveal how a business has performed in the past, how it is performing today, and how it may perform in the future. He isn't afraid of financial statements. He knows how to read and understand a balance sheet – perhaps better than many of the folks who work in his company's finance department. He knows how to read an income statement and a statement of cash flows, and he knows that each statement contains vital information that he can quickly assemble into a snapshot of a company's financial health. He knows that the information in financial statements helps him assess a company's prospects for growth and success in the future.

When the business-savvy sales professional uses business acumen to identify and qualify bona-fide sales opportunities, and assists customers with solutions that impact their business issues, he sends a clear message to the rest of the sales team and to the rest of the organization: Business acumen contributes tangibly to sales success, and a

financially literate workforce will contribute tangibly to the success of the business. He knows that it would be hard to find a CFO in America who doesn't wish for a more financially literate workforce.

The business-savvy sales professional has a different way of looking at the business of selling today, and he knows that financial acumen will become the hallmark of world class selling organizations and superior sales professionals in the immediate future.

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