

Title: The Internal Network Manager: A Far Cry from the Selling Role?

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Abstract

Historically, salespeople have been represented as managers of the customer network; they should be 'out there' getting the business. The emergence of Key Account (KAM) and Global Account Management (GAM) as approaches to managing customers, however, is challenging the accepted role set of the salesperson. This paper presents findings from a pilot study on the role of the Global Account Manager, that indicate that a significant proportion of a GAM's job is managing their own organisation's internal network in order to deliver for the customer. This perspective is supported in the pilot study not just by the GAMs, but also the customers and the GAM's internal colleagues or 'virtual team'.

Synopsis of Paper

The role of the salesperson in the literature has generally been defined in terms of customer-based activities and in terms of making and closing individual sales transactions. A typical salesperson specification makes no reference to the internal activities they need to perform in their own organisation. However, the interaction and networks approach of the IMP (e.g. Hakansson 1982) and the emergence of relationship marketing as an alternative marketing approach (e.g. Christopher et al.1991) has been accompanied by suggestions that the nature of sales is changing (Wotruba 1996; Weitz and Bradford 1999). In particular, the emergence of National Account Management in the US (e.g. Shapiro and Moriarty 1980, 1982, 1984a, 1984b) and Key Account Management in Europe (e.g. Wilson 1993; Pardo, Salle and Spencer 1995; McDonald et al. 1997) as ways of managing long-term relationships with key customers, has led to a view that people in these roles have a fundamentally different role and skill set than that required by traditional sales people (McDonald et al., 1997; Weitz and Bradford 1999).

One such role would appear to be the need for KAMs and GAMs to focus on managing their internal network in order to deliver for the customer. It is evident from the literature review that little in-depth empirical research has been carried out on this important aspect of the job. This paper presents the findings from a pilot study that is looking in-depth at the roles and activities of GAMs. Implications for researchers and practitioners that arise from the study are presented and explored.