

# Motivating salespeople is the key factor for digital solutions selling, finds study

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Salespeople's motivation is the essential factor in value-based selling—the process of presenting a product or service in terms of the value it creates for customers—especially when the value proposition is

based on the offering of sophisticated digitally enabled solutions. Supervisors, on their side, can play an important role in creating and stimulating motivation. This is the subject of a recent paper written by Paolo Guenzi of the Bocconi Department of Marketing together with Edwin J. Nijssen of the Eindhoven University of Technology. The work is published in the *European Journal of Marketing*.

Value-based selling is a key success factor in B2B settings, but its relationship with digital solutions selling, defined as the use of technology to help customers streamline processes, solve problems or exploit new opportunities, has so far been scarcely explored in marketing literature. The ever-increasing importance of digital technologies, coupled with the shift from selling products to selling solutions tailored to each customer, has opened new horizons to sales firms.

Yet this change of perspective requires [salespeople](#) to adopt a completely different selling strategy, since defining a custom-made proposal is a challenging activity. The authors look at this process by means of an already established theoretical framework, called the MOA model after the initials of its three [basic elements](#): motivation, opportunity, and ability. The study hypothesizes that all these three ingredients are needed for salespeople to sell digitally enabled solutions conducive to value-based selling behaviors.

Motivation is the inner personal drive to work on designing a solution knowing well that the effort may come to nothing, as the customer is free to reject an innovative commercial proposal. Ability refers to the capability of salespeople to both acquire necessary information from the potential customer and establish a network within their own company (or internal coordination) in order to provide the best possible solutions. Opportunity is in general a facilitating condition stimulating the individual salesperson's motivation and ability, and in this case it refers to the formalized policies, rules and procedures used by sales [supervisors](#)

to influence and direct salespeople towards digital solutions selling.

But how do these elements influence salespeople's behaviors? Guenzi and Nijssen tested the model by interviewing 178 sales representatives working for a company which used to sell [power tools](#) and recently invested in [digital technologies](#) and developed, for instance, mobile systems for job-site productivity improvement, predictive maintenance, and fleet management optimization.

Results show that motivation has an influence on value-based selling through both customer networking and internal coordination (the two factors grouped under the ability label), which act as key abilities salespeople have to possess. Furthermore, behavior-based control by supervisors significantly increases salespeople's motivation and enables the [sales force](#) to develop necessary customer networking abilities. Supervisors therefore represent an important opportunity for salespeople to adopt value-based selling thanks to their role-modeling contribution that enhances salespeople's self-efficacy, defines their expectations and ultimately stimulates sales performance for digital solutions.

"These results demonstrate the key importance of motivation to implement value-based selling. The findings emphasize the mediating role of salespeople's ability to collaborate with colleagues and engage in customer networking to configure the right digital solutions and demonstrate these solutions' economic value. Supervisors have a fundamental role in directly and indirectly stimulating [motivation](#), [customer](#) networking ability and value-based selling," Guenzi explains.

**More information:** Paolo Guenzi et al, The relationship between digital solution selling and value-based selling: a motivation-opportunity-ability (MOA) perspective, *European Journal of Marketing* (2022). [DOI: 10.1108/EJM-11-2021-0907](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-11-2021-0907)

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