

## Keep the Social in Social Selling

By: Michelle Davidson

Google the phrase “social selling,” and you’ll get “about 530,000,000 results.” Lots of people and businesses offer advice for how to use social media networks to in sales and increase revenue.

Much of what you’ll find is tactical—how-tos for using each platform. Tactics are good. You need to know how each network functions, and you need a plan for using social media as a sales tool. But you have to keep in mind the one thing that drives social networks and enables salespeople to successfully use the tool: relationships.

As Shannon Belew writes in her book *The Art of Social Selling*, “Social selling is the identification, targeting, and *reaching out* to prospective and existing customers through social media channels and social communities in an effort to *engage* them in conversations that result in a potentially *mutually beneficial relationship*.”

It’s about connecting with people and developing relationships with them. To help you do that, here are five tips from social selling experts. They may sound like common sense, but many people do not do them.

**1. Research Prospects:** Whether you use LinkedIn or Twitter, use their search feature to identify potential customers and visit their profile pages to learn about them.

“This isn’t about sucking up or being a brown-noser; it’s about taking a sincere interest in people,” writes Kevin Knebl in his article *LinkedIn Is a Social Selling Goldmine*. “Identify where they went to school, what professional achievements they’re proud of, common interests, etc. Then craft a simple, personal approach that shows you’ve done your homework.”

**2. Personalize Invitations to Connect:** Every day I receive invitations to connect on LinkedIn. Nearly every one uses the generic LinkedIn text. And when they do, I decline offer. I don’t know them, and I don’t trust them.

You have to give people a reason to connect with you, says Melonie Dodaro in her podcast interview *3 Steps to Generate Leads and Win Sales via LinkedIn*. Otherwise, they'll do what I do and click Ignore.

“You need to send a personalized message that really tells them why you want to connect with them,” Dodaro says. It could be as simple as, ‘Hey, I notice we’re both in XYZ industry, and I’m interested in growing my network with other people in the industry. It would be great to connect with you.’”

**3. Follow Up with Connections:** It isn't enough to just make connections. You have to follow up with them and develop the relationship. For example, immediately after you connect with someone, send them a welcome note. And periodically after that, send messages that include something of value to them—something they would find helpful—such as an article, a white paper, or a video.

This approach serves Thomas von Ahn of Viral Solutions quite well, writes Jill Konrath in her article *Does Social Selling Really Work?*

“Tom regularly gives free advice—without expecting it to immediately turn into business. He offers free ebooks and free white papers. He shares good resources that can help solve problems his company can't. And, he even wishes people happy birthday,” she says.

**4. Participate in Group Discussions:** Join groups your targeted customer frequents, and participate in the discussions. Offer advice, share your opinions, and ask questions. Just don't push your product or service.

**5. Interact with People:** Retweet people's posts on Twitter, reply to their tweets, “Like” their posts on LinkedIn or Facebook, and comment on their posts, says Daniel Francès in his article *Twitter vs. the Telephone: Can Social Media Optimize Cold Calling?*

“It's difficult to establish trust when your customers don't know whether you're a time-scheduled drone mechanically posting away or a real person behind the keyboard,” he says. “Commenting on posts and replying to clients' responses will reassure them that you're knowledgeable and trustworthy. Make your business likeable and personable.”

The key to using social networks for sales is to take a sincere interest in people and develop relationships with them.

“As you're using LinkedIn, or any social media tool, don't be focusing on collecting connections. The focus has to be on building relationships,” Dodaro says. “If you're collecting connections, you're going to be sitting back, scratching your head, and

wondering why nothing's coming to you on LinkedIn. You really have to build those relationships if you're going to convert that prospect to a client.”

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**Michelle Davidson** was Editor of *RainToday*. As such, she oversaw all of the articles published on the website and published the weekly newsletter, the *Rainmaker Report*. She also produced the site's weekly podcast series, *RainToday's Sales Tips & Techniques Podcast*, and the site's webinars. You may contact her via Twitter at [@michedav](#).