



## **Focus Group Research**

The Changing Buying Environment in the  
Digital Economy

## Background and Aim

The Amigos Network recently organised a series of end user Focus Group meetings with the aim of better understanding the buying environment in the IT and Security sector. The event was designed to encourage open and frank discussions about the buying process, the effect of digital transformation and attitudes towards the tactics and activities of organisations selling in this sector.

The aim is to be able to offer pragmatic and practical advice to the selling community through a better understanding of how to best serve their buying community and create stronger engagements that lead to mutual reward.

## Group Members

The events brought together attendees from a wide range of organisations including Financial Services, Charity, Staffing/Recruitment, Engineering, Construction Manufacturing, Insurance and Consultancy. With either national or global responsibility, the attendees' roles included Security Architect, Risk Manager, Security Operations, Senior Principal, Head of IT and Cybersecurity Consultant.

## Findings

- One view shared by all of the attendees was the apparent lack of preparation and research shown by the sales community which they found annoying and would deter them from engaging with the sales teams. For example, a term used to describe the initial approach was 'scattergun' with calls not targeted at specific individuals but simply trying to find someone who might be interested within the company.
- Due to time constraints and the anonymity of the sales individuals, we found that the buyer community go to extraordinary lengths to avoid contact with sales teams from giving trusted callers a password to pass reception, setting up ghost email accounts and proving false mobile numbers.
- During their online research for new products/services, a finding was the strong objection to the principle of a download being dependent on providing contact details because of the inevitable follow-up sales call. For the buyer this is nearly always research, rather than an intention to buy.
- There was a similar disapproval from the respondents that as a security

audience being sold security products that they are being asked to click links in emails which may potentially be insecure.

- Sales pitches citing 'cutting edge technology' was usually hype and competitor comparisons were obviously biased, according to the group.
- Demos are pushed hard by the sales team, but don't realise demos are seen as fact finding by customers and not necessarily an intention to buy.
- Finally, and arguably, the most important output from the meeting, was the failure for sales teams to understand that customers have plans and budgets. On average, customers buy between four and six technologies a year. These are budgeted and planned for up to a year in advance

## **Conclusions**

Following these research findings, it's our conclusion that a sales process solely focusing on the sale and not a customer relationship, alienates buyers who employ a multitude of methods to avoid contact. Calling and mass emails are largely redundant in their world until at a very late stage in the buying journey.

This is because Digital transformation has made the buyer community much more informed than ever before and don't rely on sales to raise their awareness of a product or service. They do a lot of research and build catalogues of information that is analysed and often shared with peers in the same organisation or outside. As a result, peer to peer recommendations are most widely accepted and respected method of obtaining knowledge.

We believe buyers want more sophistication and professionalism from sales teams. They want more intelligence shown in research, understanding of the market, challenges they face and personalised information, (including what other organisations/peers are feeling with similar pressures and challenges) to support them in their decisions. As well as how to engage, they want a greater appreciation of when to engage, in terms of planning and budgets.

## **Recommendations**

Our central recommendation is a reversal of the current way of selling in that sales teams need to first focus on the customer not the sale. Essentially, build a relationship that works towards a sale.



Adopt a long term, rather than short term, attitude to selling and in that time, aim to get to know the buyer and understand their challenges and preferences. Enable them to access reliable content that helps them personally, not how it compares to competitors as they make their own value judgements.

We believe for sales to be successful it needs to adapt to the needs of the buyer community and personally engage to establish a relationship and be that valued source when the customer eventually wants to buy.

### **About The Amigos Network**

Firstly, we offer ambitious businesses access to professional, multi-disciplined resource and enterprise grade systems as a managed market-making service to engage buyers with their own brand. Of course, an SLA guarantees results and a bespoke analytics dashboard offers absolute transparency at every step of the way. This is **youramigos**.

Secondly, we're building a community of buyers who become members of a hub containing resources where they can access all manner of content from every imaginable source, accessed in whatever way they prefer. This is uniquely profiled and delivered to them based on their own preferences. Because they choose who their friends are, this is called **myamigos** network.

Our job is to bring the community of buyers and sellers together for mutual reward.

Making friends, with benefits.

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