



artesianTM

Guide to Client Engagement

By Immy Tugcu

Client engagement in the digital age

84%

of senior decision makers use social media to make purchasing decisions

source: IDC

Time to change

No one likes change. Comfort zones are so much more, well, comfortable. But in the age of the informed buyer, the bar has been raised for client-facing teams to become more knowledgeable, better prepared to add value to the conversation, and increasingly responsive to the rational needs and emotional risks and fears of the modern B2B buyer.

Changing business buyer behaviour

We are in the middle of an online and social revolution that not only changes the way we buy a holiday, restaurant or airline, but how we buy for our businesses too. Three quarters of business buyers use social media to make purchasing decisions according to IDC¹ and that figure rises to 84% for senior decision makers. Connecting on professional social platforms such as LinkedIn has simply become a part of the modern decision making process.

The digital buying process

Business buyers aren't just turning to social networks – online search has become the first place buyers turn to inform their decision. According to the Corporate Executive Board, the buyer is 57% through their purchase process at the point they first engage a professional². In a similar study, Sirius Decisions, suggests that 67% of the buyer's journey is done digitally – though the company points out that this does not mean communication between buyers and sellers is grinding to a halt³.

Yes, buyers have vast amounts of online information available at their fingertips. Yes, this makes it harder for sellers to add value to sales conversations. But is there still a place for B2B professionals to reach customers and prospects with regular and genuinely useful communications at every stage of the buyer cycle? Absolutely.

The rise of social engagement

Many have recognised this change and teams are transforming the way they engage with their customers in this new reality. A new breed of professional is emerging, one that has embraced the transformation and is seizing the opportunity to engage with customers using social media.

Social empowered professionals stand out to the new connected buyer. Not because they are using social platforms, although they are, but mostly because they have adopted a set of behaviours that set them apart. They are proactive, customer-centred, productive and smart. These are the new habits of the social professional.



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #1 Be proactive

Understand your customers and their markets and use social channels to engage well before they become leads or prospects

The lines of responsibility between marketing and sales are blurring.

B2B professionals that wait for compelling content, customer references, and competitive intelligence, or even leads from marketers are simply not keeping up. There were 433 million users on LinkedIn at the beginning of 2016; your customers, prospective customers and competitors are all using it. There are 500 million tweets each day with micro bloggers commenting on your company, your competitors and the problems you solve.

All of this represents an opportunity to understand your customer and for them to become aware of you. A little research each day gives you greater understanding of market news, industry trends and legislative changes which, coupled with a little sharing, mean that you are continually growing your own social profile as a thought-leader on subjects that matter to clients.

“Artesian has quickly become an integral part of our day-to-day working lives”

Alex Alder - Head of Market Research, Barclays



Are you missing out on conversations?



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #2 Build a network

The time to grow your connections with thought leaders, commentators, customers and prospects is now.

In 1959 businessman Harvey Mackay, turned a failing envelope business around. Today, he still manufactures four billion envelopes each year and has established himself as a New York Times best-selling author.

His business card does not read CEO, Chairman or Author: it reads 'Envelope Salesman'. Mackay has built a hugely successful career through being in service to his customers and by building a network of people that trust and value him. Each of Mackay's connections started with Mackay considering what he could do for them and not the other way around, and this wasn't just an initiative Mackay employed when he was at the end of a quarter. He built his network continuously in a way that is elegantly summed up in the title of one of his bestsellers 'Dig Your Well Before You are Thirsty'. Never underestimate the importance of your network.

Connect often

Build your connections each week. Monitor your customers, competitors and markets using tools such as Artesian. Connect on LinkedIn with those people you meet, find people on Twitter who are talking about the problems you solve for your customers and reach out to thought leaders and commentators known in your industry. Not only do these individuals keep you informed in your field but they also have influence in your market. Your network will grow, slowly at first, but only if you continue to make a contribution.

Separate personal conversations from public ones

Smaller, closed conversations can follow larger, open ones. Occasionally, someone makes a comment that resonates with our own views and we end up in a sidebar, leaving the wider discussion and comparing notes. This happens on Twitter and LinkedIn too and there are occasions where there is a brief exchange of direct messages after which there will be the equivalent of a business card exchange. They will exchange email addresses or connect on LinkedIn, these open conversations on Twitter can be every bit as meaningful as those we have at conferences, expos and any other physical networking events.



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #3 Listen before everything

Buyers are increasingly social which means their needs are increasingly transparent. But only to those who listen first.

In Native American tribal circles, the talking stick is a tool used to ensure that whoever holds the stick can present their point of view, while those around them listen. The tradition reinforces the need to listen without interrupting: a way to hear before speaking.

Conversations on social networks follow the etiquette of any group social conversation, if you joined a group holding drinks and sandwiches at a conference you would listen first. You would try to understand what the conversation was about and get a sense of the people speaking before jumping in. This is true of online social gatherings too.

Listen at scale

It is not easy to do this as there are almost 350,000 tweets, 100 LinkedIn accounts and 1,500 new blog posts created every minute. Sitting in front of a search engine is not going to be nearly efficient enough to stay on top of existing customers let alone prospective ones. Those that use the right tools will be rewarded though, in an online and social world our needs are transparent and so are those of our customers.

There is an ocean of information, but if it is filtered carefully and routinely ranked with automatic triggers, we can discover relevant insights about such events as; senior management changes, awards, new products and periods of either rapid growth or decline. These are social signals that tell us what is happening to customers, partners, competitors and markets. Social professionals listen to these, using tools such as Artesian to understand their customers. Identifiable triggers that Artesian can discern include; organisational change (e.g. new geography); leadership change; market change; external change (e.g. legislation); relationship change (customers, partners); strategic; tactical (initiatives, reviews) and events.

Customer interaction in context

These insights inform the relationship with your customer or prospect and are at the core of changing the conversation from a vendor or product focus to a customer focus. Listening is a habit that allows professionals to understand, to bring customer context to every interaction, to nurture existing relationships and create new ones. Some of these signals are events, situations and circumstances that cause companies to consider buying your product or service. These signals are so strong, that the buyer need is evident but only professionals that have been listening are rewarded with these signals that trigger an opportunity to help start or progress a commercial discussion.

Artesian means we always have something relevant to talk about, and we make the conversation about our clients instead of all about us” Ian Williams - Origination Director, Lyceum Capital



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #4 Become a brand

Build a reputation through your professional social profile, your content, conversation and contribution.

The customer no longer starts their buying process by engaging with a sales professional. Instead, they are researching through search engines, seeking opinions from their professional network and looking to online content as their guide. A personal brand is how buyers will find you in a world where B2B buyers are completing more and more of the buying decision before involving a professional.

Many have not been forced to think in these terms before, a LinkedIn profile was only a mirror of their curriculum vitae, but today the need for a clear brand will enrich careers and build businesses.

Be more than a job title

It starts with thinking about the value you add rather than job titles, responsibilities and a list of verbs such as proven, strategic and effective that everyone else is using anyway. To create your personal brand you should focus on achievements, this is not bragging but is, instead, the intersection between the value your customer or business has received and the contribution you made to it.

‘To create your personal brand you should focus on achievements.’

Think about a problem you have solved or an opportunity that you have exploited and then think about the actions you personally took and the results. Whilst this has always been good practice for building a resume, focusing on this approach with customers in mind is very different.

Consider the following statements “closed the largest deal in the company’s fiscal year and delivered 150% of quota” and “worked with a leading retailer to implement an on-line virtual fitting room which reduced returns by 5% in the first year of implementation”. Both of these statements describe the same achievement but the latter is going to build brand and reputation. The latter tells a story.

Your online reputation spreads beyond your LinkedIn profile and your corporate website, customers will look for contributions from professionals and their business on Slideshare, YouTube, Scribd and any other content sharing site.

A social professional will have the confidence to ask for recommendations because they are confident that they have acted in the interests of their customers and who would not want to recommend exceptional service to their network.



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #5 Practice 360° Networking

**Approach your prospects
through common connections.**

Traditionally you might have approached all those connected with a business buying decision individually perhaps through a campaign of cold calling. Once inside the circle, the professional would affect introductions and the extended sales team would work to satisfy the specific needs of each stakeholder. Whilst much of this remains true today, the initial work can be done far more efficiently by aligning your own network and theirs in a way that is referred to as 360 degree networking.

Approaching individuals directly (0°) is only one option. A zero degree approach is, as it sounds, cold and fraught with the risk of an all or nothing outcome.

Alternative introductions

Alternative approaches include working with professional introducers, such as analysts (at 90°). Businesses need to buy to operate, to grow, to change. So spend some time working out what your prospective customers' business needs are. Then identify suppliers that you could either work with or that might even be currently working with your prospect. Online social and editorial sources are rich sources of information for identifying existing partnerships with your prospect on which you can collaborate.

Naturally, the most effective approach is through warm introductions and you have tools at your disposal that can discover shared connections in what we call 180° prospecting – at 180° are the people that are connected to your prospect. Each of these might already be part of your network, share a common interest, contribute to the same forums or even be a customer that you have already helped. At 180° is a rich network on which common connections can be discovered and introductions made.

Research over dialling

At any one time, there are only 3% of companies intending to make a purchase decision in the next 90 days⁴. A further 7% are passive buyers and may respond to a well-timed campaign. At around 5 to 7 dials to even speak to a person, it will take up to 70 dials to find a lead.

Rather than dialling for a virtual needle in a haystack that time could be spent more wisely on developing an indirect, warm, targeted and well-timed approach.

“Clients are impressed with the level of detail I know about their companies and what’s going on. Now I am not just talking to them about insurance, I am developing a relationship with them.”

Towergate



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #6 Nurture the network

Find reasons to connect each and every day. A comment in a forum, a tweet or something to share is the perfect way to stay top of mind.

So you have established a personal brand, made connections on LinkedIn and built up a following on Twitter. Your network is growing steadily and you proactively prune those areas that are overgrown or outdated. Congratulations, you have an abundance of current and active connections.

Dunbar and meaningful connections

This is where all the work you have done in building your brand and understanding your market aligns with the network you have carefully constructed. British anthropologist, Robin Dunbar, suggested that there is a cognitive limit of around one hundred and fifty stable social relationships that we can maintain, this is why we are redefining what words like friends, followers and connections really mean. Online social networks are larger than their traditional equivalent, so inevitably the connections are not as strong. As Dunbar's number would suggest we cannot maintain deep relationships across all of our social networks but they can still be meaningful. You are routinely in possession of insights that you can share, so build a blog if you can. Remember buyers do not switch instantly from not having a need to needing what you do – our needs evolve.

We might be dissatisfied with the status quo, but not feel motivated to change. Your content, including your blog can help buyers understand where they are in their cycle of need and move them along. It is also a permanent record of where they can find someone who has empathy for where they are today.

Many B2B professionals find it too difficult to blog, so consider writing very short posts of 200 to 300 words. If blogging is just not something you feel you can do then contribute comments to existing blogs. Add your perspective to the conversation so you can be found by buyers who share it.

Everyone has 140 characters inside them

There is little or no excuse to not microblog. Everyone has 140 characters to share on a daily basis if only to pass on those insights derived as a result of being a good social listener.

Comment, mention, retweet and share your opinions on the insights that come your way. Don't be tempted to treat social channels like traditional media though. Your Tweets and LinkedIn updates are not a time to pitch. Instead demonstrate thought leadership, share insights openly and let customers know that you can help them solve their problems. Showcase your experience and build your credibility. Understand and use hash tags and keywords so that your customers and prospects will be able to find your insights at each stage of their buying journey.

“Demonstrate thought leadership, share insights openly and let customers know that you can help them solve their problems.”



[Request a demo](#)



Habit #7 Be in service to your customers

Smart professionals have always known that their personal success is an outcome of being focused entirely on their customer and their needs.

The final habit will require you to re-examine your very purpose as a B2B professional. In the 1970s an AT&T executive, Robert Greenleaf, was responsible for creating the Servant as Leader movement. In a brief but profound essay he turned established business thinking on its head. The notion that leaders are in service to their followers is at the core of some of the most disruptive and consistently successful businesses in the world such as Southwest Airlines, Starbucks and WL Gore, a business that has never made a loss. To engage today requires this same attitude – it is being in service to the buyer. Each interaction should be driven by the question ‘in what way am I going to make a difference, how will I make their life better?’

Customer engagement in the 21st century requires consigning notions of manipulating customers to history and replacing them with a purpose centred on making a difference to the lives of others.

Each interaction should be driven by the question ‘in what way am I going to make a difference, how will I make their life better?’

Adapt or become irrelevant

The future for B2B professionals is to deliver a personal experience in service to their customers but to do so at scale. There is no longer a choice. Customers are changing rapidly and the only two options are to adapt to a rapidly evolving buyer or to become irrelevant. Today’s customers do not expect to be interrupted, annoyed or bothered by sales and marketing teams when they are not ready to talk. In spite of this, the moment they are, their expectations are at an all-time high. They will expect digital professionals to have done their research, to be contactable and even to be reaching out at the point their needs are becoming evident.

Improved productivity and effectiveness are only going to come from a permanent change in habits and by making use of the right media, tools and technology. There are simply not enough hours in the day to research prospects so that they are being contacted at the right time and simultaneously nurture each connection even in a light way.

“Artesian helps build our credibility when meeting customers & shows that we do take an interest in them even when we aren’t discussing new business”

Lombard



[Request a demo](#)

Changing your habits



Changing habits doesn't come easily. New behaviours take time to develop, they feel uncomfortable at first and need to be practiced diligently. It is though, like all good habits, an investment in your future success. You are on a journey to connect with your customers in meaningful ways, to be keenly aware of the difference you make to them and to freely share valuable insights in a way that will attract prospects to engage with you or turn a cold contact into a warm one.

Work on each of these new habits every day.

Proactively discover new leads and insights, grow your network and build your brand. Nurture your network and remember that there is always more than one way to connect. Most of all listen. All of the behaviours require an understanding of your customers, their markets, their competitors and their issues as they arise. This information is freely available from online and social digital sources but it can get lost in the volume and the noise.

The Artesian customer engagement platform routinely delivers relevant insights about your customers and the market you serve so that you can respond, react and serve your customers at the time they need you most.

To learn more about the art of social engagement:



Follow us @Artesian



Connect with us on LinkedIn



Check out our fabulous free resources at
www.artesiansolutions.com/resources/

REQUEST A DEMO TODAY

About Artesian Solutions

Artesian is the world's most powerful customer engagement platform for B2B professionals; it gathers and tracks intelligence on customers, prospects and competitors from millions of online resources including blogs, news sites, editorials and social platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn. Artesian uses clever science to filter and transform acquired information into commercially valuable insights based on the companies and industries that are important to users. Artesian gives users the ability to, target, connect and share with customers and prospects.

Artesian clients include American Express, Adobe, Barclays and HSBC.



About the author

Immy Tugcu is VP, Services at Artesian Solutions. She is responsible for the Support, Taxonomy and Training teams, taking the customer through implementation, enablement and training to an ongoing managed service. She is passionate about delivering exceptional service for customers and about providing leadership to her teams in a way that inspires them to deliver and progress. Before Artesian, Immy worked with some of the UK's largest businesses, providing project and content management within the publishing, security and engineering industries.

References

1. <http://influence.cipr.co.uk/2015/01/18/social-buying-report-idc-says-trusted-networks-improve-purchase-experience/>
2. <http://www.salesforlife.com/blog/the-roi-of-social-selling-5-data-driven-outcomes-infographic>
3. <https://www.siriusdecisions.com/Blog/2013/Jul/Three-Myths-of-the-67-Percent-Statistic.aspx>
4. <https://stickybranding.com/creating-a-first-call-advantage-applying-the-3-rule/>

artesianTM



Request a demo