

Telematics sales & ethics – striking the balance towards professionalism



Brian Martin writes about the poor practices adopted by a minority within the telematics sales industry, that's tarnishing all companies with the same brush

QUESTION: CAN ETHICS EXIST within the sales environment?

The short answer is YES, but history has sadly shown us that it is more often the exception rather than the rule.

The true Sales Professional does deserve and should receive a high level of praise and respect for the job they do. However the people that do not interact with professional salespeople on regular basis, may believe in the negative stereotypes of the salesperson as a pushy, shifty, not-to-be-trusted sort. So where does this stereotype come from?

Television programs, movies, even West End or Broadway productions have promoted this negative image of salespeople, as has the tabloid press. A study of how salespeople are portrayed in the popular press found that salespeople are often associated with deceptive, illegal, and non-customer oriented behavior.

In this study which included newspapers and general interest magazines, these words were often associated with salespeople.

Deceptive Practices:

(Deceptive; Deceive/Deceit; Hustle/Hustler; Scam; Unscrupulous)

Illegal Activities:

(Fraud; Defraud; Con Artist; Con Man)

Non-Customer-Oriented Behavior:

(Pushy; Hard Sell; Fast Talking; High Pressure)

You may be wondering what this has to do with Telematics, because it is easy to think of this negative association as a thing of the past. I'm sure everyone has a horror story of their own, associated with the sales industry. These stories are never one offs, and sadly have tarnished the market verticals from whence they came. Double Glazing in the 1970's; Photocopiers from the 1980's and the Car Salesperson of the 1990's. And in this new millennium decade, it now appears to be the Track and Trace Industry, that has adopted some of the bad practices of yesteryear, and whose reputation is currently being tarnished.

Business people have devalued selling for far too long, is it any wonder that many companies have tried to distance themselves from the profession of Sales, calling them selves 'executives', 'consultants' or even 'managers'. We in the Telematics Industry must stop the rot, and keep the Sales industry of Telematics a profession to be proud of.

I am saddened when I hear a story of a Telematics company who wins a court case to receive money from a customer, who refused to pay for a solution that did not work. Likewise seeing Strategic Alliances posted on a web site, or sales literature knowing personally that such an Alliance has come to an end. We in the industry are not stupid and we do talk to each other, and bad press travels a lot faster than good press.

Below are few quotes from potential customers of Telematics, who regret-

tably have experienced the negative side of Telematics Sales, which have all contributed to this damaging image:

"I am responsible for a large fleet of vehicles, and in all honesty I am lucky if a day passes, without someone trying to sell me a tracking solution."
(Anonymous from a large water utility company).

"We went to one of the biggest players in the industry, and agreed to trial their system. However the support was non existent and the trial failed to live up to the sold expectation... it's now been 7 months since we last spoke to the company, and the unit is still in our vehicle."
(Anonymous from a laundry service company).

"I invited a so-called, fleet management company in to sell the benefits to one my clients.... He was briefed about my clients' needs, which were to monitor the chilled temperatures of the transportation, and he agreed that this was a standard feature... However, the feed back I received from my client was the salesperson failed to talk about the temperature monitoring and only spoke of vehicle tracking... This was embarrassing, having been told what the need was, and then not have it discussed... This has now tarnished my relationship with my client."
(Anonymous from an insurance company).

Being burnt through bad Sales practices has not been restricted to just end users. There have been several companies who have entered this industry to ride the wave of expectation, and sell the dream of a great product to both Investors and employees alike. To then be struck by reality and fail to deliver. This has resulted in Millions of pounds wasted, and livelihoods taken away. There is nothing wrong with selling a dream, but the dream does have to be based on market knowledge, something tangible – a product that works, which is right for the proposed target market (vertical and country). If these don't exist, then realistic time scales and openness must prevail. Below is a quote from a Sales Manager who worked for such a company:

“I was recruited to drive sales for a Track & Trace product, new to the UK ... However the product was not right, it was full of bugs, unstable, and the mapping took forever to refresh... It was developed for a country new to Fleet Management, and not suitable for the mature UK market place... I gave my Directors the feedback needed to adapt the product to the UK; unfortunately the Directors never took my advice and told their investors how wonderful the product was... Naturally when 6 months passed with no product development, no sales and no money, the Directors could not go back to the investors and blame the product, hence the whole sales teams was dismissed.” I am not professing to have the answers, but it's obvious that some salespeople in this industry have not been professional in their approach, and this has contributed to the negative stereotype. Thus sales professionals should work to improve their image, through their own behavior. Perhaps the industry should take the initiative and form it's own association, laying down ethical and professional guidelines for all to adhere to? It's good to hear that at least one manufacturer

(Globetrac) has its own “Code of Ethics”, let's hope it is both followed and enforced.

The buying public, fleet managers etc... have survived the initial growth, and thus have become more sophisticated than they used to be. There are more companies, more telematics events, and more information out there, which has resulted in better educated buyers. Sales professionals must realize that the buyers now have more choice and the competition is more intense and proficient. It is therefore absolutely essential that any salesperson attempting to perform and achieve in the current climate of this vibrant market place, must be equipped and knowledgeable of the accepted practices of modern selling.

If you decided to take up a sport, be it rugby, football or dressage, the first stage would be to start training (mentally and physically) and get to grips with the rules. And in learning those rules, you would obviously want to know the most recent rules of the day, not the rule book of past generations from the 1970's, 1980's or 1990's. Regrettably however, too many salespeople are being taught out of date practices.

Do you really want the sale at any cost? At the cost of your company's integrity? your own integrity? Your company's reputation? Your reputation? For what goes around always comes around!

People like to do business with people that can be trusted, make them feel good, and will give them the very best advice, service and fit for purpose



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product! Companies and individuals must come round to the thinking that Vehicle Telematics Solutions are just that, “Solutions”, it is not a one dimensional product sell, there a lot of Business benefits to be had from Telematics, and it's these that must be sold. Gaining knowledge about your prospect, and market place has to become part of the standard sales practice, Only then will you be able to translate that knowledge to specific benefits to them. Fleet Management & Telematics are not Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), thus this different sales approach must be taken.

If the industry wishes to shake off this image, these changes need to be made. Remember regardless of which company you work for, never forget the most important product you're selling is yourself, Sales is a profession and it up to the Salesperson to be Professional. ■

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