

Using the Internet & automation as tools for salespeople

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**Using the Internet & automation as tools for salespeople**

**By Dave Kahle**

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Will the Internet cause the death of the outside salesperson?

Pick up any trade journal or sales and marketing publication these days and chances are you'll run into some comments addressing that question. I rarely teach a seminar without that question popping up somewhere in the course of the day. Almost every sales manager, executive and sales person I know has pondered it recently.

So what's the answer? Like most others, I have to admit that I don't know. It is certainly possible that some aspects of today's outside sales jobs will be replaced by point-and-click. But the answer to the big question remains unclear and a ways into the future.

I am sure of one thing, however. The Internet, specifically, and computers in general can be powerful tools in the hands of a capable salesperson, and those salespeople who take the initiative to become automation-enabled will find themselves growing in importance to their customers and in value to their companies. Rather than wait fearfully for an answer to appear, the wisest course for the professional salesperson is to proactively make computerization work for him or her.

We all understand that computer technology, particularly the on-line segment, is moving so rapidly that parts of this article may be obsolete by the time it is printed. Keeping that perspective in mind, here are some ways that an Internet-enabled, computer-savvy outside salesperson can use this technology to excel.

How salespeople can use the Internet

1. Qualify new prospects. Just because you have the name of new prospect doesn't mean that it's worth your time to call on that prospect. Why not use the Internet to qualify your prospects before you spend time trying to see them? Let's say you've developed a list of 25 new prospects in your territory, one of which is XYZ tool and die shop. Do a search for that XYZ tool and die through the search engines and see what develops.

You may discover a website with a wealth of information about the prospect. It wouldn't be unusual to find out the names

and titles of the key people, the key product lines or customers they serve, the mission or vision statement of the company, etc. You may also find the company mentioned in a number of other ways. For example, you may find them mentioned in a press release by an association to which they belong. They may be a new member, or have been mentioned in an article in a trade journal, or listed as a customer by another vendor. The possibilities are endless. Every piece of information can be useful to you in determining whether or not to call on them, and, if so, how to approach them. And all that information may be available over the Internet.

2. Email. This is clearly one of the greatest advantages to the Internet. Think of how many hours per week you spend on the phone with all the people in your own company. Now add the hours spent on the phone with customers, or more accurately, trying to reach customers. Suppose you could dramatically reduce that time by using email to communicate with your support people and your manager. And now, suppose that you could virtually eliminate voice mail frustrations by communicating via email to your customers. You could transform dozens of hours each week that are currently spent in frustrating and tedious tasks into productive sales time.

You could even go beyond using email for personal communications. It can also be a sales tool. Collect the email addresses of those customers who agree to this, and then use mass email as a sales tool. Here's an example. Let's say you have 100 customers, and it takes two months to see all of them. You have a hot new product to tell all of them about. Why not mass email the information overnight, and then visit first those who first expressed interest in it? You could dramatically reduce the time it takes to turn that new product into sales dollars.

3. Contact management. Contact management software has been around so long, the benefits so clearly established, and is so commonly used that I hesitate to even mention it. However, it's my personal experience that even today at least 50% of the sales forces with which I have contact are not automated. There is no longer any excuse for this. You need to be using a laptop with a contact manager program to collect and record information customers, to record contacts and conversations, to create schedules and to do lists, to file quotes and record sales information. One of the characteristics of the turn-of-the-century marketplace is the rapid increase in the amount of information a salesperson must handle. Using a computer to assist in the organization and processing of information is no longer optional. If you're not using a laptop daily in this manner, shame on you. You are behind.

The initial cost is no longer an obstacle, as several Internet-based programs have been introduced recently which allow you to use contact-management software via the Internet on a monthly-rental basis.

4. Presentations. The computer-enabled salesperson uses a laptop with presentation or video programs to present a new product or service to the customer. Using these tools means that you can prepare a colorful, animated, talking presentation, and view it together with your customer. That allows you to make sure you get all the important details into the presentation, and present the product as positively as possible. Taking time to create a presentation in a stress free environment of your home or office ensures a far higher quality in the presentation than if you attempt to adlib as you go in front of the customer.

Store your supplemental paper-based literature on the computer, and print sell sheets with a portable printer on an as-needed basis. Watch all the clutter in the back seat of your car disappear.

You can take this concept to a deeper level. Your company's marketing department, for example, can create the product presentations and make them available for all the salespeople via CD ROMs, downloads over the web, or internal networks.

Manufacturers can do the same for their distributors. Instead of relying completely on a salesperson visiting and training your distributor salesforce on new products and promotions, why not

create those product presentations and make them available to automation-enabled distributor salespeople over the Internet?

5. Become the customer's search engine. There's no doubt that the amount of information available on the web is growing exponentially. It takes time to search through it all to find answers to the questions you, and your customers, have. Yet all of your customers are suffering today with more to do and less time to do it than ever before. Time is the most precious commodity of the Information age.

The person who can find information on the Internet for someone else, and thereby save him or her time, is of great value. I routinely pay people to search the web for information that I want. I don't have the time to do it myself, and it's a service that is of value to me. You can serve that function for your customers, becoming the trusted source of applied information.

Learn to use the Internet to research product applications, competitive products, the competition, technical details, and

whatever other questions tempt you or intrigue your customer. One way to prevent your customers from using the Internet to replace you is to preempt the process. Build your Internet skills to the point where your customers come to rely on you as a trusted source of important information, and you'll become irreplaceable to them.

6. Share your success. We've only just scratched the surface of the ways in which an automation-enabled outside salesperson can use computerization to become more effective. There are probably thousands of specific things you can do more effectively via computerization. You may have some powerful and unique applications yourself.

Here's an invitation to share your techniques with other salespeople. If you have a technique you'd like to share, visit Kahles Korner, a bulletin board for salespeople, and submit your idea.

Use your browser to open this page: [www.davekahle.com](http://www.davekahle.com), and click on the button For "Salespersons Members Board." When prompted for a username, type "slspeople," then use "sales" as a password. Post your idea, or review the ideas of others. To entice you, we'll send a free copy of my new book, *The Six-Hat Salesperson*, to three salespeople every month in the year

2000 who submit the best ideas that month.

You can no longer afford to be computer or Internet ignorant if you expect to prosper as a salesperson in the 21st Century. The time to make proactive moves to become automation-enabled is now. ###

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Dave Kahle is a consultant and trainer who helps his clients increase their sales and improve their sales productivity. For more information, or to contact the author, contact The DaCo Corporation, 15 Ionia SW, Suite 220, Grand Rapids, MI 49503; phone 1-800-331-1287; fax 1-616-451-9412; Info@davekahle.com www.davekahle.com

## **Mercury automated testing**

**By Tom Millichamp**

Since the millennium bug there has been an explosion in test automation. The expansion of automated tools from vendors such as Mercury Interactive, IBM Rational, Segue and others has really delivered automated testing into the heart of just about every major organisation in the western world. And this can be seen to continue with new development methodologies such as eXtreme programming which has test automation at the heart of its design.

So why Automate? Well, the major benefits are:

### **Speed**

Automated tests can run much faster than the manual equivalent, so more testing can be achieved in a smaller time frame. It is not unusual to see regression suites that take two weeks manually reduced to 24 hours with test tools!

### **Consistency/repeatability**

Automated tests can be repeated over and over and will always perform the test exactly as recorded. Manual testers can easily make mistakes or perform the same test slightly differently when repeated.

## Using the Internet & automation as tools for salespeople

### Unattended - reduce cost

Once developed, the automated testing can be executed unattended overnight, so repeating the testing requires very little resource or cost.

### Audit trail

The tests are stored as automated scripts and the test results are stored for every execution of the tests providing a full audit trail of all testing performed.

### Improved Test Coverage

As the test pack develops, more & more tests can be added and as the execution time is much faster than manual testing and less resource intensive, more testing can be completed, ensuring greater coverage of the application under test.

### Free up testers to perform other tasks

If the structured testing is automated, testers will hopefully have more time to perform other types of testing (accessibility, usability, ad-hoc/random testing) which commonly get pushed aside.

### Some testing may only be possible with automation

For example how do you manually simulate 5000 concurrent customers performing transactions on your on-line web site?

### What types of tools are available?

#### Functional/regression automated tools

These tools capture user interaction with the application under test and can then be replayed. However they go beyond this and allow you to data-drive tests, to capture the state of your application whilst performing business processes and provide fully-featured development environments allowing you to manipulate applications in almost any kind of way. Tools such as Mercury's WinRunner or QuickTest

Professional demonstrate the pinnacle of what these kinds of tools are capable of.

#### Load/Performance tools

These are used to emulate multiple (concurrent) users performing tasks against your application, for example if your business has an on-line banking system - how many users can it support? What kind of performance will it deliver under load? Where are the bottlenecks? All of these kinds of questions can be answered using automated load testing tools such as Mercury's LoadRunner.

#### Test Management

Tools such as Mercury's TestDirector or Quality Center offer Test Management facilities; a central repository to store test requirements, test scripts, execution results and defect tracking, integrating seamlessly with the automated tools such as WinRunner, LoadRunner and QuickTest Pro.

### So what are the pitfalls to test automation?

It is easy for these tools to become 'shelfware' as purchasers do not consider the complexity and

power of some of these tools.

They all share a steep learning curve, so some time and money need to be invested into getting your team up to scratch with the tools.

Some solutions to good automation implementation:

Technical Testers. Ensure your testers have a reasonable grasp of technology, some programming experience would be ideal.

Training, Training, Training. Good training programs are offered for these tools and are well worth the investment. The trainers usually have good project background experience and can demonstrate how the tools should be used and explain the pitfalls.

Hand-holding for the basic infrastructure. Following the training it is well worth getting a consultant in for a few days or weeks to build the basic automated infrastructure, provide on-site training against your application and to develop templates for your team to expand the test automation out from. They can achieve in weeks what could take you months to learn.

Tools such as LoadRunner, WinRunner, QuickTest Pro, TestDirector, Quality Center can provide a great return on investment in the longer term, but to make them effective do invest in training and assistance at the beginning.

Tom Millichamp director of Edgewords Training

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