

Foreword

*E*SCAPING THE BLACK HOLE is about pushing the edge of the envelope with new ideas and processes. Some are tactical, some are strategic, and a few are truly revolutionary. Its promise is a clear and concise blueprint for creating a highly effective and more synchronized sales and marketing ecosystem.

I admit this is a daunting challenge. Like many sales executives, I had embraced the notion that marketing people could never understand what goes on in the customer's mind. Marketing's approach was just too different from sales. I know very few companies that have sales and marketing working together, where all parts are synchronized and implanted in an "ecologically healthy" corporate culture. In many companies, sales and marketing departments have grown apart because too many projects were designed to satisfy the egos of the leaders rather than to delight the company's customers.

When I think of the disconnect between sales and marketing, I think of a cacaphony of noise. When marketing sees an opportunity, they tend to commission a composer to write a symphony that will attract a wide audience. Like classical music, marketing evokes a predictable stream of predictable emotions. When salespeople see a customer, on the other hand, they hear anything but a symphony. The world of selling is more like jazz, the art of the moment. Salespeople listen to a customer's riff for a while, and then respond with a riff of their own. Good salespeople are masters at improvisation.

Bob's view is a little different. He sees selling and marketing as an integrated, multi-dimensional challenge that involves maximizing the transfer of knowledge between marketing, sales, partners, customers, and prospects through simple, systematic processes that help marketing and sales professionals see the world from the outside-in.

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I have known Bob Schmonsees for many years, and have admired his relentless passion for getting sales and marketing to listen to the customer's tune and for continually driving the creation of "customer-centric" organizations. Bob has directed several sales and marketing teams and suffered the indignities that come with premature and poorly planned product launches, ineffective marketing messages, and misinformed salespeople. As the CEO of several software companies, he's been ahead of the curve, set the bar to the highest level, enjoyed great success, and also experienced the agony of failure. Bob and I have engaged in many lengthy discussions over the last dozen years on how to best create a coordinated and symbiotic sales and marketing team that is truly driven by the needs of the customer.

Bob has done a little more intellectual weightlifting than others in the field, and he has discovered a simple process for creating and hardening a company's value propositions. Here is where Bob's genius lies. His battle cry is "value . . . as the customer defines it," and his weapons are powerful and precise. Bob's patented methodology called "Value Mapping" forces sales and marketing to take a closer look at their customers' business problems and begin a systematic discovery and knowledge-transfer process that helps everybody from the CEO to the salesperson articulate the value proposition in a way that is consistent, objective, and measurable.

Value creation is the heart of any business, and Value Mapping lets you create a visual map of your company's "Value DNA," and provide your salespeople with just-in-time coaching on all the different elements of your value propositions so that they are as crystal clear as a mountain lake. This is truly a revolutionary process, which in my view will become as important to marketing as forecasting is to sales. Value Mapping quickly raises customer knowledge up the organizational flagpole, and allows sales and marketing to synchronize their efforts around the precise value that their solutions deliver to the marketplace.

Value Mapping is just one of the innovative new processes and best practices in this book that will help B-to-B companies avoid what Bob calls "The Black Hole," that powerful energy field that absorbs countless dumptrucks filled with useless marketing material along with millions of dollars of wasted sales efforts.

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Bob is a realist, however. He understands that creating a Synchronized Marketing and Sales Ecosystem may be simple to talk about and understand, but is not quite as easy to achieve. People resist change. But what's the alternative? Irrelevance!

The bottom line is that the new ideas in this book will help you stop talking about customer-centricity and help you actually begin to walk the walk. And that is what effective marketing and selling is all about.

—Gerhard Gschwandtner
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