Sales Content Management

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The Sales content Management is an activity directed to systematize the enormous amount of raw information available to companies. It aims to organize information in an orderly and structured flow of content, to support the sales force.

Starting from a sample of around 700 commercial professionals, the study provides a photo of the current adoption of sales content in Italy and investigates its organizational antecedents and managerial implications.

43,7%
of respondents have a heterogeneous set of sales content at their disposal.

To achieve sales goals, companies should make available to the sales function a wide variety of content and oversee their capacity to use.

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SALES CONTENT MANAGEMENT

The use of digital tools is now widely implemented in all phases of the sales process. According to Accenture data, around 80% of companies adopt digital tools to facilitate the management of sales activities, for example in relation to the identification of new business opportunities (sales leads), the creation of commercial proposals and the configuration of the offer.

The set of processes, technologies and tools useful to support sellers in carrying out commercial activities is known as sales enablement. Sales Content Management - one of the typical components of sales enablement systems - aims to systematize the enormous amount of information available to sales functions (endogenous and exogenous to the company, eg product sheets, market analysis, sales forecasting etc.), in order to organize them in an ordered and structured flow of contents.

Providing commercial tools to better know the market - and effectively representing the company's value proposition and portfolio - is a critical success factor. Although it is often observed the presence of widespread resistance to sellers' adoption of sales content. Through a mix of quali-quantitative techniques - and the involvement of various corporate stakeholders, such as top managers, managers and users of sales content - our research, describes the current adoption of sales content and highlights its organizational antecedents and managerial implications.

Regardless of the format (text, video, etc.) - as well as storage and diffusion tools (company intranet, APP, CRM etc.) - the study focuses on seven categories of sales content, useful both for the analysis of the customer portfolio and for the management of commercial relations. The categories are summarized in Figure 2 which highlights their degree of diffusion in the sample.

We conducted a survey on a sample of salesmen and trade supervisors, with different roles and sectors. The research model summarized in figure 1 identifies the key questions of our study.

Figure 1 –Research model and key questions
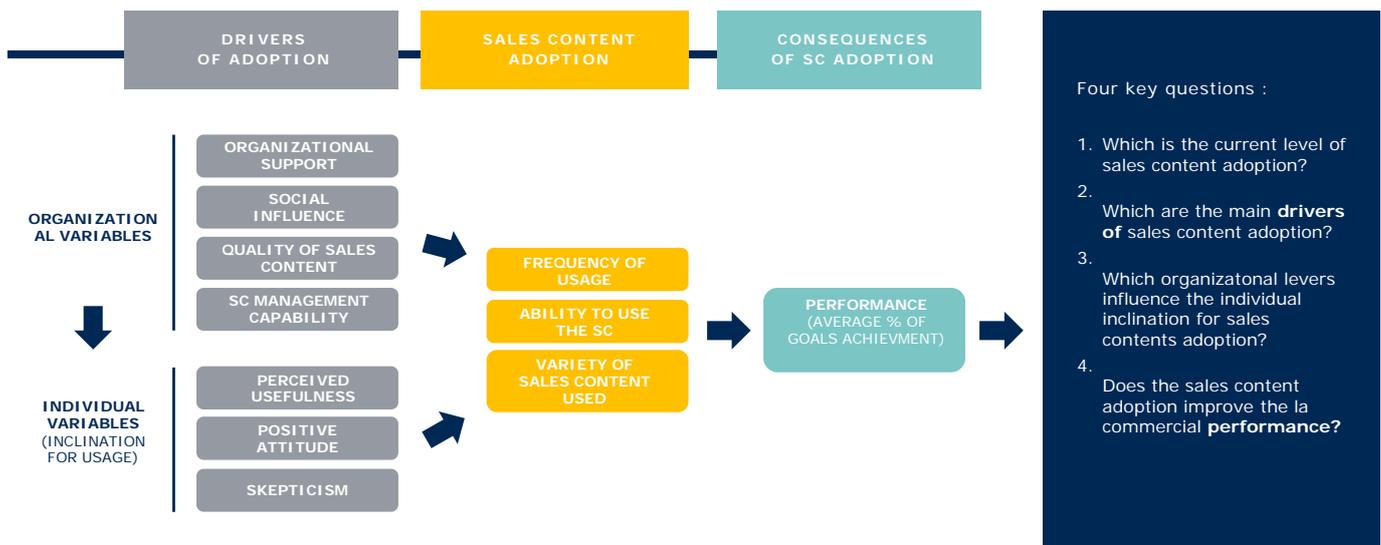
SALES CONTENTS ADOPTION

The variety of content available to sales functions is very heterogeneous: 18.5% of respondents have only one category of content, 37.8% mention two or three and the remaining 43.7% site the presence of four or more categories of content.

Figure 2 –Category of sales contents widespread in our sample

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To explain how the product/service works	63,8%
To maintain the customer relationship after the sale	63,0%
Ti assess atractiveness and potential of actual customers	54,0%
To communicate reputation and company's reliability	43,4%
To communicate the value proposition	41,2%
To assess potential customers (prospects) attractivenss	38,8%
To handle objections and tough complex interactions	32,3%

The adoption of the contents by the commercials has been investigated both from the behavioral point of view (frequency and capacity of use) and the cognitive point of view (importance attributed to them).

Crossing the different aspects of adoption, emerges a different maturity stage of the categories analyzed (Figure 3):

A. SALES CONTENT MATURI (*MUST HAVE*)
   SALES CONTENT MATURE/RIPEN? (MUST HAVE). Widespread categories, considered to be - on average - more important than the others, better managed by the companies/BU, better mastered and more frequently used by the commercials.

B. SALES CONTENT SECONDARI (*AS IS*)
   SALES CONTENT SECONDARIES (AS IS). Categories that are less widespread, less frequently used, less mastered than average and considered to be of little use by commercials.

C. SALES CONTENT CRITICI
   SALES CONTENT CRITICAL. The contents useful to evaluate the attractiveness of the prospects are a category still not very widespread, little used and managed by the commercials, perhaps because it is poorly managed at the organizational level. In fact, it is potentially very attractive among those who do not have this category of content.

Figure 3 – Evolutionary stages of sales contents
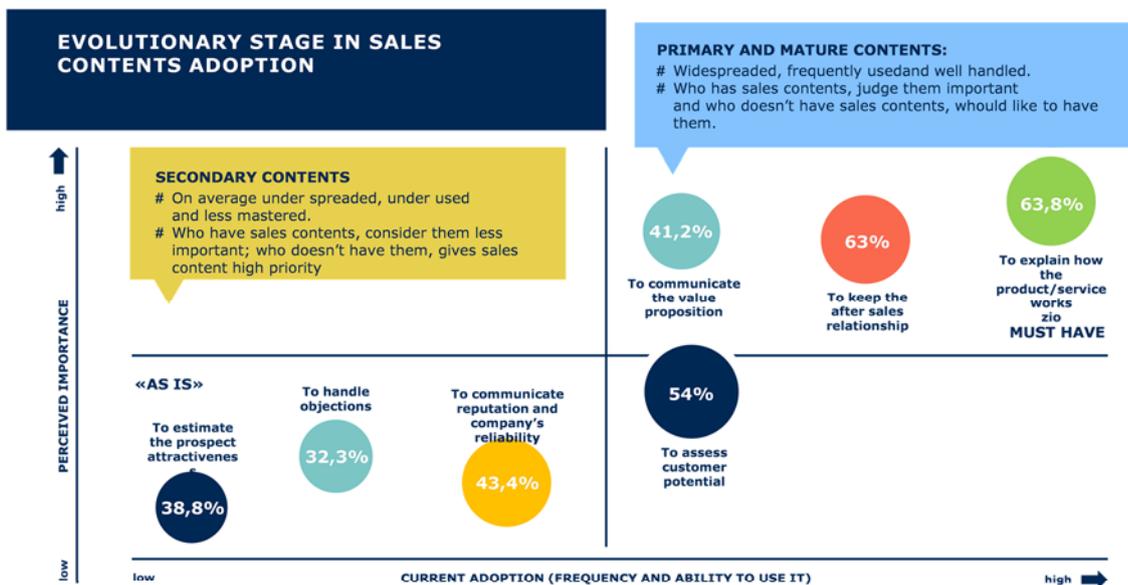
Nota Bene: Circles size represents the % of contents categories diffusion in our research sample.

SALES CONTENT MANAGEMENT FROM SALESMEN POINT OF VIEW

How can we stimulate the use of sales content by our sellers? An essential prerequisite is the quality of the contents available. In our studio, the commercials consider them as useful for their work, reliable and easy to use.

Instead, among the weaker aspects there is the reduced possibility of customizing the contents, the inadequacy of the formats, the slowness of the technologies adopted and the scarce availability and accessibility of the contents.Secondly, our research shows that it is important the example provided by top managers and direct leaders, who through their use of content represent virtuous role models to be imitated.

Furthermore, to stimulate the use of sales content, an organizational support is needed. Typically, it appears to be inadequate, due to the absence of incentives aimed at rewarding the use of sales content, the low involvement of end users in the design phase and the reduced analytical approach, which does not lead to measuring actual use by sellers and to give them feedback. On the other hand, the aspects assessed in a more positive way are the internal communication on the available sales content and the training provided, both on the contents and on the supporting technologies.

The adoption of sales content depends a lot on how they are perceived by sellers. Companies must therefore know and work on this dimension.

What are the sales content for? Our study shows that the commercials consider them as tools able to perceive themselves as more prepared and efficient, especially when organizing a visit with a client; while commercials consider sales content less relevant in terms of supporting them to achieve tangible results such as the increase in average order value and conversion rate, or the lead generation.

Overall it persists a favorable attitude of sellers towards sales content. Skepticism derives above all from perceiving sales content as a possible control-tool used by companies to raise commercial objectives.

Analyzing the use of content tends to reduce the favorable attitude of commercials, especially in cases where the company is not able to demonstrate that their use enhances the commercial performance.

Organizational support is inadequate due to the lack of incentives for use, limited involvement of end users in the content design phase and reduced analytical approach (analysis and feedback on use).

Salespeople consider sales content useful for their business, reliable and easy to use. Although they are critical on the format, on the speed of the technologies adopted, on the standardization of content, and on the lack of availability and accessibility.

To increase the achievement of sales targets, companies must make available to Salespeople a wide variety of content and strengthen their mastery of use.

IMPACT OF SALES CONTENT ON PERFORMANCE

Our research shows a positive correlation between the ability to use sales content, their variety in use and the commercial performance (figure 4). In order to facilitate the achievement of the commercial objectives it is therefore necessary to make available to the commercials a wide variety of contents and to develop in the commercials the mastery of use - which increases as the frequency of use increases - . It is necessary to focus on the quality of the contents and to invest in the company's ability to manage them. The perception of usefulness of contents and the favorable attitude towards sales content must be developed and disseminated, since a skeptical attitude of sellers tends to reduce their frequency of use.

Having a wide variety of contents and mastering them increases the percentage of goals achieved by the commercials.

The frequency of use of the contents has only an indirect impact, because it improves the ability to use them.

Figure 4 –Relationships between Performance e Sales Contents adoption
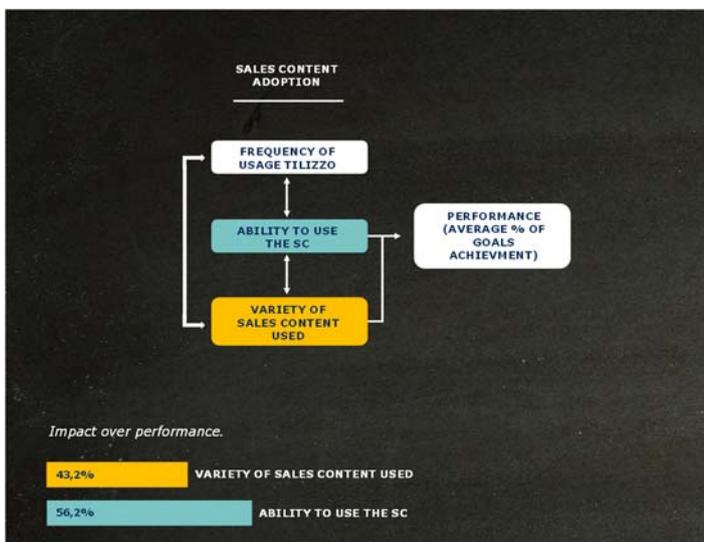
MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND A MODEL FOR SALE CONTENT MANAGEMENT

How to develop a positive attitude of salespeople towards sales content? The individual propensity to use depends primarily on the perception of quality of content, followed by the impact of organizational support, and residually by the social influence and the company's ability to manage sales content (and not just create them).

To strengthen the propensity of business to use content, companies should:

The organizational context plays a key role in addressing the individual towards sales contents

- define a clear strategy of use;

- adopt a two-way approach to internal communication (communicate the available sales content, request feedback and opinions);

- train for the use of sales content;

- involve end users in the design and creation of content;

- demonstrate the effectiveness of sales content in terms of commercial performance.

As described in Figure 5, our research suggests investing in four phases of an ideal process of development and management of sales content

Figure 5-A final model to manage sales contents

CONTENT CREATION

WHAT:
Which are the sales contents to focus on?

HOW:
Who should be involved in the contents creation? How?
How much, when and how is advisable to leave sales people free to customize sales contents?

ANALYTICS AND REPORTING

HOW:
How to manage the analys on sales contents usage?
How to return feedbacks voiding sales people to believe they are «controlled»?

1 2

Sales process integration (es. CRM)

4 3

CONTENT STORAGE

HOW:
How to storage and organize the sales content in order to facilitate their access and usage?

CONTENT DELIVERY

HOW:
How internal communication and training on sales contents should be managed?
Which roles should behave as "influencer" to facilitate the sales contents adoption, how?

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-	contributing to the growth of sales jobs reputation, making it an attractive choice to talents;
-	helping companies to best understand and manage the variables that determine sales performance, even in light of current and future market changes.

For further information please visit the Commercial Excellence Lab's website:

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