

The Field Sales Rep of the Future

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The bottom line for the distributor field sales rep of the future is that they will continue to be critical to success and well paid, but the role will be very different from where it started. Fundamentally the transition is from being a self-directed generalist to a management-directed specialist.

Some firms are already well on their way, and many are not the publicly held billion-dollar firms. They are privately held regional distributors that are making the transition quietly.

Here are five behaviors or practices these firms are using to make the transition:

1

They are transitioning from generalist field sales reps to specialists and adding inside customer service reps, inbound and outbound telephone sales, product specialists and quotation departments that narrow the responsibility of the field sales rep. The role that remains is focused on new business development and demand creation.

2

They are adding real marketing functions that identify new business opportunities, creating clear value propositions that make customers sticky by increasing their switching costs and building a playbook of value-added service offerings. The responsibility of identifying growth opportunities shifts from the field sales rep to the marketing department.

3

The field sales reps are shifting away from servicing their existing book of business, as that business transitions to lower cost and higher efficiency alternatives.

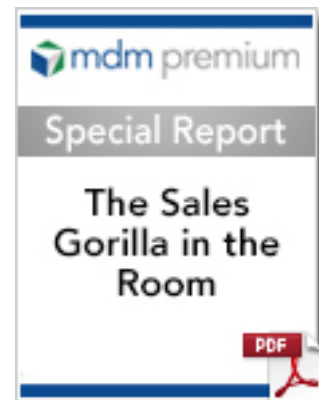
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The field sales rep is doing what the senior sales executives thought they were doing from the start: They are conducting needs analyses for customers, documenting real customer cost savings and disrupting the old-school traditional reps by taking their customers away.

5

They no longer are defined by a set of assigned customers that largely remain unchanged. They have customer-recognized experts in product selection and application, specific markets or specific business challenges.

How customers buy is challenging the traditional role, function and purpose of the distributor field sales position. But many distributors have resisted changing their approach to sales for fear of losing sales reps, customers or both to the competition. The economics of relationship selling are changing, and that means distributors must change, as well. The [MDM Special Report: The Sales Gorilla in the Room](#) examines the role of the distribution sales rep, what is driving the shift and paints a picture of the future of field sales, including its role, function and purpose for the successful distributor.





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