

The Evolution of B2B Sales Decisions

Exploring the sales rep from 1950 to 2015.

The role of the sales rep at industrial B2B companies has significantly changed over the past 65 years. Yet, there is one constant. Company sales and profit growth are tied directly to how well sales reps can answer three questions, each and every day:

 **Who to Call?**

 **What Products to Pitch?**

 **What Price to Quote?**

Let's explore how reps have evolved in their decision-making over time...

Click on an icon and jump to view retro relics, articles and images.



There was little sales call planning, with most calls being conducted with random visits, phone calls or at the sales counter.



Product catalogs were far less complex, simplifying this decision point, sales reps focused on educating customers about items in the catalog.



Sales reps quoted list price with little discretion. "How to price a new product is a top management puzzle that is too often solved by cost theology and hunch."

1950s
1960s

Habit, intuition and gut feel dictate day-to-day decisions.

1970s
1980s

Computers add basic analysis to supplement "gut feel" decisions.

The Rolodex reaches iconic status, sales reps use them to quickly access customer contacts, and guard them with their lives.

Basic computers are more widely used, providing B2B sales reps with basic reports like market segmentation and product sales.

In a misguided attempt to boost volumes, "during the 1970s, managers got into the habit of simultaneously boosting the list prices of their goods and making deep promotional price cuts."



Spreadsheet advances give sales reps more price specificity in terms of territory, region, or other broad factors like cost-plus or list-minus; sales reps commonly negotiate deeper discounts for their customers.



M&A creates massive product proliferation, (complicating product cross-sell) 935 cross-border M&As total \$148.6 billion in the 1990s alone.



Cloud-based CRM gains adoption; sales reps are more efficient in tracking meetings, calls and sales.

1990s
2000s

Emerging technologies give better information to sales reps.

2015 & Beyond

Data-driven technologies reach maturity, enabling smarter sales and profit decisions for reps - every day.

Prescriptive sales applications reach maturity, advances in data science alert sales reps to the best cross-sell and retention opportunities in their territories to help them retain more customers and sell more to existing customers.

More B2B companies embrace true mathematical price optimization to help sales reps quote the right price every time.



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Contact mdr@zilliant.com to learn more.