

ARE YOU MISSING THE PERSONAL TOUCH?

The internet has given buyers 24/7 access to information and more control over their order-books, but has anything been lost by minimising human interaction?

'People buy from people.' It's an old saying, but one which Charcroft believes is being eroded by the increasingly impersonal nature of the interaction between buyers and their distributors. Certainly, face-to-face meetings between buyers and distributor salespeople still happen, but now they are only one part of a wider spectrum of communication. Rather than picking up the phone to a supplier, buyers are just as likely to log on to the 'My Account' section of the distributor's website, or use Google to get an answer to a technical question.

The internet has certainly given purchasers rapid access to information and more control over their order-books, but has anything been lost along the way?

Contact us

The degree to which communication between distributors and buyers has been de-personalised can be demonstrated simply. Think of a distributor you don't currently deal with and try to contact them. Your first action will probably be to visit their website and find the 'Contact Us' button. Depending on the distributor, this will either ask you to submit your enquiry via an online form, or give you a central switchboard or telesales phone number.

Charcroft claims to provide a more personal and streamlined approach, by simply listing the contact details for each business development manager, as well as the counties they cover and the products in which they specialise.

Of course, the scale of global distribution networks means that maintaining an up-to-date list of all sales contacts would be a formidable



Sales manager, Charcroft, Debbie Rowland

task. It is also possible that corporations of this size want to concentrate their support and resources onto the top 20 per cent of customers, so it may be in these distributors' interest to put a few hurdles between its local sales engineers and customers who don't meet the required potential spend level.

In reality, Charcroft believes this means that buyers procuring relatively low- to mid-volume bill of materials (BOMs) are likely to find themselves dealing with sales systems, rather than sales people.

Face-to-face

Taking a more personal approach to business can offer benefits for customers of all sizes. Face-to-face meetings give a buyer greater scope to discuss their procurement challenges in more detail and for solutions to be discussed and explored together. They also give the salesperson a deeper understanding of the customer's business compared to five minutes spent on the 'About Us' section of the



Passives specialist, Roger Tall, has joined Charcroft's external sales team

customer's website. Often, it is this level of detailed and historical knowledge, gained through personal interaction, which is lost when a specialist distributor is acquired and absorbed by a global distribution network.

In the past few months, Charcroft's belief in the 'people buy from people' approach has resulted in Roger Tall joining the external sales team as a passives specialist. It has also led to new franchises with ceramics specialist, Exxellia Temex, and with power-supply manufacturer, Puls. Both manufacturers chose Charcroft as their distributor for its ability to combine digital communication channels, such as online live chat and social media, with personal service from a telephone help desk and transparent access to field salespeople. It is this combination of digital and personal service that Charcroft believes helps customers to fulfil their procurement objectives swiftly and efficiently.

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