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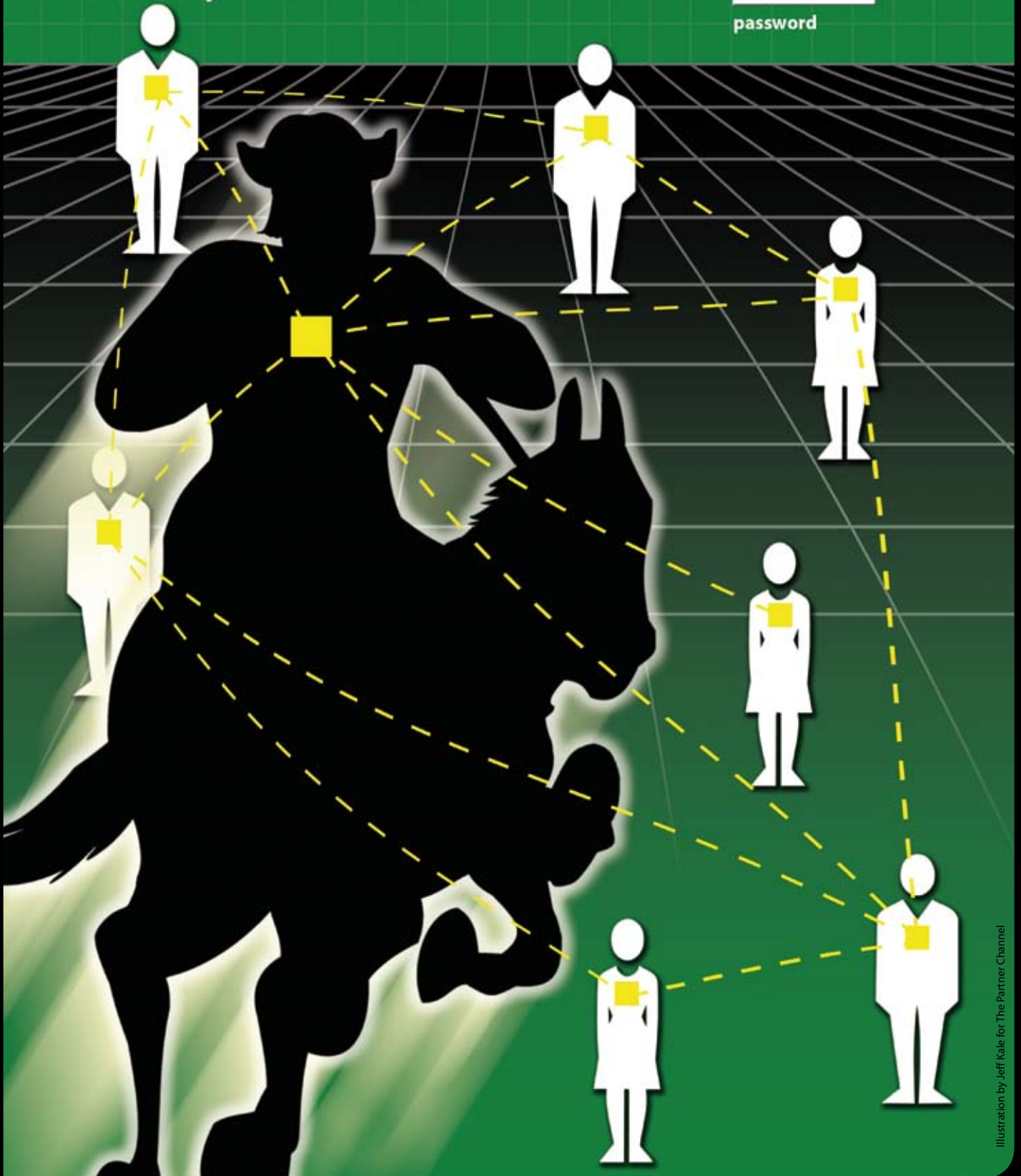


Illustration by Jeff Kale for The Partner Channel

Paul Revere NEVER MADE a Single Cold Call

 Joe Mechlinski

Technology has accelerated the impact that word-of-mouth has on the sale. With social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, it is possible to reach wider and wider audiences, around the world, instantly. But, regardless of the message or the platform for communicating it, the most important factor is still the messenger. We have to trust the messenger, or we're unlikely to listen or hear. Consider the famous story of American patriot and master networker Paul Revere.

According to retellings in popular business books such as Malcolm Gladwell's "The Tipping Point" and Keith Ferrazzi's "Never Eat Alone," Revere was an extremely social and well-connected member of Colonial society. In April 1775, Revere learned that the British had orders to capture rebel leaders and forcibly disarm the townspeople. Chased by Redcoats, Revere rode from town to town, spreading the news to the most connected people in each town. Those people in turn spread the news. Therefore Revere's news could spread more quickly to more and more people who could spread it more quickly, creating one of the earliest examples of viral marketing in America. Revere knew the right people in the right towns, and he made sure he got the message to them.

The lesser known part of the story is that Revere had a counterpart that night, William Dawes, who also went riding off with an urgent message. Dawes was not as well connected. He went door-to-door with his message ... "cold calling" in today's sales parlance. Just the fact that you've never heard of him tells you how effective he was.

Cold Calling Is DEAD

In a world that has drastically changed, it is more challenging than ever to sell. Even b-2-b (business to business) Microsoft® Partner sales are affected, because business people are consumers and investors, too. As such, they've dealt with decreasing home values, shriveling stock portfolios, and corporate bad actors such as Enron, WorldCom, and Bernie Madoff who have demonstrated to everyone that it is more and more difficult to know whom to trust.

To combat this, Partners need to change their game. They must learn to use a combination of social networking (and social media) and a renewed, intensified focus on building trusted networks to increase word-of-mouth sales.

People have always done business with people they trust. We give no time to telemarketers, cold callers, or people we don't know. Cold calling always was a low-performing sales activity anyway – but now it's worse. Studies have shown that, at any one time, less than 3% of the marketplace is actively buying. They have also shown that it takes, on average, nine rejections before a prospect is willing to accept a meeting. If this is true, have you been guilty of having

Why Word-of-Mouth Is Still the Best PR

your sales people “smile and dial” through a list, with little thought to follow-up? If so, why have them engage in low-yielding activities?

One of our mentors has a phrase: *“Common sense principles aren’t always common.”*

As business owners, Partners have always understood that cold calling is low-yield. What’s not so widely understood is what to do to build trust in this new economy. If you accept that cold calling is dead,

it, too. And when the entire offense had it, the defense wanted it. Then other teams wanted it. Then players in other sports. Word of mouth was better than any PR campaign. Imagine how quickly word would have spread had social media existed in those days!

The company continues to build good to this day, online and off. Case in point is the recent story about Under Armour’s CEO Kevin Plank. It was widely reported across the news media that Plank turned down

is scared and quiet, looking for leadership. That should be you.”

What does this mean for Microsoft Partners? From the perspective of leading your sales team, it means that your buyers are becoming more tribal. They are forming communities of friends they can trust and to whom they can turn whenever they need information or advice. To reach them, Partners need to go where they are, and prove that they can be trusted. You can see why cold calling is absolutely useless in this new paradigm.

...LASTING AND SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE CAN BE BEST EFFECTED BY A TRIBE, A GROUP OF PEOPLE CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER, TO A LEADER, AND TO AN IDEA. —SETH GODIN

how can you increase sales? Is there a discipline around developing, maintaining, and leveraging your trusted community? This article shows how to build relationships on trust, and win in any economy.

The Old Secret Sauce

In the past, the “secret sauce” to building trust in the business community included utilizing a public relations firm to create third-party testimonials via the traditional broadcast channels, TV, newspapers, and radio. Consider the example of publicly traded sports apparel company Under Armour®. Many sports fans have seen their intense TV commercials, featuring the athlete who screams, “We must protect this house!” This is a great example of memorable marketing and advertising.

Of course, the company wasn’t always large and influential. In start-up mode, Under Armour used a distinctly grass-roots, trust-based approach to building their brand. They gave away their product for free to college and pro football players with the knowledge that a team is a trusted community. They assumed word would spread. Sure enough, when the quarterback was wearing the apparel, and talking about it, the fullback came to want

his million-dollar bonus and instead took just a \$25,000 a year salary in response to his company’s failure to hit certain goals. As a result, what do people think about Kevin Plank? They trust him.

The Power of Trust in Tribes

Trust is even more important in this era of information overload. Until the broad expansion of the Internet in the mid-to-late ’90s, buyers had limited access to information. Not even 15 years later, the reverse is true. Buyers have information pouring out of every electronic device they use, from the hand-held to the GPS to the news and entertainment media channels to social media with links back to Web 1.0. We’ve become numb. To cut through the clutter, we turn to our trusted advisors when we need something.

Marketing guru Seth Godin has given a name to our networks of trust. He calls them “tribes” and argues that lasting and substantive change can be best effected by a tribe: a group of people connected to each other, to a leader, and to an idea.

In speaking about his book, “Tribes,” Godin recently said, “This is a great opportunity to build relationships, to lead a tribe, to create a movement. Everyone else

Five Strategies for Building Trust

As a Microsoft Partner seeking to expand your networks and grow your business, what can you do to generate word-of-mouth news and capitalize on the trust-based economy?

Here are five strategies:

1) **Seek to understand your community. Who are they?** What do they want? Why do they do business with you? When do they do business with you, where, and how? Once you understand what it is that drives demand for your offering, you can better align your company with that demand.

2) **You must actively build your network.** As said in movie “Field of Dreams,” “build it, and they will come.”

3) **Ask for referrals.** To do so, you must give before you get. Don’t keep score. Steven Covey in his book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” uses a bank analogy. He says you can’t make a withdrawal before you make a deposit. Salespeople and their companies need to think about how they are giving back to their communities. But in asking for referrals, be clear on what you want and who you want it from. Tell your sales team to stop asking people what YOU are looking for. Don’t say, “Do you know any Fortune 500 CEOs who are running legacy systems?” What you should be asking for is what YOUR PROSPECTS are looking for. For example, “Do you know anybody who is growing who has a need for a better network?”

4) **Be comfortable asking for what you're looking for.** We find it amazing that 95% of the Microsoft Partners we work with report that they don't follow-up. Follow-up is easy! It could be an e-mail, a card, a call, or a post on their Facebook page or LinkedIn. You could send them to a book, invite them to the next charity group that you're a part of, or invite them to the next networking event you are going to. *What* you invite them to is not as important as *that* you invited them. Following up is the most underrated and valuable skill a sales organization can possess. Without it, you will fail.

5) **Build your own community through a series of roundtables, networking events, and other business forums.** Build communities offline as well as online.

Building Trusted Communities Online

Can you imagine what Paul Revere could have done with today's social media tools?

Once you have done everything you can to understand your audiences and reach out to them offline, the next step is to work on building those communities online.

The key here is the fact that you can't manufacture a community. If you don't take time to build your network offline, nothing will happen online. In other words, you can't automate a relationship if no relationship exists.

One of the greatest examples of online/offline community-building and relationship-building is Amazon.com. You go to the site and order a book, and in the process, receive automatic referrals ("People who bought this product have also bought this product"). After you've read the book, you'll return to Amazon to provide user-generated reviews, sharing your thoughts and feelings to like-minded readers.

Other examples of community builders are famous bloggers like Guy Kawasaki, the owner of an early-stage venture capital firm and a columnist for *Entrepreneur Magazine*, who has more than 100,000 followers on Twitter, and Jeremy Epstein, a former Microsoft executive, who generat-

ed a large following with his Partner-centric blog, "Igniting the Revolution: Never Stop Marketing."

Don't have an e-commerce site? Not a blogger? That's okay. There are multiple business applications in social media for building communities. For example, here is a short list of ways LinkedIn allows Partners to stop cold calling and stay relevant with their audiences:

- » **Recommending others** – this feature allows you to build good will, unsolicited, by creating a recommen-

**"GREAT SALESPEOPLE KNOW HOW TO
COLD CALL BUT DON'T HAVE TO."**

PAUL REVERE CERTAINLY DIDN'T HAVE TO.

dation for your clients or prospects that all LinkedIn viewers may see.

- » **Posting events** – have something going on offline? Advertise it to your communities online.
- » **Asking questions of the community** – stay relevant by generating relevant conversations that help the community deepen their inquiry and expand their knowledge.
- » **Posting job openings** – this tactical feature of LinkedIn is one of the most widely used and effective means of leveraging your trusted community to help you find your next hire.
- » **Posting status updates** – as with micro-blogging sites like Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn allows you to share short updates with your community about whatever is important for them to see.
- » **Voyeurism** – this functionality allows you to see who is visiting your profile. You may leverage that information to reach out to the members of your community directly, based on timing and indirectly expressed interest.
- » **Screening candidates** – found someone you're considering hiring?

Check out their profile and activity on LinkedIn first.

- » **Researching people for upcoming appointments** – if your salespeople are not doing everything they can to learn about prospects before meeting with them, they are missing the opportunity to harvest potentially relationship-building information.
- » **Relationship map** – LinkedIn's connections map or relationship map allows you to see who knows whom in the community.

- » **Introductions** – it's very easy to ask a contact on LinkedIn to introduce you to a contact whom you would like to meet.
- » **Participating in questions** – it's fun to answer questions, and it could establish you as an industry expert, increasing your relevance with the community and driving word-of-mouth referrals.
- » **Polling** – give your audiences a chance to weigh in on an issue that impacts them. Send them a LinkedIn poll, and let them make their voices heard.

Forming Profitable Relationships

In terms of Microsoft Partner sales, it doesn't matter how big your rolodex is. It matters how many relationships you have and how good those relationships are. As the leader of your sales team, it is your job to align sales efforts with the trust-based economy and leverage social networking to build your brand, get your name out, and grow sales revenue profitably. A famous man once said, "Great salespeople know how to cold call but don't have to." Paul Revere certainly didn't have to. 🌟