

THE CHALLENGER™ CUSTOMER

Are you targeting the right decision maker?



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The Group Dynamic Problem

Any sales rep can tell you that the number of people involved in purchasing decisions has ballooned in recent years. “The average B2B decision-making group includes 5.4 stakeholders, and the likelihood of a purchase decision being made drops to 30 percent with that number,” says Patrick Spenner, director of strategic initiatives at CEB and co-author of *The Challenger Customer: Selling to the Hidden Influencer Who Can Multiply Your Results*. Salespeople need to get a collective “yes” from all of these stakeholders to close a deal, and they don’t always know who all of those stakeholders are or what they care about. Indeed, even customers themselves may not always know who will be involved in a purchase decision. To matters more challenging, each of these stakeholders has different priorities, goals, perspectives and varying levels of knowledge about what the rep is selling.

This seemingly ever-growing group of individuals needs to communicate and agree on a shared view of the problem at hand, their priorities, what action they should take, and finally, which supplier is best able to support that action. Without clear alignment, the group will do one of two things: arrive at a “good enough” view of what to do, settling for the lowest common denominator; or more commonly, do nothing at all. How do you sell and market into these complex group dynamics? As Spenner and his colleagues at CEB found, you need to find and target the stakeholder that is most likely to help forge consensus for a new way forward and help their colleagues arrive at the right purchase decision.

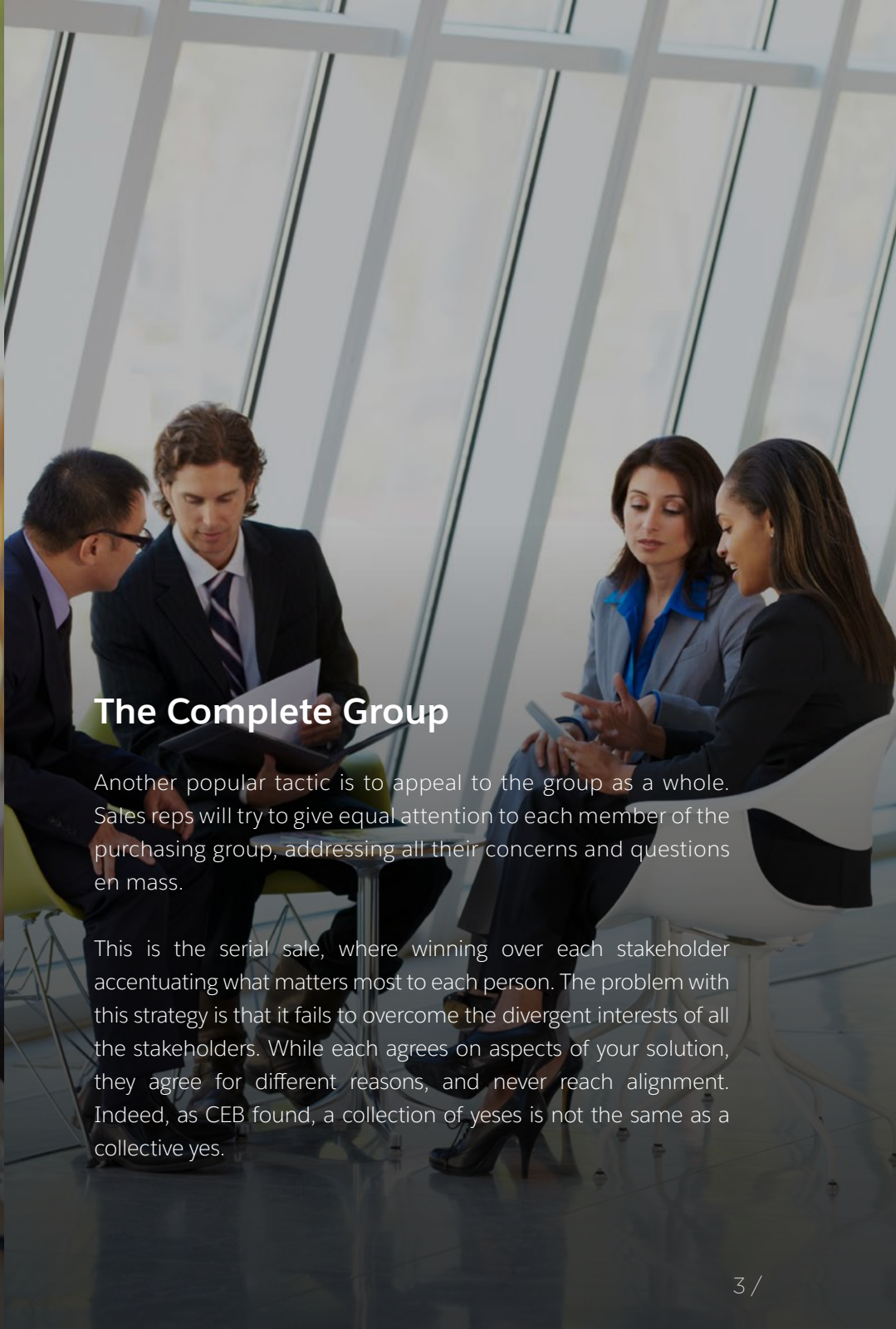
A close-up photograph of a man with brown hair and glasses, wearing a blue and white striped shirt. He is smiling broadly and looking slightly to his right. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office or meeting space with large windows.

So Who Do You Target?

The Friendly Customer

CEB research shows that most sales and marketing organisations try to engage the friendly customer. Traditionally referred to as an advocate or champion, this customer is already on your side and very willing to discuss the purchase, and network you with their peers.

However, targeting this customer is not ideal for creating group consensus. Within a purchasing group, the friendly customer lacks the credibility to push the group towards a definitive choice. Their affinity for your product or service makes them a biased party to the rest of the decision-making group. CEB data shows these traditional points of contact are often unable - or unwilling - to drive a purchase decision forward.

A photograph of four business professionals (two men and two women) in a modern office setting with large windows. They are gathered around a small table, looking at a laptop and discussing it. The man in the center is pointing at the screen. The women are also looking at the screen and talking to each other.

The Complete Group

Another popular tactic is to appeal to the group as a whole. Sales reps will try to give equal attention to each member of the purchasing group, addressing all their concerns and questions en masse.

This is the serial sale, where winning over each stakeholder accentuating what matters most to each person. The problem with this strategy is that it fails to overcome the divergent interests of all the stakeholders. While each agrees on aspects of your solution, they agree for different reasons, and never reach alignment. Indeed, as CEB found, a collection of yeses is not the same as a collective yes.



The Answer:

The Challenger™ customer

CEB conducted rigorous quantitative and qualitative analysis of thousands of B2B customers to understand buying-group consensus, and discovered that your target should be the Challenger customer, otherwise known as the Mobilizer™ customer.

Mobilizer customers value new ideas for their business, they're skeptical and deeply supplier-agnostic. They could care less about your features and benefits, but they do value new direction for their business. Conversations with Mobilizer customers are difficult to say the least - they push back, they ask hard questions, they play "Devil's Advocate" -- and for most sellers, this type of conversation feels like a blown sales call. But these qualities are exactly what gives the Mobilizer customer the credibility to inspire change inside their organisation. When they lock onto an idea, their colleagues listen. So how do you win them over and help them build consensus?

1

FIND YOUR COMMERCIAL INSIGHT

First, your team needs to find what CEB calls “Commercial Insight,” which answers the following: “What do our customers fail to fully understand about their business, but should, and that leads uniquely back to our company?”

Commercial Insight isn’t a demonstration of how smart a supplier is, but rather how wrong a customer is (obviously delivered in an empathetic and respectful way). Commercial Insight is not based on typical “voice-of-the-customer” surveys. VoC tends to ask customers what they think of a particular supplier. To create Commercial Insight, companies must ask what customers think about themselves. By deeply understanding how customers think their business works, it becomes clear where the customer is mismanaging their business. This becomes the basis for a good Commercial Insight. Mobilizer™ customers require these ideas, and commercial teams will simply fail to engage Mobilizer customers without them.

57%

of the buying process is complete by the time a sales rep is involved.

2

CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT

The average buying group is 57 percent of the way through a purchase decision when it engages a sales rep; and it's 37 percent of the way through the purchase decision when group conflict peaks and is most likely to kill or stall a deal.

This means your content will reach your prospects before your sales team, and it will reach them at the most crucial moment. Marketing and sales teams must create content that explains their Commercial Insight, leading customers to learn more about how they could be managing their business differently, ultimately encouraging a buying group to take action and make a decision.



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3

HELP BUILD CONSENSUS

Once a sales rep is involved in the buying process, they must understand how to help Mobilizer™ customers build consensus and move forward with the purchase.

The solution requires sales and marketing to collaborate in a new way and change how they communicate with customers. Sales teams must coach the Mobilizer customer through the purchase, helping them understand the inherent pitfalls, and arming them to overcome internal challenges. Marketing must build content that supports the Mobilizer customer on their purchase journey, buying guides, diagnostics, and cost of inaction calculators all supporting the Commercial Insight the Mobilizer customer is driving into their company.

46%

of customers report that agreeing on a course of action as a buying group is highly difficult.



How Can CEB Help?

**Find Mobilizer
Customers**

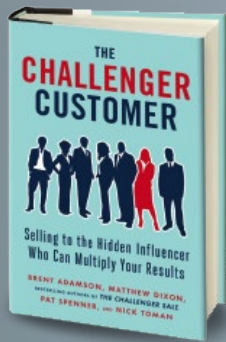
**Engage Mobilizer
Customers**

**Drive
Consensus**

CEB equips organisations through best practices, tools, and implementation support.

We help members be fast and right.

Get inspired and learn more at
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