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## **XChange 2017: Traditional Sales Strategies Are 'Under Siege,' But Brand Evangelism Can Help The Channel** [1]

by [Alec Shirkey](#) [2] on August 14, 2017, 8:00 pm EDT



With digital marketing tools and a commitment to brand evangelism, solution providers can change how effective they are at finding and keeping customers. That's the message from marketing expert and author Denise Lee Yohn (pictured), who delivered one of the keynotes here on Monday keynote address at The Channel Company's XChange 2017 conference in Orlando, Fla.

Yohn singled out Guy Kawasaki, a former Apple executive, as someone who embodied the idea of brand evangelism in the 1980s.

"It was his job to convince people, share the good news, that Macintosh is going to make everyone more creative and productive," Yohn said. "[He] wasn't really marketing a computer. [He] so believed in Macintosh that [he] wanted other people to experience it for themselves."

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Yohn believes disruptive technologies have heightened the importance of brand evangelism, which is built around the idea having the other party's best interests in mind. In industries where field sales staff has been reduced, and sales tasks have become more automated, a strong brand can help companies stand out, even when there are fewer face-to-face selling opportunities.

Solution providers have the added challenge of building their own brands while also selling clients on a vendor's products and reputation. Yohn said IT companies need to first clearly articulate what specific needs they fill and what value they bring to a customer when beginning to build their brand platforms.

"Sales is under siege today," she said. "We can't afford to let that happen. You are the engines of the business today."

Brand evangelism can help, explained Yohn, who discussed seven principles of effective brand-building that can better position a business for success.

The process begins with ensuring that an entire organization understands what its target customers want and need, she said. Yohn also highlighted the need for companies to avoid simply selling products. Instead of pushing features or functionality, she argues for the need to sell clients on emotional connections because customers are often well-educated on pricing options and potential pitfalls.

Yohn next emphasized the need for "great brands" to avoid following trends for the sake of imitating successful competitors. Rather, a company can determine its unique value by targeting specific client needs.

Confidence is another area solution providers must keep in mind, as customers can often sense "desperation." Don't be everything to all people, she said, because that can be off-putting.

Effective brands are clear about their values and commit to them regardless of whether it aligns with every potential customer out there, Yohn said. Leaders should consider all the information at their disposal to target the customers they really want.

"You better use all the data and analytics to know how to engage those prospects," Yohn said. "Sales is no longer a numbers game about getting through as many people as possible. It's an insight process."

Yohn touched on three more principles of effective brand-building for businesses: Going out of the way to build unique customer experiences; living out brand values, instead of feeling obliged to "give back" charitably; and relentlessly executing on the chosen brand platform.

"Amazon was created to be the world's most customer-centric company," she said. "[Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos] doesn't care if he has to lose money, alienate employees or browbeat vendors. He is committed and stays committed."

Yohn's keynote hit home with attending solution providers. "I have to reinvent myself. I have to basically go back to the drawing board and ask those fundamental questions," said Uday Dalvi, CEO of Tucson, Ariz.-based MSP DataWorks LLC. "What am I all about? Once you establish that, why does it matter to the customer what I'm all about? Those are the two big questions I need to really go back and answer before we come up with a strategy."

Dalvi also recognized the importance of better targeting his company's sales efforts, rather than casting a wide net to land a few fish.

"You've got to figure out which is the type of customer you want to attract and just stick with that. Don't take any other ones, because they're basically energy drain," he said.

Yohn parting admonition to solution providers here: Be genuine, show customers brand value instead of telling them, listen to clients at every turn. "What great salespeople do is not really selling.; It's brand evangelism," she said.

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