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www.valveworldamericas.com

Publishing Director

Thijs Elshof, t.elshof@kci-world.com

Sales Director

Andre Davanzo, a.davanzo@kci-world.com

Editorial Team (print & online)

press@kci-world.com

Sarah Bradley (Canada/USA)

s.bradley@kci-world.com

Candace Allison (Canada/USA)

c.allison@kci-world.com

Christian Borrmann (The Netherlands)

c.borrmann@kci-world.com

Advertising Team (print & online)

Andre Davanzo, a.davanzo@kci-world.com

Josh Gillen, j.gillen@kci-world.com

David Scharbach, d.scharbach@kci-world.com

Thijs Elshof, t.elshof@kci-world.com

Jesse Mejaski, j.mejaski@kci-world.com

Subscriptions (print & online)

Lindsay Jackson, l.jackson@kci-world.com

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Design & Layout

Anita Smits info@layouthuis.nl

Publishing House & Mailing Address

KCI Publishing Corporation

36 King Street East, Suite 701,

Toronto, ON, Canada

info.toronto@kci-world.com

Tel: +1 416 361 7030

Fax: +1 416 361 6191

B.N 829876267RT

Netherlands Office

KCI Publishing B.V., Jacob Damsingel 17

NL-7201 AN Zutphen, The Netherlands

info.zutphen@kci-world.com

Tel: +31 575 585 270

German Office

KCI GmbH

Tiergartenstr. 64, D - 47533 Kleve, Germany

info.kleve@kci-world.com

Tel: +49 2821 711 450

China Office

KCI Shanghai, Room 603, 6F,

#400 Zhejiang Mid. Road Postcode 200001

Shanghai, China

info.shanghai@kci-world.com

Tel: +86-21-6351 9609



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Final Words

Millennial engineers search the web before they'll pick up the phone

Face it. They don't want to call you!

By Tom Lautenschlager - Thomas Enterprise Solutions

There's a reason why today's younger engineers don't answer or return your calls. They don't want to. Don't take it personally. More importantly, don't expect it to change.

From looking for restaurants to buying music online, this generation grew up on self-serve information. Unlike older engineers, the fastest point from whatever they need to the right solution was never, and will never, be the phone. Why waste time trying to find the right person with the right answer when it's so much easier and faster to jump on your laptop or mobile and get it yourself? Efficiency is their one and only priority.

You can look at this significant shift in buyer behavior in two ways. As a threat to how you've always sold your products or services. Or as an opportunity to leverage their behavior into a new, highly efficient engagement model that will win more sales and make you more efficient at the same time.

It begins with rethinking your own role in the sales process. Today's younger engineers don't need or want you to "sell" them out of the gate. Instead, they want immediate access to what they need to sell themselves. Savvy manufacturers understand when it's the right time to reach out.

In a word, *content*. Not just product information. Deep product information. Not just reams of it buried in a website. They want

highly detailed content that's easily found and applied. And I'm not just talking about written specifications and descriptions. They want drawings. 2-D, 3-D, downloadable, configurable. Something they can drag and drop into schematics. The more they can do with your content, the easier and faster it is for them to determine if it fits and, if it does, specify it for procurement.

But (I can hear you thinking), *I can already get them what they need. And every time I do is an opportunity to build a relationship with them.* Really? Let's take a moment to honestly assess, from the engineer's standpoint, the "traditional" engagement experience.

Typically, he or she calls you, the sales person, and asks for a specification sheet and drawings. You say, "I'll get those for you asap!" The second you hang up the phone you call and email for the latest product specifications. You call and email your internal engineers to get the drawings. Then you wait. Hours. Days. Meanwhile, the customer isn't waiting. They're looking at your competitor's products and services. And calling them, too.

You finally get back to them with what they want and maybe they've found it from someone else. Maybe they haven't. But in either case, what kind of expectations for the relationship have you set? Keep in mind that engineers expect instant gratification. Manufacturers who have all of their detailed product information available, and are positioned to respond quickly are the ones who will ultimately get the job.

Here's how to rethink the engagement process and your role in it. Your content, not you, should be the first point of engagement. Enterprise-wide content that provides engineers direct access to the in-depth information and drawings they want gives them the power to efficiently pre-qualify your products. Making sure the same "voice over" information you would provide as a sales person regarding customization, availability and delivery info should also be served up with the product details.

This isn't just an ideal scenario. It's becoming more and more of an imperative for manufacturers that want to do business with future generations of engineers. A recent ThomasNet.com® Industry Market Barometer® annual survey notes that by 2025, a full 75% of the workforce will be made up of the Millennials who are now 18 – 32 years old. These are the same young engineers who are already determining exactly how the sales process should work on their terms. They're the ones who want to initiate the call after they've assessed your products and services.

Instead of an initial inquiry, the customer is now a strong lead. You haven't wasted your time getting them information on products that may not fit the bill. They've already moved themselves through the sales funnel. In giving them what they need to be more efficient, you've become more efficient as well. And you've established your relationship based on their needs and priorities.

Sounds like a pretty good approach to me.

About the Author

Tom Lautenschlager is an Enterprise Sales Engineer with Thomas Enterprise Solutions. Contact him at tlautenschlager@thomasnet.com.



Dear readers,



The Valve World Americas team and I hope you have enjoyed reading this edition as much as we have putting it together. We have done our best to compile an interesting issue

for you, including the cover story about MRC Global's immense growth, as well as our discussion with Sage Environmental's Steve Probst about the upcoming 4C Environmental Conference and its importance to the valve industry. We also had the great opportunity to meet with Greg Ardoin of Phillips66 to discuss his experiences in procurement and his thoughts on the industry. We have also introduced our new Ask The Experts column - if you have a valve question that you need answered, we are here to help!

We are always looking for feedback! Do you have any suggestions for future content that will make our year even better? Maybe you want to contribute a technical article or you just want to let us know about an event you think we should attend? Contact me at s.bradley@kci-world.com.

Sarah Bradley
Editor, Valve World Americas



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