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## Swedish Meatballs, Flat Boxes and You

This month's *Harvard Business Review* passes through the outer orbits of a terrific concept in Michael Norton's short write up, *The IKEA Effect: When Labor Leads to Love*. According to Norton and his colleagues, "When people construct products themselves, they come to overvalue, their (often poorly made) creations." They studied this hypothesis using origami, which is not a product most people but is undoubtedly easier to carry to research sites than pallets of build-it-yourself kitchens. The research revealed that people "were so enamored of their own amateurish creations that they valued them as highly as origami made by experts."

### Our Take

First, sticky nomenclature alert: "The IKEA effect" is a great name for this research. (I can't help but wonder how many *HBR* readers have IKEA furniture in their own homes, but never mind that.)

Norton and the gang tapped into a truly powerful idea which can help many companies during these tough economic times. The gold is not, as the researchers ponder, in passing along labor costs. Yawn. Rather, the broader, more important concept is in using experiences to generate sales.

Contributing your own labor is simply one version of a much bigger idea: involving your customers in an experience which compels purchases and loyalty. This is an idea I have long talked about under the heading "Experiential Selling." (An exclusive, in-depth white paper on the topic [is available here.](#))

While the *HBR* article focuses on folding the creases with your own deft fingers, the fact is that any kind of experiential involvement will increase sales. If you have enjoyed a live performance while dining at the local

pub you know the experience makes you more likely to buy the artist's CD and promote him to your friends, regardless of his musical proficiency or lack thereof.

In fact, the authors could have extended their idea to the "RockBand effect" which accounts for the surging popularity of old or obscure bands whose songs can be played in the videogames RockBand and Guitar Hero. According to Nielsen SoundScan data, songs featured as a RockBand download saw digital download sales spikes of 30-to-50 percent for the month after they were featured.

Similarly, as a frequent speaker at conferences and corporate events, I know that audiences give top marks to speakers who engage them in a live case study, regardless of whether or not that speaker dazzled them with Obama-esque oratory.

So, how do you tap into the power underneath the IKEA effect? The fastest, cheapest, and easiest way is to equip your sales force with experiential selling capability. Here are four steps to arming your team with an experiential selling tool that works:

1. Understand the **motivating factors** which lead to sales in your market. Most companies are too product focused, concluding that buying decisions are based on price, features, service and relationship. It's rarely that simple. What constitutes a win in your buyer's eyes? In B2B sales, increased profit may be important, but often there are "softer" motivators. In a segment of the environmental monitoring industry, we found buyers motivated by industry recognition for being on the cutting edge.
2. Broadly envision all the paths which **connect your offering to the motivating factors**. Success in creating the experience->emotions actions chain directly corresponds to the linkage between your offering and a significant win.
3. Solidify your **compelling story** before developing a sales tool. One paper manufacturer went to market with a dynamic sales tool which, unfortunately, made it clear to buyers that they offered no real point of difference. Oops.
4. Create an **engaging gateway** into the experience. A software tool or an unusual or intriguing device might initially be dismissed as "fancy" or "gimmicky," yet when it draws the buyer in then it has done its job.

Unless you want to buy all your furniture at IKEA this year, you probably want to find ways to drive sales in a down market. Experiential selling is

one solid, proven approach that will help you. Build a tool yourself, or for help putting together the pieces, call me:

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