Preface

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The past decade has seen an explosion of sales research by practitioners and academicians recognizing the importance of sales. The developments in communication technology, rapid assimilation of digital marketing, and globalization of the marketplace have vastly impacted sales practices as well as management of field salespeople. Customer service expectations and demands are increasing at a brisk pace requiring salespeople to continuously adapt strategies to keep pace with their customer base. Today’s salesperson has access to huge amounts of data, but their challenge is to transform that data into useful and actionable information to gain competitive advantage. To be effective and successful in customer acquisition and retention, salespeople must transform themselves and adopt a new way of thinking in terms of value creation and customer delight. Research indicates that despite all the advances in technology, the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI), automation and influence of social media, salespeople remain the key differentiating factor in the marketplace. Practitioners and academics are looking at the best ways to keep salespeople effective and engaged. This edited book is structured with an aim to serve as teaching material as well as a research source for academicians in the current digital era.

This book is a collection of work from eight author groups that features original research and current developments in the sales field. Each chapter reflects scholarly contributions from researchers who have made a mark in the sales field and summarizes current developments in the sales field along with authors’ perception of how these developments have influenced sales practice now and will in the future. Notice that these chapters provide a glimpse into the sales process from a historical perspective as well as the changing perspectives of value creation in the prevailing marketplace. In the first chapter, An Exploration of Sales Activities from a Service Ecosystems Perspective, Hartmann, Wieland, and Lussier use a service ecosystems perspective to explore how sales
activities are responding to the advancement technologies and evolution of customer orientation. They posit that three fundamental core components need to be present as part of sales activities: (1) definitions of reciprocal exchanges, (2) the norms that guide exchange practices, and (3) relational norms.

Sales activities in value creation and presentation of value proposition have been profoundly influenced by technological changes. In Chapter 2, Agnihotri reviews the contemporary sales technology literature from a managerial perspective and cites the belief of many scholars that AI and digitalization will be a dominant focus of sales research in the near future. This study also notes how research focus is shifting to interactive technologies at the salesperson–customer interface. This study integrates the diverse ideas of scholars with a view to provide guidelines in the research area.

Onyemah and Rivera-Pesquera delve into the details of entrepreneurial selling in Chapter 3 and show how it differs from the traditional selling process. They posit that unlike routine selling which relies on existing procedures and knowledge, entrepreneurial salespeople must resort to innovative techniques and utilize new information to develop a mutually beneficial exchange. Their characterization of entrepreneurial selling is much broader and encompasses selling not only to customers and consumers but to other stakeholders such as investors, experts, and suppliers. They believe that entrepreneurial salespeople must be both hunters and farmers, acquiring new customers and nursing the current ones.

Family-owned small businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy and provide 55 percent of all jobs in the U.S. and 54 percent of U.S. sales according to the U.S. Small Business Administration (www.newarkadvocate.com/story/money/business/2017/). Small business and family business owners place great reliance on relationships they have cultivated during the inception and growth of business. Yet, small businesses also find it difficult to change business operations they have grown accustomed to. Friar, Ippolito and Clark provide a practical perspective of the ordeal family business owners experience when they are forced to make changes to grow the business. Chapter 4 shows Friar and his colleagues’ experience of running a family business, as well as their opinions from an academic perspective. They discuss difficulties associated with implementing the discipline of professional selling methods for family-owned businesses and suggest strategies for successful transition into professional selling methods.
Chapter 5 looks at the changing demographics and its impact on managing the salesforce of Millennials and Generation Z. Attracting and retaining successful salespeople has always been a challenge to sales managers and has been the subject of extensive research. However, with the entry of Millennials and Generation Z, sales managers are facing new challenges to find out the best way to motivate. Deeter-Schmelz reviews the literature to understand current knowledge and offers recommendations to managers. She also provides a glimpse into the attitudes and behaviors of Millennials and Generation Z workers while providing clues to their expectations about the workplace and managerial practices.

The developments in digital technology have also impacted the selling process. Most firms now rely on apps or programs to identify leads and supply the salesforce with a list of qualified prospects. Kadić-Maglajlić, Chaker, and Arslanagić-Kalajdžić examine the current seven-step selling process that is being taught in professional selling classes and study how it is being implemented in emerging economies as well as the impact of technology on the selling process (Chapter 6). Their research of salespeople showed that while there are similarities to the traditional selling process in developed markets, there are also important differences in terms of the activities, challenges, and issues salespeople face in emerging markets.

Salespeople must constantly balance demands from both customers and management and stress is an accepted part of a salesperson’s job. There are still questions about why some salespeople are more prone to stress than others. Stress can be a motivating factor for some while for others stress can lead to burnout. Stress and emotional exhaustion, a component of burnout, have been extensively researched. Ambrose, Rutherford, Shepherd, and Tashchian review and summarize the existing research stream and present a new framework for burnout research (Chapter 7). They posit that this framework, using the shortened 10-item version of the MBI inventory scale, should help move the research forward and look at the ‘always connected’ salesperson.

We round up the topics by Chapter 8 on ethics in sales. Dingus reviews the literature on ethics and sales, identifying some of the dilemmas that salespeople face using a model of sources of the conflict. She outlines proactive strategies selling organizations, sales managers, and individual members of the salesforce can take to instill an ethical climate, as well as some of the possible outcomes.

Overall, the book accomplishes its goal of providing a comprehensive review of a variety of perspectives related to sales practice in the current settings. This collection of chapters includes summaries of previous research, empirical
research findings and practical cases making it a resource for both academics, students and practitioners who wish to develop more deeply into learning about sales.

This book would not have been possible without the effort and cooperation of several individuals. First, we want to thank the author teams who contributed the eight chapters you see here. Their insights and analyses are invaluable. Second, we also want to thank the reviewers who took the time to conduct a detailed review of this book and provided very useful and constructive suggestions. Without the selfless effort by all of those concerned, this book would not have been possible. Finally, we would like to thank Edward Elgar Publishing who planted the idea of this book in our mind nearly two years ago.