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## FROM “SELL-IN” TO “SELL-OUT”: THE EVOLUTION OF THE SALES REPRESENTATIVE TO BUSINESS CONSULTANT

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**Abstract:** Distribution channels have been undergoing transformations that highlight the limitations of the traditional *sell-in* sales model, centered on large negotiations with intermediaries. This model has lost effectiveness because it does not reflect the dynamics of final consumption. Given this context, the article analyzes the transition from *sell-in* to *sell-out* and its implications for the evolution of the sales representative and the repositioning of the distributor as a strategic partner of the retailer. The research is qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive, based on a literature review. The results indicate that *sell-out* and trade marketing favor integration, inventory turnover, and competitiveness in the channels.

**Keywords:** *Sell-in*; *Sell-out*; Trade Marketing; Sales representative; Distribution channels.

## INTRODUCTION

Distribution channels are undergoing significant transformations as a result of structural changes in contemporary markets, characterized by increased competition and greater consumer choice. As Almeida Filho *et al.* (2019, p. 2) point out, changes in retail have highlighted the need for new strategies, since “the retail customer is not simply a channel to reach the end consumer, but a potential consumer.” In this context, traditional sales models tend to adapt, at the risk that their actions do not guarantee sustainable performance throughout the chain.

The classic commercial model, based on the logic of *sell-in*, consolidated a practice in which representatives and distributors acted predominantly as “order takers,” focusing on quantitative goals. However, the

efficiency of a channel should not be measured only by the transaction, but by the integration and coordination of channels (MELLO *et al.*, 2022). Remaining exclusively in *sell-in* has generated significant distortions, such as stockouts. On this subject, Aguiar *et al.* (2014, p. 30) state that “one of the main problems faced by large retailers is related to stockouts on the shelves,” which directly affects the consumer experience.

Given these limitations, the *sell-out* approach has emerged, where performance is evaluated based on sales to the end consumer. Knowing how much the end customer is consuming through indicators means working with *sell-out*, which helps the company to know its customer and achieve strategic objectives (BESSANI; BAJAY, 2022, p. 2).

This change requires the sales representative to take on an advisory role. Patrício and Gonçalves (2018, p. 2) reinforce that organizations must provide training that promotes changes in habits, ensuring that the representative is not just an intermediary, but an agent of loyalty.

In this scenario, management shifts to the Point of Sale (POS) through Trade Marketing. As defined by Oliveira, Palmeira, and Alvarez (2021, p. 3) *apud* Alvarez (2008), “the role of retailers is to ensure that consumers find the products they are looking for.” Thus, the distributor is repositioned as a strategic partner, acting to integrate flows and support retail execution.

This article aims to analyze the transition from the *sell-in* to the *sell-out* model, discussing its implications for the evolution of the sales representative and the transformation of the distributor into a strategic partner. To this end, we adopt a critical

approach to the traditional model and propose an approach focused on point-of-sale management, inventory turnover, and trade marketing practices, in light of the scientific literature on marketing and distribution channels.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Understanding the transformations in sales models and the roles played by commercial agents requires a theoretical basis that articulates the concepts of *sell-in*, *sell-out*, market orientation, trade marketing, business-to-business (B2B) relationships, and collaboration in distribution channels.

Marketing literature shows that, in its early stages, the discipline was strongly production-oriented. This orientation supported the *sell-in* model, focused on moving production to the channel. In the context of organizational markets, this transactional logic was reinforced by volume-centered B2B relationships. Prieto and Carvalho (2005, p. 3) argue that, in B2B environments, the concept of CRM seeks to view market share by first analyzing each customer's share, as if it were their own market, something that the purely transactional logic of *sell-in* tends to neglect, favoring short-term relationships.

The limitations of this model become evident when analyzed in light of retail management. Aguiar *et al.* (2014, p. 39) demonstrate that coordination failures contribute to high levels of disruption, "it was possible to identify that 38.0% of the causes of disruptions are focused on the store, that is, the product is not available," which reinforces the criticism of the exclusive emphasis on *sell-in*, which ignores the pulse of final consumption. In this context, the concept of *sell-out* emerges as a central element. Bes-

sani and Bajay (2022, p. 1) define *sell-out* as a strategic tool, pointing out that "relying on *sell-out* consumption data encourages the organization to focus on the customer," which allows for greater precision in planning and reduces waste of resources.

The *sell-out* orientation shifts the strategic focus to the point of sale (POS), an environment in which Trade Marketing assumes relevance. Almeida Filho *et al.* (2019, p. 1) conceptualize Trade Marketing as a marketing strategy that seeks to improve "manufacturer/retailer/end customer relationships," treating retail as a potential customer that requires supply chain customization. In addition, category management (CM) is a vital tool. Santos and Pereira (2012, p. 10) state that CM aims to "increase sales and profitability through efforts to add greater value to the end consumer," treating categories as strategic business units.

The evolution of sales models directly impacts the role of the sales representative. Santos (2009, p. 46) demonstrates that the representative is the relational link between companies, and their contribution is vital "in building long-term relationships." This perspective supports the transition of the representative from transactional agent to business consultant, where trust and technical competence become differentiators. Furthermore, Pigatto and Alcantara (2007, p. 155) highlight that, in B2B and B2C relationships, the supplier can take responsibility for the layout of specific spaces at the point of sale, expanding their role beyond traditional logistical functions.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive research.

The choice of this approach is justified by the objective of understanding complex phenomena, such as the transition of sales models and the evolution of roles in the distribution chain.

The methodological procedure adopted consisted of a bibliographic review. Scientific articles, dissertations, and studies published in academic journals of relevance were selected, such as Revista de Administração Contemporânea (RAC), Gestão & Produção, Navus – Revista de Gestão e Tecnologia, Exacta, and Revista Ibero-Americana de Estratégia.

The analysis of bibliographic data followed an interpretative and comparative approach. Thus, the analysis was not limited to description, but sought a critical reflection on the effectiveness of cooperation strategies.

## DEVELOPMENT

Based on the theoretical foundations presented, this section analyzes the transition from the traditional sales model to a *sell-out-oriented* logic. It seeks to demonstrate how this transformation is expressed in point-of-sale management, in the performance of sales representatives, and in the repositioning of distributors as strategic partners of retailers.

### The transition from *sell-in* to *sell-out* and strategic trade marketing management

The traditional sales model was historically built on a production-oriented and transactional logic, in which the main objective of organizations was to sell their products through distribution channels. This

logic consolidated the operational activities of both distributors and sales representatives, focused on negotiating prices, terms, and volumes, favoring short-term and uncooperative relationships throughout the channel (PRIETO; CARVALHO, 2005, p. 2).

However, the excessive emphasis on *sell-in* began to generate significant imbalances in the supply chain, especially in retail. The research by Aguiar *et al.* (2014, p. 39) reveals that the unavailability of goods in Brazilian retail, due to the disruptions found in the research, is partly caused by the lack of *sell-out* management of the distribution chain to the final consumer. This indicator is critical, as it generates a direct loss in sales volume and deteriorates the target audience's perception of trust. These results highlight the limitations of a model focused exclusively on transferring products to the channel, without adequate consideration of actual consumption.

According to Bessani and Bajay (2022, p. 2), "using only the sales history—*sell-in*—known as quantitative demand forecasting, instead of the consumption history—*sell-out*—in the construction of the sales plan can mask the real demand." Therefore, overcoming these limitations has driven the adoption of models oriented toward actual consumption, synthesized in the concept of *sell-out*, aligned with market orientation. The authors demonstrate how *sell-out* analysis is a strategic sales planning tool, as it allows production, supply, and commercial actions to be aligned with the demand actually observed in the market. Under this logic, performance is evaluated by the ability to generate turnover at the point of sale, and not just by sales to intermediaries. In this sense, *sell-out-oriented* management proves

to be fundamental in addressing stockouts. The systematic use of *sell-out* data allows for greater predictability of demand and contributes to reducing these inefficiencies throughout the channel.

The consolidation of *sell-out* as a strategic reference therefore shifts the focus of commercial decisions to the point of sale (POS), where the consumer's purchase decision is made. In this context, Trade Marketing emerges as an integrative approach between companies of various sizes throughout the supply chain, with a focus on maximizing performance at the POS (ALMEIDA FILHO *et al.*, 2019, p. 3). This discipline operationalizes the *sell-out* orientation, articulating joint actions aimed at retail execution. According to Almeida Filho *et al.* (2019, p. 5), Trade Marketing involves the management of assortment, plans, as well as strategies, product display, promotional actions, and communication at the point of sale, always guided by indicators linked to actual consumption. Category management is one of its main instruments, treating categories as strategic business units and considering consumer behavior in the definition of commercial strategies, which involves "merchandising and marketing practices, aiming at consumer expectations" (SANTOS; PEREIRA, 2012, p. 10).

Oliveira, Palmeira, and Alvarez (2021, p. 3) reinforce that the application of Trade Marketing is not restricted to large organizations, but can also be adopted by small industries and distributors, provided there is strategic guidance and proximity to retail. Thus, Trade Marketing consolidates itself as essential between the logic of *sell-out* and strategic POS management, enabling the integration between the interests of the industry, the distributor, and the retailer.

## The evolution from sales representative to business consultant

The transition from *sell-in* to *sell-out* profoundly redefines the roles played by commercial agents in distribution channels. In this new context, sales representatives no longer act solely as order collectors and now take on a strategic role, focused on market data analysis and support for retailer business management, given that managers, who are distributed throughout the chain, do not have an accurate analysis of the chain's final consumption or whether future sales forecasts are consistent with consumption history (BESSANI; BAJAY, 2022, p. 2). This change reflects the need for greater alignment between sales, actual consumption, and point-of-sale performance.

This evolution is directly associated with the logic of long-term relationships in business-to-business (B2B) markets. Prieto and Carvalho (2005, p. 11-12) highlight that value creation in B2B environments depends on building relationships based on trust, commitment, and information exchange. In this sense, the sales representative acts as a relational link between companies, contributing to the coordination of industry and retail interests. The representative's advisory role gains relevance at the point of sale, especially in supporting the organization of the assortment, product display, and the execution of trade marketing actions.

Complementarily, the role of the distributor is also undergoing a significant transformation. Traditionally associated with logistics, distributors now assume a strategic position by integrating physical, informational, and relational flows in the distribution channel (PIGATTO; ALCÂNTARA, 2007, p. 155-157). This role increa-

ses their relevance in coordinating the channel and supporting retail performance.

Pigatto and Alcântara (2007, p. 156) argue that competitiveness in distribution channels increasingly depends on the development of collaborative relationships based on trust and alignment of objectives. Empirical studies corroborate this perspective, demonstrating that collaborative relationships between manufacturers, distributors, and retailers increase the competitive capacity of retail by favoring information sharing and joint decision-making (SIQUEIRA; SILVA; VIEIRA, 2016, p. 67; ALVES; TIERGARTEN, 2008, p. 101).

By supporting retailers in analyzing *sell-out* data, managing categories, and executing trade marketing actions, distributors consolidate their position as strategic partners, contributing directly to point-of-sale performance and business sustainability, thereby "delivering better results for the organization and a more solid and lasting relationship with retailers." (OLIVEIRA; PALMEIRA; ALVAREZ, 2021, p. 1).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis developed throughout this article shows that the transition from the traditional *sell-in-based* sales model to a *sell-out* orientation represents a profound structural change in contemporary distribution channels. This transformation is not limited to the replacement of performance indicators, but redefines the logic of value creation, shifting the focus from the volume traded with intermediaries to actual consumption and the satisfaction of the final consumer market (SAMPAIO; PERIN, 2006; BESSANI; BAJAY, 2022).

The evolution of the sales representative is one of the main developments of this paradigm shift. The literature shows that sales representatives no longer act as mere order collectors and now take on a advisory role, based on interaction and proximity, and long-term relationships, based on the analysis of *sell-out* data, POS management, and strategic support to retailers (SANTOS, 2009, p. 17; BESSANI; BAJAY, 2022). This strengthens long-term relationships in B2B markets, where trust, credibility, and information exchange are key to creating joint value (PRIETO; CARVALHO, 2005).

Complementarily, the distributor also undergoes a strategic repositioning. By integrating physical, informational, and relational flows, the distributor assumes the role of channel coordinator, promoting collaboration between manufacturers and retailers (PIGATTO; ALCANTARA, 2007). Empirical studies indicate that cooperation strategies and alliances increase systemic efficiency, reduce costs, and raise the level of service provided to retailers (SIQUEIRA; SILVA; VIEIRA, 2016; ALVES; TIERGARTEN, 2008).

Thus, it can be concluded that sustainable competitiveness in distribution channels depends on the adoption of a *sell-out* orientation, the strengthening of trade marketing practices, and the evolution of commercial agents toward strategic and collaborative roles. The managerial implications of the study indicate that organizations that invest in the consultative training of representatives and in strengthening the distributor as a strategic partner tend to achieve better results at points of sale and greater alignment with consumer market demands.

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