



# **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION:** *Buzzword or Biz Tool?*

By Cate Gutowski

# Digital transformation is the hot topic for business these days. For good reason: no industry is immune to it.

So why is the business world so slow in implementing this necessary transformation? Why is practical, business-to-business digital transformation so elusive?

For one thing, it's not just a matter of technology. In fact, much of the technology that can dramatically transform our processes exists today. No, digital transformation is, at its core, *human* transformation. Organization-wide adoption requires a culture shift. It means we have to change our mindsets, shift our thinking, reject the status quo and, often, shake up the culture.

And, let's face it—it's not easy. It's hard. Really hard. And that's why we are proud of our announcement earlier this month. We are currently leading the largest digital transformation of any sales force globally. It's real, and we're putting it into practice. In fact, in eight short months, a horizontal team spanning 13 different business units and functions was able to take our digital transformation vision—the theoretical—and move it firmly into the first phase of a working, *practical* set of new, digital products that are already making our global sales teams more effective.

In a slow-growth world, one of the top concerns of every business leader is sales force productivity: *How do I get more from my sales team?*

Here's what we are working on to drive more productivity:

## 1. *First, you need rocket fuel.*

We've said it before, and it bears repeating here: *Data is the rocket fuel of sales.* And for fuel to be truly effective, it needs to be free from impurities. Thus, our first step was creating a set of minimum standards for our customer data. Sounds basic, but we didn't have it. GE is, after all, a 125-year-old company with diverse businesses, hundreds of thousands of customers, more than 40 instances of a CRM system, and 25,000 global sellers who all need to rapidly access the information. Needless to say, our database had its share of impurities.

Mobilizing 100 people to clean up customer data across all business units was a herculean task, but, lucky for us, we had someone to learn from. Our work was made easier by the fact that we already had one business, GE Oil & Gas, that had a visionary Commercial leader, Maria Borrás, who understood that data is the new oil for sales. She and her team implemented this strategy, and they have benefitted significantly from the results. Maria and her team became our trusted advisors and helped us to understand how to run the playbook to make this work for the company.

Thanks to strong leadership support and an incredible collaboration with leaders representing Sales, Digital Technology (IT), Commercial Excellence and Marketing, we were able to implement a new customer data structure that took our nearly *two and a half million* disparate customer accounts and put them into 350,000 clean commercial entity structures. *We cleansed our database of more than 99 percent of the impurities.* Rocket fuel, indeed.

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of sales.**

Was it smooth and seamless? Of course not. It was messy, heated and, at times, chaotic. But, it was also an energizing and inspiring entrepreneurial challenge, where our small and consistent failures were actually the fuel that enabled our successes. This, coupled with moments of inspiration from sales leaders like Colleen Collins, who helped us see that with clean data, we can achieve exponential growth, we found a new sense of shared purpose that provided us with the inspiration to persevere.

## 2. Next, we launched the Future of Sales.

After we laid the foundation with clean customer data, we activated what we call the Commercial digitalTHREAD. It's a *connected digital ecosystem* that was built to help our sales organization drive growth, speed and productivity.

We're not too bold calling this the Future of Sales. Because until now, most sales professionals could only spend about *a third of their time actually selling*. The other two-thirds had to be reserved for administrative tasks. *We believe that's just not acceptable; that's not what a sales force of a digital industrial looks like.*

**Our sales teams will be able to spend more of their time doing what they're really good at.**

The Commercial digitalTHREAD—and the future products it will allow us to build—will flip those numbers. Our goal is to enable our sales force to spend only one-third of their time on administrative tasks, and *two-thirds of their time actually selling*. Our sales teams will be able to spend more of their time doing what they're really good at (like collaboratively solving customer challenges) and less of their time with the tasks that just slow them down.

With a clean data foundation and the Commercial digitalTHREAD ecosystem, we can now build products that turn our sales teams into sales astronauts (to keep with the rocket fuel analogy).

## 3. Built by Sales, for Sales.

When I took on this role, I was passionate that in order to be successful, I knew we needed a product management strategy to execute and deliver on our sales transformation. We've been using product management tools, methodologies, and mindsets to develop our strategy and digital product roadmaps. And, what do the best product managers in the world do? They listen to their customers and they anticipate their future needs.

That's why, in determining what products to launch within the Commercial digitalTHREAD, we decided to utilize GE's own crowdsourcing solution, GENIUSLINK, to help us collect ideas from more than 25,000 GE sales professionals across the globe. After all, nobody knows what Sales needs better than Sales—and in my heart, I'm a salesperson. I joked with my team that we just won't be able to implement anything that I would not use.

The top two needs that surfaced: 1) a product that could tell them who else within the organization is calling on their customer, and 2) a product that could save them time in their daily tasks. (As mentioned above, nobody in sales likes the current selling vs. nonselling ratios.)

So for Phase I, we gave our team exactly what they asked for: *GE Insights* and *GE Connect*. Two incredible products that were built *by Sales, for Sales*.

**GE Insights** is our first horizontal (company-wide) digital product for the GE sales teams, which was built on the solid company-wide customer data foundation. It enables our sales teams to quickly locate and identify key sales colleagues across various GE businesses who have a relationship with a specific customer or prospect. This is a task that, according to the field sales teams, would typically take about three weeks on average of sending phone calls and emails—if they were persistent. Yikes. Now, with a clean customer data foundation and working digital ecosystem, *this same task will take only seconds*.

*Why should our customers care?* Our customers should care because they've told us before that we could be more organized, more connected, and more responsive to their needs. We can now service them better, faster, and more in line with the kinds of instant, on-demand experiences they're used to in the consumer world.

**GE Connect** integrates the two most commonly used systems, Outlook and Salesforce.com, into one easy-to-use system. No more wasting time toggling between two systems. No more manual data entry. No more typing and retyping contacts.

Everything is connected, and we estimate that sales teams will save three hours per week on average.

*Why should our customers care?* We know that the needs of our customers are changing. We know that our customers are demanding that we deliver more value, more data, and more insights about how we can help them solve their business challenges. We are committed to continuing to eliminate the time the sales force spends on non-value-added administrative tasks so they can, in turn, spend more time with our customers.

## What's next?



We live in a slow-growth world. So our agility and adaptability need to speed up significantly. Now that the Commercial digitalTHREAD has been activated, we have a launch pad for building new sales technologies that align with our three pillars: What might those products look like? Our Commercial digitalTHREAD team is currently working on new, digital products to reduce the time spent on manual reports, and enable a world of data 24x7. We will simplify sales forecasting, and even enable Sales to have their own digital assistants, i.e., an “Alexa” for GE sales teams through artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and machine learning.

**As we focus our efforts on enabling sales transformation, it's important to keep in mind that Digital Transformation is not just about *being* digital. It's about *using* digital to make our jobs simpler, do them faster, and serve our customers better than we could before.**

We are truly transforming the sales experience. And we believe that when we transform the sales experience, we can empower our sales teams to transform the customer experience.

And, the best part? We're just getting started.



Cate Gutowski, vice president, GE Commercial & digitalTHREAD, leads the company's effort to transform how GE's global sales force utilizes technology to drive customer success across all GE businesses. In this role, she guides teams that are innovating new technologies in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and predictive analytics to drive productivity and enhance the customer experience. She also leads GE's global leadership through storytelling initiative, “If You Can See It, You Can Be It.” Previously, Gutowski held corporate general manager and operational leadership roles for a variety of GE businesses in the United States and Europe.