

"The New Power Base Selling will take its place on the required reading list at my company."

—Bill McDermott, Co-CEO, SAP

# THE NEW POWER BASE SELLING

LESSONS FROM 28,000 SELLERS AND 50,000 DEALS

*Master the Politics,  
Create Unexpected Value  
and Higher Margins, and  
Outsmart the Competition*

JIM HOLDEN  
& RYAN KUBACKI

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## Praise for *The New Power Base Selling*

“To be successful in sales, it takes 10 percent inspiration and luck with 90 percent smart work and discipline. *Power Base Selling* has been the most pragmatic and effective guide for many years in my career in professional services. With the new edition, Jim and Ryan are not only sharpening a proven methodology but also adding an essential element in an ever more competitive environment, namely Unexpected Value. This is fundamental to differentiate and defend margins.”

—**Patrick Nicolet** CEO Infrastructure Services, Member of the Group Executive Committee, Capgemini

“*The New Power Base Selling* provides salespeople, sales leaders, and chief executives with the knowledge to make the right investment decisions regarding sales opportunities. The methodologies described in this book take the guesswork out of assessing the quality of your sales pipeline and ultimately enable executives to lead a more intelligent sales engine. Intergraph has long been recognized as a leader in protecting lives and property through its software. After implementing the Holden method, sales excellence also became a core competency of Intergraph in just 24 months.”

—**Bill Campbell** Senior Vice President, Americas, Intergraph Corporation

“Holden and Kubacki have elevated sales to a scientific process that enables sellers to provide exceptional value to their customers. In my 31 years of selling, this is the first definitive work on how to leverage the intangibles of

politics, value, and strategy to boost win rates. It's a master's program in sales superiority!"

—**Lou Ebling** Global Account Executive, Oracle

"It's time to retire the 'Glengarry leads' mentality of sales effectiveness and take an objective, academic look at the science of selling. Holden and Kubacki deliver a provocative and thoughtful message that up-levels the sales profession to its rightful place in the corporate value chain."

—**Peter Ostrow** Vice President & Research Group Director,  
Customer Management, Sales Effectiveness, Aberdeen  
Group

"*The New Power Base Selling* presents sales as a management science, analogous to the principles of military special operations and counterterrorism, for developing repeatable strategies to defeat competition. In this latest book from the Fox people, Holden and Kubacki identify the doctrine and practices for leveraging political insight, creating unexpected client value, and formulating highly effective strategies to quickly achieve relative superiority and obtain a decisive advantage in any sales environment. They have successfully brought Sun Tzu into the twenty-first century!"

—**Kevin Nowak** Senior Adviser under contract to the US  
Department of Energy, Office of Security and Cyber  
Evaluations

"I've been a Holden disciple for a number of years, having found the processes and insights invaluable in helping me to understand how to win in an increasingly complex and crowded marketplace.

"In their book *The New Power Base Selling*, Jim Holden and Ryan Kubacki build upon their time-tested and revolutionary classic, turning the art of selling into a science. Jim and Ryan demonstrate a repeatable, scalable

process that will enable any sales force to increase the value of what they sell by establishing sales superiority. Their book details how to leverage the new dynamics of social media and globalization, as well as how to differentiate in the current economic environment.

“Holden and Kubacki’s understanding of sales strategies, along with the proper balance between customer and competitive positioning, provides a must-read and a must-implement for any sales professional.

“*The New Power Base Selling* demystifies the selling environment, helping a salesperson to understand how to balance product, political, cultural, and business concerns to provide Unexpected Value to their clients.”

—**Woody Sessoms** Senior Vice President, Global Enterprise Theatre, Cisco Systems

“This is a book that I couldn’t put down. I was spellbound by the new ideas presented and the concepts of Political Advantage, Value Creation, and Compete Strategy. Sellers must advance from information providers to Customer Advisors, and Holden and Kubacki tell us exactly how to do it using language and examples that are both engaging and compelling. Every organization needs to read *The New Power Base Selling* if they want to outfox the competition. It is beautifully written and information-packed.”

—**Rosemarie Mitchell** CEO, ABS Associates, Inc.

“Holden and Kubacki unveil the science of selling. They show how sophisticated business development can itself create Unexpected Value for clients, drive loyalty, and produce competitive market share.”

—**Clark Dean** Corporate real estate consultant

“*The New Power Base Selling* is an invaluable tool for anyone looking to achieve the ultimate competitive advantage. The visible and invisible sales tools drilled

down on in this book apply to any industry—politics included—and for any individual facing a competitive battle. The book’s insights guided my successful and hugely underdog 2010 campaign for US Congress and continue to assist me in the competitive world of Washington, DC.”

—**Joe Walsh** Congressman, 8th District of Illinois in the US  
House of Representatives

“A must-read for selling in today’s economy and hypercompetitive marketplace. *The New Power Base Selling* will help ensure value-driven sales rather than price-driven lower-quality business. Jim and Ryan have created an MBA program for selling where all sales professionals can advance to Stage IV Customer Advisors, providing Unexpected Value to customers while driving up win rates.”

—**Garth Carter** Vice President, State and Local  
Government/Education, CIBER, Inc.

“This update to the original thinking of *Power Base Selling* is required reading for every sales professional, whether early in their careers or experienced executives. The key today is relevance and success in an increasingly competitive and complex selling environment. The transition from a product and relationship orientation to a model of political alignment, Value Creation, and Competitive Differentiation yields more wins, trusted advisor status with customers, and larger commission payouts.”

—**Geoff Nyheim** Vice President, Cloud Services Sales,  
Microsoft

“Holden and Kubacki masterfully define the many influence factors that drive sales in today’s complex organizations. They know what separates super-

salespeople from mere account reps, and after reading this book, so will you.”

—**Paul Gillin** Author of *The New Influencers*, *Secrets of Social Media Marketing*, and *Social Marketing to the Business Customer*

“In 1999, when I was running sales for Sprint, we deployed Holden Power Base Selling and we proceeded to win 13 strategic accounts over the next 13 months. My next opportunity to deploy Holden principles came 10 years later at International Game Technology, and we are back again as a dominant force in the marketplace. Jim Holden and Ryan Kubacki, in *The New Power Base Selling*, have captured the essence of selling strategically and describe how to effectively navigate in our complex and competitive environments. We will continue to add to their accumulating 50,000 deals . . . and counting!”

—**Eric Tom** Executive Vice President, North American Sales and Global Service, International Game Technology

“*The New Power Base Selling* is a must-read for anyone looking to create a Customer Advisor sales organization whereby you are looking to increase your deal size, provide value differentiation, and help your customers solve their business problems. The result is a win-win for your company and your customer—that is true value.”

—**Dave Furtado** Global Vice President of Sales, Ascom Network Testing

“Although the approach to maximizing selling skills is changing dramatically based on advancements and opportunities in technology, the fundamentals of *Power Base Selling* introduced by Jim Holden more than 20 years ago are still exceedingly relevant. Along with Ryan Kubacki, Jim has updated, modernized, and refreshed the application of understanding politics, creating value, and defeating the competition for this generation of sellers

and many to follow. How we access the Fox may be changing, but the dynamics of why sales are made can be enhanced by driving the *Power Base Selling* model across the enterprise.”

—**Jill Billhorn** Vice President Small Business, CDW Corporation

“A comprehensive A-Z book showing simple, yet powerful, concepts on how selling has changed in today’s fast-moving environment. Great not only for salespeople but also for executives to better understand their own sales team and those of competitors.”

—**Doug Lee** CFO, Peerless Networks

“In my experience, the best salespeople will embrace the ideas, practices, and methodologies outlined in *The New Power Base Selling*. The content of this book is fundamental to the success of the modern sales professional.”

—**Chris Michalak** Client and Accounts Leader, Aon Hewitt

“This book enables salespeople to develop a Fox-inspired strategy to create a path through the minefields of corporate politics, up the slippery slopes of influence, and into the gilded halls of power. It will help business-to-business (B2B) salespeople outfox their competition and rake in millions of dollars in new sales.”

—**Gerhard Gschwandtner** Owner, Selling Power

“As an executive coach and trainer for more than 30 years, I see this book as the holy grail of real selling. It outlines what everyone in a Power Base knows and understands. If you face any politics in sales (who doesn’t?), you must read this book.”

—**Bailey Allard** President, Allard Associates, Inc.

“I found *The New Power Base Selling* to be a great enhancement to the previous selling concepts discussed

in the original *Power Base Selling* (PBS) version . . . kind of an Advanced PBS or PBS 201 structure. Many of the concepts discuss selling from a customer's point of view, along with the mandate to offer not only product but differentiated and Unexpected Value to your customer. This is essential in today's environment. The continual focus on all aspects of your customer's business—politics, competition, value chain, business environment—are crucial for success. I also love the introduction of using social media as an effective sales tool in the selling process. This is a playbook that I would recommend to any sales organization struggling to compete in today's competitive environment."

—**Greg Baur** Director of Sales, Intel Americas

"As an investor in the venture capital/private equity space who focuses on investing in high-growth founder-owned businesses, I spend a significant amount of my time in the process of selling: selling the value-add of our firm to founders when we are trying to win the deal, helping our portfolio companies sell themselves to potential hires, and helping portfolio companies close complicated enterprise sales. Yet business schools typically spend very little time on the topic of selling strategy. With *The New Power Base Selling*, Holden and Kubacki provide an advanced MBA of selling to drive significant enterprise value."

—**Brian Shortsleeve** General Catalyst Partners

"For the sales that matter—and every targeted sale matters—this approach provides the safety net to allow you to answer the question 'Have I done everything I can to prepare for this close?' with a resounding 'Yes!' So many companies have focused on cutting costs for so many years that they have forgotten the skills necessary to create value for customers."

—**Jim Dyke** Corporate Vice President, Sales and Marketing,  
Psychemedics Corporation

“I meet hundreds of entrepreneurs each year, and only a tiny fraction recognizes sales as a science. The start-ups that understand how to sell have a huge advantage when it comes to building a new and successful business.”

—**Chris Yeh** Angel investor

“I have leveraged this approach across multiple companies and have found that the principles hold true for seasoned sellers, as well as those just starting out. But, independent of experience, the only way for sellers to remain relevant with customers and partners is to demonstrate that they understand their business and politics while providing Unexpected Value. This book provides the road map to succeed across all of these areas.”

—**Nancy Stickney** Vice President of Sales, Hyland Software

“Whether lawyers are involved in developing business, negotiating settlements, arguing a case in court, or simply explaining their billable rates, we are always selling. Before any lawyer signs up for another continuing legal education (CLE) course, before any law student graduates from law school, and before any partner talks to another client, they should read this book!”

—**Jim McCarthy** Partner, McDonnell Boehnen Hulbert and Berghoff, LLP

“In making a deal, we can easily misunderstand what our customers truly value—at the cost of the contract. Holden International has made a business out of teaching others how not to make that error. *The New Power Base Selling* explains how we can learn the key human elements to deal-making. I found this book understandable and engaging and know that the principles put forth can lead to success.”

—**Rear Admiral David R. Oliver Jr. (Ret.)** Strategic Advisor, EADS North America, and author of *Lead On* and

## *Making It in Washington*

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Outsmart the Competition*

Jim Holden  
Ryan Kubacki



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*This book is dedicated to the executives, sales managers, and sellers who are leading the charge in transitioning sales to that of a management science, one that can be defined, understood, and measured. As such, the days of viewing sales as an art—a way of explaining what has not been understood—are coming to an end. This means:*

- *The elevation of the sales profession*
- *The ability to dramatically accelerate the development of sellers*
- *Enhanced hiring of sellers with defined and measurable sales competencies*
- *Stronger sales management coaching*
- *The true ability to align Sales with Marketing, Human Resources (HR), and Finance*

*All of this means higher win rates, with better margins and higher customer satisfaction, particularly at the customer executive levels. It is our hope that this book, along with the help of these progressive sellers, managers, and executives, will create definitive change in moving sales to a management science—literally becoming an inflection point in the sales profession.*

*But our dedication doesn't stop there. In the world of competition, there is no more intense competitive environment than that of military operations. This is an area where the transition to that of a management science has been critical, particularly in Special Operations, where a small force takes on a much larger, often better-equipped, enemy force. Drawing corollaries from this domain to sales has been very helpful in our management science efforts. In that process, we continue to develop a deeper and even more profound appreciation for the remarkable men and women of our military who put themselves in harm's way to protect the freedom and liberty of our nation.*

*As an expression of appreciation, Holden International will donate 15 percent of The New Power Base Selling royalties*

*to the Wounded Warrior Project.*

# Foreword

The nature of sales has changed dramatically since the hugely successful *Power Base Selling: Secrets of an Ivy League Street Fighter* first appeared in 1990. The era of Internet-powered globalization, along with a recent recession, has made buyers more discerning and demanding than ever.

And yet, the fundamentals still apply. Large-scale corporate sales still require preparation, persistence, and a deep understanding of the customer. And they still involve real human beings, with all their brilliance and flaws.

In *The New Power Base Selling*, the sales world now has an updated guide that takes into account the timeless realities of human nature—as well as the contemporary tools that can empower a sales team to capitalize on that nature.

Through their hands-on research into thousands of sellers and competitive deals, Jim Holden and Ryan Kubacki demonstrate the importance of mastering the intangibles: the internal politics and individual motivations that invisibly—and inevitably—shape every transaction.

At a time when products and services are often at relative parity, these intangibles can be the primary differentiator in the success of a sale. But mastering them requires more than simple alertness; it requires a discipline that borders on the scientific.

In that regard, *The New Power Base Selling* represents an important advance for the profession of selling. It applies logic and metrics to the complex relationships that determine the outcome of a considered purchase. Then it goes where its predecessor couldn't go, by demonstrating how to harness social media and other online resources to gather intelligence on both buyers and competitors.

These lessons are especially relevant within the ever-changing software industry, where today's influencer is tomorrow's authority. But they apply to any industry in which the key to success is not only knowing one's customer but also deeply understanding that customer's business value, political value, and cultural value.

Through its unique perspectives and practical techniques, *The New Power Base Selling* will take its place on the required reading list at my company, SAP. I expect it will at yours, too.

May the best Stage IV Customer Advisors win!

**—Bill McDermott**

Co-CEO

Member of the Executive Board

SAP AG

Newtown Square, Pennsylvania

# Acknowledgments

## Jim Holden

At the genesis of this new book project we knew that it would become the core of our firm's marketing efforts, but what we did not recognize was that it would soon become the epicenter of the firm and all that it stands for in helping sellers become more successful. And behind all of that and everything that has gone before it, taking us to where we are today, stands one person who has been my strength and inspiration for the past 38 years: my wife and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the firm, Chris Dalghren Holden. Without her, this book would not have been possible!

## Ryan Kubacki

First, I would like to thank Jim and Chris Holden for their generous mentorship and loving friendship. Working on this project under Jim's coaching has been among the most profound experiences of my life. I am grateful. Second, I am proud to work with our team at Holden International, whose talent and dedication apply this important research to improve our clients' businesses every day. In particular, Matt Martin and Paul Dillon made valuable contributions to this book. Most important, thank you to my wife and Marketing Director of our firm, Jana Meader Kubacki. Her contributions in research, data analysis, and editing deepened the insight and accelerated the availability of this project. More significantly, her love, friendship, and sense of humor make our life journey meaningful, exciting, and fun.

# **PART 1**

## **SALES AS A MANAGEMENT SCIENCE**

# CHAPTER 1

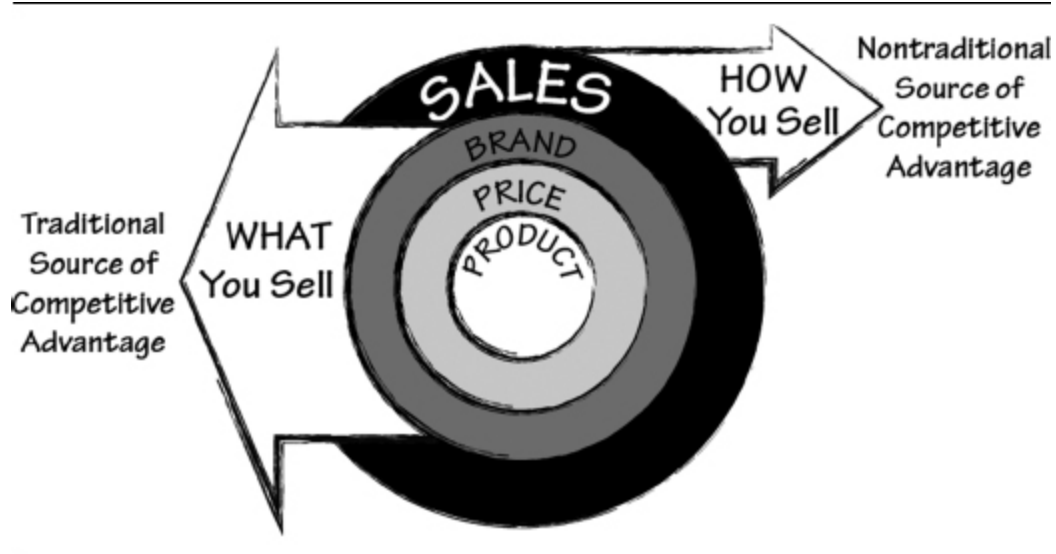
## Seeing the Invisible

*It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.*

—often attributed to Charles Darwin  
“Know this about yourself: there is only one reason professional salespeople lose orders. They are **OUTSOLD**,” began our first book, *Power Base Selling*, in 1990. Assessing over 28,000 sellers and coaching more than 50,000 competitive deals since then affirms that the best sellers are politically astute, driven to provide significant value to customers, and strategically competitive, as a matter of habit.

The best sellers win because *how* they sell increases the value of *what* they sell. In fact, how they sell adds value for their customers and for their own company, beyond the value inherent in their company’s product, price, and brand, as shown in [Figure 1.1](#). Even without product superiority or price parity, the best sellers outsell their competition *and* please their customers. They are a source of competitive advantage for their company and are compensated accordingly. And you can be, too!

**[Figure 1.1:](#) Maximizing Sources of Competitive Advantage**



Most sellers do not gain clarity about their customers' informal political structure—the *Power Base*—that really makes an organization run. At the same time, they focus on *only* their customer and do not *engage their competition*. Without insight into politics and competitors, it is almost impossible to get a sense of the larger issues that will determine your ability to improve your customer's business, deepen loyalty, and win deals.

Let's look at a practical example. Meet Amy. She was selling an online software solution to a large retail customer. When she previously sold to this customer, the Information Technology (IT) team made most of the decisions. In this current sales situation, she believed that she would close the deal because the IT team had confirmed that her product was the most innovative, it best matched their buying criteria, and she knew the IT organization chart inside and out. The Chief Information Officer (CIO), with whom she had met, appeared to be supportive. In addition, she linked her product's value to business impact for the customer. Specifically, she made the case to the IT Department that her solution would facilitate more efficient communication among the customer's supply chain. This, in turn, would enable her customer to stock lower-priced

products on its store shelves much faster. Amy correctly identified this as an important business issue for the customer during a prolonged economic slowdown.

Confidently, Amy informed her manager of the probable win and began to think about how she would spend her commission check. Then, something started not to feel right. The customer had not given her the official order, and her contacts in the IT Department were not returning her emails or calls. After several weeks, the customer informed her that they “went in a different direction.” Amy was caught off guard. Her product was the best in the market. She established business value and developed a good relationship with the customer, who made it clear that things were looking good for her. She dreaded telling her manager, who had already forecasted the business as a win to upper management.

Have you ever been in Amy’s shoes? What happened? What didn’t she see? To find out, let’s meet Sara, who is the Account Manager for Amy’s competitor, calling on the same customer. Like Amy, Sara sells for a technology company and met with the customer’s IT team. Sara also positioned the business value of getting lower-priced products on the customer’s shelves quicker. However, *Sara saw three things that Amy did not.*

**1. Sara studied the politics of the customer organization, seeing how authority *and* influence flowed.** She identified that there had recently been management changes at the customer organization. An IT governance committee had been created to evaluate all IT decisions. This group consisted of company leaders from the Business, Finance, and Legal Departments. Sara recognized that this was something new. *A new type of Power Base* had formed. Its influence would likely assert itself over the IT team’s authority. Sara utilized social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook to gain as

much insight as she could on the new players and identified patterns and connections in their past. She met with several of them and asked thoughtful questions, made observations, and tried to confirm hypotheses she had formed regarding the new flow of influence.

While listening to the customer's quarterly earnings call, Sara became aware that the customer's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) had launched a new initiative, called Supply Chain Leadership, that focused on building relationships with more financially stable suppliers to reduce costly and disruptive supplier turnover. Sara also knew that the customer's Chief Legal Counsel was focused on data privacy issues.

Furthermore, through the course of her meetings, Sara observed that political conflict was taking place between the customer CIO and CFO. The CFO wanted IT to be more accountable to company initiatives, while the CIO sought independence. Sara noticed that the CIO's influence seemed to be waning among his own team, while the CFO was a proven company leader.

**2. Sara provided the customer with Unexpected Value in addition to meeting the customer's stated needs.** Working with an IT Director, Sara produced a quantified expression of value that reflected a product solution that was 90 percent as capable as the alternative. Still, this solution represented *expected value* to the customer. Sara needed more. To provide *unexpected customer value*, not only did she stress compliance with the new initiative, but, focusing on the financial strength of her company, she also stressed the clear data privacy policies that the CFO could announce as an early example of his new initiative.

**3. Sara assessed her competition and formulated a sales strategy.** She analyzed who Amy was calling in

the account and what type of value Amy was proposing. After firsthand evaluation, Sara concluded that the product Amy was proposing had superior capability. However, Amy's company's unclear financial health and unproven data privacy policies represented potential vulnerability.

Armed with her political and competitive insight, Sara formulated a sales strategy and partnered with an IT Director to approach the CFO, shifting the decision focus from *only* the stated buying criteria defined by the IT Department to *also include* the ability to fulfill the broader organizational needs as defined by the CFO and Chief Legal Counsel.

At the end of the day, Sara outsold Amy and better served her customer by seeing the three intangibles: politics, Unexpected Value, and strategy.

## Selling Skills Are Not Enough

It's fairly common knowledge that you must master certain skills to succeed in sales. Abilities such as prospecting, asking good questions, structuring a sales call, building a business case for your product, and establishing rapport with a customer, to name just a few, are essential. However, a majority of the techniques that dominate today's notion of selling help sellers in only one dimension of their efforts: establishing the relationship between seller and buyer. Focusing solely on a prospective buyer assumes that there is only one thing between you and getting the order—the customer. It produces a distorted vision of what selling is all about, and it blinds you to the real threat—the competition.

Think about it this way: as much as you want the customer's business, so does someone else. But typical sales campaigns don't make provisions for competitive