CISCO Employee Connection (JS)
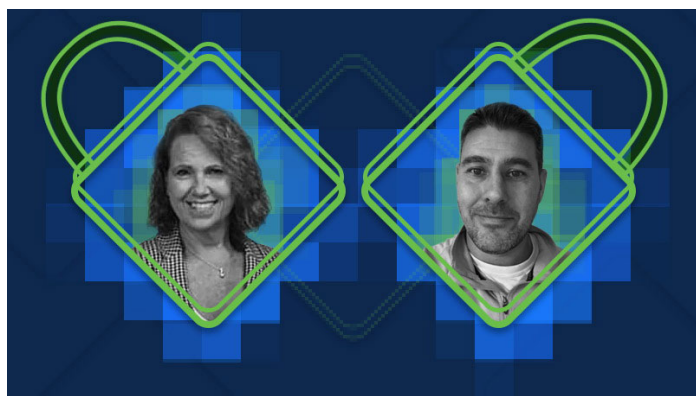
MENU   OneSearch / Directory

Global Employee Headlines /

What It's Like to Sell Security Today
(5)   (9)

Published Apr 28, 2021

By Majka Klemmer and Jerry Soverinsky

COVID-19 lockdowns created quite the paradox for our Cybersecurity Sales Specialist Pam Fletcher and Technical Solutions Architect Ed McNicholas.

Cybersecurity Sales Specialist Pam Fletcher and Technical Solutions Architect Ed McNicholas.

On one hand, the sales environment became more challenging. No more in-person customer visits or large-scale events where customers could learn more about new solutions.

On the other hand, bad actors capitalized on the pandemic, leading to a global proliferation of new cybercrimes. Customers also needed to secure morethan ever before, like protecting employees working remotely.

All of which has spelled a continued rise in demand for cybersecurity products — a bright note in a chaotic year for sales veterans Pam and Ed.

The cyber setting

Over the past few years, a surge of anti-malware competitors has entered the marketplace, cluttering the space with an alphabet soup of acronyms: EDR (Endpoint Detection Response), MDR (Managed Detection and Response), XDR (Extended Detection and Response), among many others.

The line between objective functionality and creative self-promotion has blurred, confusing an overwhelmed group of end users.

Pam says many customers think they understand their needs, but don't even understand their existing capabilities and operational challenges. She has to slow her customers down.

"There's a lot of peeling back that onion and being very clear about what they need, what they already have, and what they want," she notes.

Meanwhile, the tech discussion can frequently veer into the proverbial weeds, overwhelming customers further.

Ed agrees. He applauds Cisco's transparent and direct approach to selling cybersecurity products.

"We've taken strides to clean up the process and make it easier, while some of our competitors continue to rely on the promotions and find success with far inferior products."

Cutting through the virtual clutter

Breaking down the complexity for customers is challenging, to say the least. It requires a steady cadence of interactions to foster engagement and sales — all elements of a personal visit.

Pam and Ed had to transform the way they've done business over the past year.

"So many of our selling motions involve the personal relationship with the customer," Pam says. "When we're virtual, we don't get all of those signals that are important to go off of, which we can use to get our customers to engage."

For Ed, that dynamic has led to out-of-the-box tactics to help him cut through the virtual clutter that his prospects receive. "I started shipping them lunch," he says. "It's been different."

Obstacle course

Whether in person or on Webex, Pam and Ed still approach selling cybersecurity products by focusing on their customers' primary challenge — managing risk.
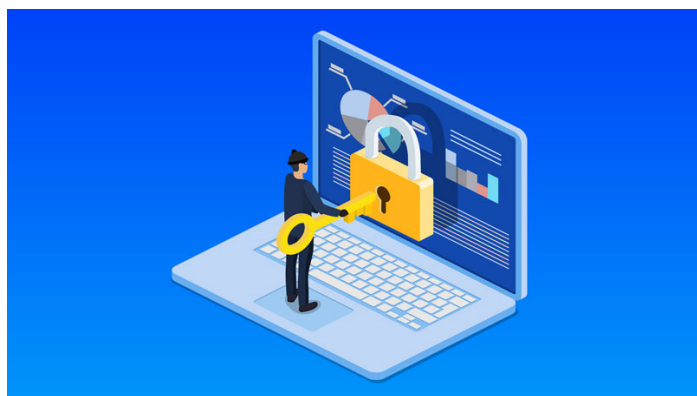
"Everyone wants to avoid the breach," Pam says. "At the same time, they need to keep up with their projects and accomplish things from their unique business perspective. And of course, they always want to save money."

Those challenges have intensified now that the connected "perimeter" of most companies has expanded, Ed says. "They're being forced to understand that everyone is not behind the same four walls, and you can't protect them that way anymore."

The differentiator

In most cases, talk turns to Cisco's SecureX, the advanced cybersecurity platform that has made steady growth in the marketplace.

More than 6,300 organizations have adopted SecureX globally to simplify their security approach and achieve business outcomes. Customers like University of North Carolina at Charlotte notice their IT staff could be four times more productive after deploying SecureX to automate routine tasks.

"My customers love it," Pam says, who was involved with positioning strategy before the product's launch. "Even if a customer doesn't use all of our products, there's tremendous value. We need to continue to drive home that message … SecureX is our differentiator."

"The biggest thing for our clients with SecureX is that it integrates with third parties, not just Cisco security," Ed says. "That's a huge benefit for us. The customer doesn't feel like they have to buy these disparate things to secure their environment. This brings everything together in one platform."

COVID-19 has accelerated SecureX's growth, with companies slowly understanding that their dispersed workforce includes myriad endpoints that require superior protection, monitoring, and maintenance.

"People are in need of security today more than ever," Pam says. "It's a hot market, and the cybercriminals outnumber the good guys."

Plus, no matter where customers are in their modernization efforts — on-premise, cloud, or a hybrid approach — Cisco can assist them. "We have ways to help them no matter what phase they're in," Pam says.

Cisco's holistic approach to cybersecurity energizes Pam and Ed, who consider their roles less about selling products than selling strategy.

It also helps that Cisco incorporates a collaborative approach across the organization, which provides Pam and Ed with ongoing support.

"Every day, I work with an architecture group," Ed says. "And there are also people from enterprise networking and data center. They help create different types of bundles to make our customers happy."

Doing the hardest thing best

While selling cybersecurity products is a distinct sales niche, it's the high-level aspects fueling Pam and Ed's passion for success.

"I'm in sales because I like working with customers and helping them solve problems," Pam says. "If you're going to do this just for the money, you're not going to be very happy because you're just going to be chasing the dollar the whole time."

Ed nods enthusiastically. "It's that, and my management team is unbelievable. I have great bosses who also have great bosses." He pauses, and his eyes widen.

"Plus, cybersecurity is the hardest [solution to sell]," he says. "If somebody has got to do the hard thing, I want to do it.

"And I want to do it the best."

Stay tuned for more security topics next month when we cover the RSA conference.

Related links

- Radically Simple Security (Cisco Live 2021 session with Gee Rittenhouse)

- SASE, Network as a Service, and Your Onramp to the Cloud (Cisco Live 2021 session with James Mobley and Gee Rittenhouse)

- Explore the newly-redesigned Cisco SecureX website (customers experience a customized page)

- Cisco Security Outcomes Study: Small and Midsize Business Edition

- Check out upcoming Security virtual events

Beating them at their own game

While most of our competitors sell piecemeal offerings that lack the advantages of our platform-based approach, there's still strong marketplace competition.

"One competitor has been taking their existing enterprise agreements and expanding them into the security suite," Pam says. "And with their enormous customer base and multiple products across different suites … they are my biggest competitor now."

Ed agrees, though he said once customers gain a better understanding of capabilities, the dynamic changes. "A lot of customers are coming to us or coming back to us saying, 'This competitor is doing a good job but not good enough job. And we need to do this again right.'"

More pressing is the work of some competitors in the cloud security space, which Ed says has developed a strong following. "But even with their Secure Internet Gateway, cloud security, and cloud proxying, with our new umbrella platform and our SASE, we really have a way to compete with them and even blow past them within the next couple of months."

This story was featured on the CEC global homepage — make it your homepage.

(9)

Share your Comments on this news article.

Comment on this news article.

(Rate this document)   Clear All   Submit

Average Customer Reviews

(Average of 9 ratings)

Joseph Buchanan

Nice way to bring all of the areas needing to be secured together!

Thu Apr 29 2021 13:40:38 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

Ashela Webb

SecureX is definitely an advantage, smart positioning by Pam and Ed!

Wed Apr 28 2021 16:29:36 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

Maamoon Kassem

Love the strategic selling approach by Pam and Ed. Selling the Security Architecture Strategy is how we win! Product feature knife-fights have mixed results and often leave you bloody!

Wed Apr 28 2021 14:07:16 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

Page Information   Help and Publishing   Submit Feedback   Data Protection Policy

Make CEC Your Homepage