

IBM CSP Growth Initiative 2.0 Playbook #4

*“HOW to reach your target AI customers and
the evolution of your solution offering”*

HOW to reach your target AI customers and the evolution of your solution offering



This topic is covered in the fourth video in the series to help IBM CSPs design and build a profitable and value-added Artificial Intelligence (AI) business to serve the ever-changing needs of their customers.

“HOW to reach your target AI customers and the evolution of your solution offering” is a video designed to help you understand “THE HOW” in communicating your AI expertise to reach the customers and market segments you serve. This is a critical success factor in building your brand as a cutting edge CSP who has expertise in the world of AI. Building this brand is very important for your business because AI is here to stay and by creating (or refining) your brand messaging will position you for long term growth in an under-penetrated space...and create a strong source of differentiation for your business going forward.

[Link market opportunity data here from Playbook #1](#)

The Why

Why developing AI solutions for your existing customers is a key step

If you build it...they probably won't come knocking on your door! In the past year, the market is just beginning to hear more information about the world of Artificial Intelligence. We are still in the "infancy phase" of this new, emerging technology and there is certainly some confusion about what it is, what it is not and how it will improve our lives.

As mentioned in Video #1, make sure your existing customers have a need for AI solutions before you invest in this space. If so, here lies a tremendous opportunity for you to build expertise in this space and then position your company as a market leader. To achieve this objective, we would recommend that you take the following steps to reach your customers and prospects with effective messaging designed to bring "in-bound" marketing opportunities to your business.

In video #4, we teach you "how" to achieve two very important aspects of the strategy:

1. You will need to demonstrate that your company has AI capabilities and a "special sauce"
2. Social selling will be a critical success factor in building brand with your target accounts
 - a) Social Selling is the most effective way to get your messaging to the target audience via LinkedIn
 - b) This is a new and emerging technology and you need to position yourself as a Thought Leader in the space
 - People buy from people



Demonstrating your company has AI capabilities

Updating your digital marketing messaging to effectively reach the initial target accounts is more important than ever in building your AI business. There is a large commercial market opportunity in AI the next 10 years and getting your unique messaging to the target accounts will give you a “first mover advantage” and help you re-brand your business early.

Because the breadth of the AI world is wide and mostly unknown, your solution will need to be very specific initially to meet the unique needs of your existing top 10 customers. We call this specific area of expertise (which can be referenced and demonstrable) a “special sauce”. This is an industry best practice because you must take the long view of this market opportunity and recognize that you won’t be able to be the “Jack of all trades” at this early stage for various reasons.

Define this “special sauce” in simple terms so the initial target customers and accounts are clear about what you can do and HOW it will improve the bottom line of their business. Once you have successfully implemented this AI solution in your trusted existing customers, leverage them for references and business metrics to make your messaging stronger and connected to real business results. Focus on the marketing of this “special sauce” for at least 1 year until you have updated your company branding to the market. Don’t rush to be a generalist in the AI market too early because it is still emerging and too broad to claim you have a full base of skills. There is a shortage in skilled AI professionals in the market so you must focus on your “special sauce” initially.

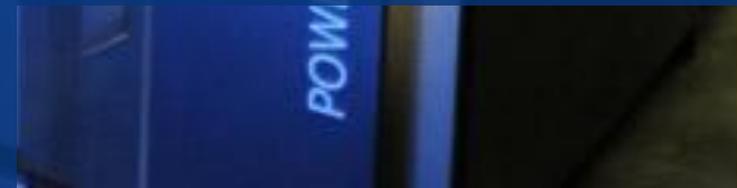
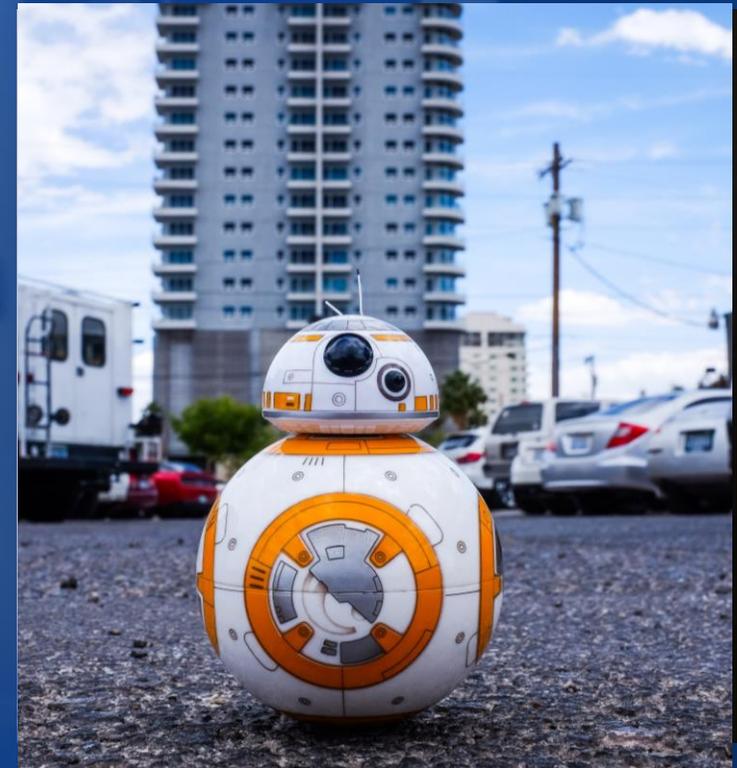


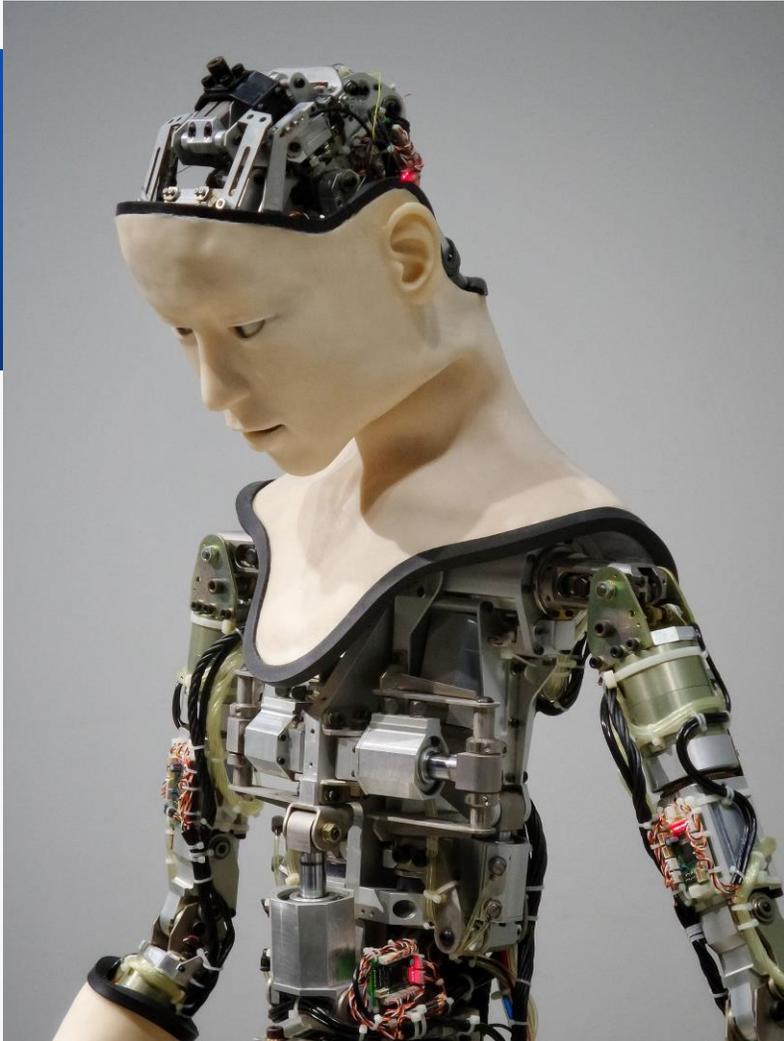
Social Selling will be a critical success factor in the early stages

One industry best practice that we have seen globally is the importance and effectiveness of building a personal professional brand associated with AI. Because the AI space is new, there aren't a lot of people who are positioning themselves as experts in this discipline. Social Selling is a very effective strategy in reaching a list of very specific targeted people who you would like to build your brand with and interact with.

LinkedIn is a powerful Social Selling platform. LinkedIn currently has approximately 440 million users and a large percentage of these professionals are in the IT industry. This provides more than enough specific targets to connect with and build your brand in the initial phase of your expansion into the AI space. While a lot has already been said about LinkedIn, the platform has evolved quickly and has many powerful features in identifying the right people you are targeting via Sales Navigator and platform analytics to see the effectiveness of your Social Selling Index (SSI). I recommend reading "Social Selling for Entrepreneurs" by Chris Reid. This short book will provide the insights to the effectiveness of Social Selling and HOW to execute an effective Social Selling strategy to build your new professional brand in AI.

As mentioned earlier, because AI is in the infancy of its emergence in the market, designing an effective social selling strategy to quickly rebrand yourself as a thought leader in AI and differentiate yourself is a critical success factor. You must reach your target customers and accounts efficiently and communicate that you have an AI solution which is referenceable, brings real value to your customers and is unique because of its "special sauce".





Recruiting the right talent as a priority

Finally, as the AI space continues to evolve, you will need to define the core competencies you have built to date and the core competencies you will require in selling and supporting the next phase of your AI solution. It is highly probable that you will have competency gaps in AI and this will be a challenging aspect of the business. There are limited AI trained professionals in the marketplace as this is an emerging technology and they are in high demand and sometimes difficult to identify.

Constantly identifying and recruiting the right talent for your AI solution will be an on-going priority. Achieving this objective should be addressed as a part of your marketing and Social Selling strategy. Spend time on LinkedIn defining and identifying AI professionals and begin building brand with them and sharing information related to the AI space. Positioning yourself as a thought leader in this space will greatly improve your ability to attract the right people and talent to fully extract the profits from AI going forward.