Clarion Review ★★★★★   **BUSINESS & ECONOMICS**

Marbles in Your Pipe: A Definitive Guide To Sales and Marketing in the Information Technology Industry

Adrian Noble
iUniverse (Dec 21, 2010)
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Written for salespeople, this guide offers a wealth of information about the IT industry.

Information technology (IT) is an industry that has its own set of companies in subcategories, such as hardware, software, and services, but it is also an area that applies horizontally across virtually all other types of businesses. As a result, selling to IT companies, or to the IT function within companies, can be intricate and complex. Adrian Noble, a South African with an IT sales background, has created *Marbles in Your Pipe*, a comprehensive volume that both explains the unique aspects of the IT business and offers authoritative sales advice.

Chapter 1 is a description of types of IT companies and also includes a useful overview of computer topology in words and illustrations. The remainder of the book concentrates on the sales process, addressing a wide range of topics, including sales strategies, prospecting, value-added reselling, time management, client site analysis, proposals, presentations, and sales analysis. In each chapter, the author offers advice, examples, and a chapter summary.

While much of the information about sales is fairly basic and can be found in other books about selling, the value of *Marbles in Your Pipe* (a phrase the author uses to describe a pipeline of prospects) is that it relates the sales process specifically to IT. For example, the chapters "Client Site Analysis" and "Quotations and Proposals" offer detailed information about how to assess a prospective client's hardware, software, and networking needs; the specific elements to include in a proposal; and suggestions for pricing services. The chapter "Service Level Agreements" describes the unique contract format technology providers use to protect a client's investment.

Recognizing that sales is as much about relationships as selling products and services, the author includes good advice about "customer relations management" as well as handling client complaints. He discusses, for example, the importance of follow-up, how to handle renewals and upgrades, and how to empathize with the customer.

At times, the text is repetitive; chapter 13 and 14, for example, include the very same quote about customer service, and chapter summaries often simply repeat rather than summarize the chapter material. The text is generally clearly written, but some typographical and grammatical errors could have been avoided through careful copyediting. The book would have benefited from a better cover (the photo of a bridge and a city is not very compelling), a bibliography, and an index.

The book extensively references one IT vendor, Kaspersky Labs, throughout the book. The company's logo also appears on the back cover. While Kaspersky is a recognized leader in antivirus software, the repeated mention of one company's products to the exclusion of others seems heavy-handed.

Still, *Marbles in Your Pipe* covers quite a bit of ground and should be helpful to novice and experienced IT salespeople alike.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (December 15, 2015)