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LEGENDS

Of Sales and Marketing

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Introduction

To say 2020 has introduced unexpected twists and turns is an understatement. Even in the face of seismic shifts and unprecedented challenges, modern sales and marketing leaders call upon their wealth of experience and wisdom to change course as needed and lead their organizations forward.

People.ai interviewed a dozen of today's elite to gain insight into what makes them tick and advice they can share about how to consistently drive the business forward. Enjoy getting to know the Legends of Sales and Marketing.

Risks, Truths, and Outcomes

Meet the man who went from DJ in Amsterdam to CMO of the #1 cybersecurity company in the world.



Picture a nightclub in Amsterdam awash in kaleidoscopic disco lights during the 1970s. The DJ drops a needle on the latest album by KC and the Sunshine Band, and a crowd of frenzied partygoers swarm the dance floor. Looking out over the crush of bodies, the DJ moves his head in time to the beat and locks in on the next tune he'll play to keep the crowd pumping. As he fades out on "Get Down Tonight," he fades in on "Shining Star" by Earth, Wind & Fire and the clubbers signal their approval with wide smiles and enthusiastic boogying.

We're describing a scene featuring René Bonvanie, who has over 30 years of B2B experience and now serves as Executive VP of Strategic Accounts at Palo Alto Networks. Does it surprise you to learn that the CMO responsible for building the #1 cybersecurity company in the world has spent quite a bit of time in the DJ booth? It makes perfect sense when you get to know the man who is driven to make big things happen – and hates being bored.

- ▶ **RENÉ BONVANIE**
- ▶ **FORMER CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER**
- ▶ **PALO ALTO NETWORKS**



If you believe in something and get the opportunity to do it, you have to take the risk. It will probably become one of the few things that propel your career.

Determined to be financially independent at 16, René taught himself the art of DJing. When he wasn't entertaining crowds of teens and young adults with tracks by the hitmakers of the day such as Kool & the Gang and Chic, he was a top-ranked field hockey goalie in his homeland, the Netherlands. In fact, René became a professional coach in his mid 20s, leading the Dutch men's field hockey team to a national championship.

Add up his experiences, beliefs, and character traits, and you get a sense of how René went from small-town boy in The Netherlands to legendary marketer in Silicon Valley.

BE WILLING TO PIVOT

True to his Dutch heritage, René is direct and quick to find common ground in order to keep things moving. But unlike his Dutch countrymen, René has taken many career risks – and they've paid off.

To understand how he landed top jobs at tech giants including Oracle, SAP and Salesforce.com before making his mark at Palo Alto Networks, it helps to get a glimpse into his education.

In high school, René set his sights on becoming an archaeologist. However, one of his teachers pointed out he'd probably spend more time teaching than

digging up treasures. This instructor also underscored the value of building a strong foundation in math and economics, opening René's world to more opportunities.

Though he wasn't fond of the subject, René majored in math at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Lucky for him, because it became the launchpad for his career. While serving as an assistant to a professor in organizational sciences, René was asked to implement a relational database.

"That project got me into the philosophy, math and technology behind relational databases, and helped me realize all you can do with data at the core."

The experience also paved the way for René to cross over from mathematician to marketer. "I was already a storyteller and saw an opportunity for a different approach

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LIVES IN

Foster City, CA

PASSION

DJing, Field Hockey

TOP MARKETING TRAIT

Risk Taker

TALENTS

Speaks Four Languages

BORN IN

The Netherlands

MADE HIS MARK AT

Oracle

IN HIS FREE TIME

Hanging With Family

FUN FACT

Drives An Orange Lamborghini

by combining storytelling with hardcore science. In other words, I saw marketing as an opportunity to turn science into an art form.”

Fresh out of university with a Bachelor’s degree in Economics, René landed a Director of Marketing role at the company that launched from his research project: Ingres.

After eight years at Ingres, he was given the opportunity to join Oracle as VP of Oracle9i, the Internet-ready version of the industry-leading database. Within six weeks of getting the call from Oracle, René sold his house and car and moved his family to California.

“If you believe in something and get the opportunity to do it, you have to take the risk. It will probably become one of the few things that propel your career.”

TAKE BOLD RISKS

As is already evident, René is not shy about pursuing his vision. When he recognized an opportunity to use database and web technology in a novel way at Oracle, he pitched Larry Ellison on a new paradigm.

Rather than continuing to invest marketing and sales resources to persuade companies to buy an expensive database, René proposed giving the software away. “I realized we could eliminate our physical inventory and marketing collateral, allow developers to buy our database over the web after trying it, and build a community.”

In 1996, this was a groundbreaking idea. Ellison gave René the go-ahead and six weeks to put his plan into action. René pulled it off and blew the doors wide open for Oracle.

“For six weeks, we were heads down building a content management system, a tracking system, a web publishing system, and the other systems we needed to market and sell in this new way. It gave me great satisfaction to deliver on my promise and do what I said I would.”



In enterprise marketing, you have to break through. My guiding principle is to not be boring, but instead be enchanting and true.

This experience planted two beliefs firmly in René’s mind. The first was that you won’t find perfection in anything you do so instead put in place a solid foundation that you can evolve. “My rule and mantra is that if it can’t be done in six weeks, it’s probably not going to work.”

Seeing his risk pay off gave rise to another epiphany. “You get rewarded in your career for things you did in unexpected ways, not for doing what’s expected of you.” That realization has shaped René’s philosophy to this day.

BE A CREATIVE STORYTELLER

René’s DJ experience also played a pivotal role in his approach to marketing. While every solid DJ prepares a playlist of crowd-pleasing tunes, they also read the crowd to get a sense of how to keep the party rocking.

In much the same way, marketers need to be attuned to their audience’s energy and figure out how to tap into and direct it. For René, it comes down to smashing the B2B marketing mold.

“In enterprise marketing, you have to break through. My guiding principle is to not be boring, but instead be enchanting and true.”

One way René does this is by making unexpected hires such as writers from Nickelodeon. “You don’t explain why someone needs a database; you explain what they can do with it. To change the way people consume our story, I needed to hire people who can write engaging, entertaining content.”



René Bonvanie in his Palo Networks office.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

This blending of business and consumer marketing put René way ahead of the curve. While competitors relied on fear-based messages, René led with messaging grounded in affirmative, positive examples of what buyers could do with business products and services.

“I saw I could use emotion in my enterprise marketing. A core tenet of my strategy was to build experiences that gave me more information about what people like and want to do. It was ambitious because it hadn't been done before, but it was very successful.”

Another example of René's original thinking is apparent when he started as the first CMO of Palo Alto Networks. The company was just establishing its customer base,

processes, and systems so René had to get creative. Seeing the chance to put in place a system to gather data and generate more insights over time, he was thrilled at the prospect of building things the right way from the ground up.

“You can anticipate many things and make better decisions if you capture all your marketing and sales activities in a single system. I was able to put that foundation in place from the start at Palo Alto Networks, which was an incredible opportunity.”

As the CMO, René also needed to hire a social media strategist but didn't look in the usual places. “If you hire conventional candidates, you'll end up with typical outcomes.” Instead he hired the person who helped establish Barack Obama as the first social-media President. “Since I'm all about the results, I looked for someone who had done something amazing in social media.”

LIVE BY THE DATA

René believes it's important as CMO to explain how the marketing team's activities contribute to the company's overarching goal.

"Many marketers say they can't measure whether their marketing works. Of course you can measure the impact. And if you can't, you shouldn't run that ad, billboard, or campaign."



*René Bonvanie
speaking at Palo Alto
Networks' 2016 Ignite
event.*

He also knows it takes careful planning and the right systems and data to demonstrate marketing's influence. "If you're going to make folks accountable for metrics and pipeline targets, you must instrument everything to measure their contribution."

That said, René is careful not to overwhelm with metrics. Here again he calls upon his background and early experiences that culminated in his unique blend of the creative and analytical.

"The vast majority of marketing metrics don't matter. Marketing must make a contract with the business to completely own achieving pipeline targets on a sustained basis. Everybody on the marketing team – from the copywriter to the graphic designer – needs to understand how they contribute to those goals, and all their efforts need to be measured objectively."

INVEST IN AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

René's experience as a professional coach motivating players to perform their best while cultivating team chemistry has proven foundational to his marketing leadership.

"With the right approach, CMOs can be incredible team builders and help others grow. In taking my field hockey team to

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the nationals, I learned the importance of organization, long-term planning, team composition and encouragement.”

To that end, René invests so his marketers learn how to understand, manage and exploit data.

“Those are core requirements for today’s marketers. You can’t hand that off to somebody else. Take the time to educate your team on how to use the tools and data and give them time to learn and become effective.”

STAND FOR SOMETHING

René believes you need to stand by your word and avoid hyperbole. “No matter how close to the fire you hold my hand, I will always maintain that what I said is true.”

This philosophy goes hand in hand with his belief that you are the master of your own destiny and whatever you learned in school is secondary to who you are. “I don’t care where you attended school; I want you to be responsible for your actions and be truthful. There’s no excuse for not keeping your promise.”

As an example, he talks of how enterprise marketers often overpromise and underdeliver by hyping the uppermost capabilities of their products. His approach is surprisingly simple and refreshing when it comes to winning over buyers skeptical of technology marketing.

“There’s no grey in marketing – what you say is either true or false. I underspec so the customer is impressed right way. It’s how you deliver massive enchantment instead of massive disappointment.”

FOCUS ON THE OUTCOMES

When asked how he’d like to be remembered, René says he hopes he’s seen as having achieved something that was deemed impossible and doing so in an ethical way.

“At Palo Alto Networks, I helped build the world’s largest cybersecurity company even though the market was not considered ripe for disruption. I’m proud of that and our off-the-chart NPS. I hope that I’ve been able to contribute by being truthful to our customers and enchanting them.”

It’s not a stretch to see how René translated his success as a DJ into success as a marketing leader. “You can be the best DJ, but it’s irrelevant if no one dances. My greatest satisfaction is knowing companies became successful using our products and that our customers are happy.”

A Champion of Software Sales

As a teen, Cedric Pech competed in the European Cup for downhill skiing. Then he applied the same ferocious drive to a career in software sales.



When Cedric Pech was 5 years old and living in the French alpine town of Les Deux Alpes, his father would tell him bedtime stories of a quasi-mythical saint who would fly down snow-covered mountains from the clouds above, delivering to the mortals below such joy that they showered him with their gold.

Even today, over 40 years later, Pech is awestruck when he thinks of Jean-Claude Killy, the legendary French alpine skiing champ who took three golds at the 1968 Winter Olympics.

“My father spent the first five years of my life talking to me about Killy instead of Santa Claus,” says Pech.

Pech, now 48, would go on to pattern his life somewhat after Killy. In his teens, Pech became a European Cup downhill ski contender. Then he pursued a sales career and managed large multinational teams, just as Killy later managed the

- ▲ Cedric Pech
- ▲ Chief Revenue Officer at MongoDB

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BORN	MADE HIS MARK
Les Deux Alpes, France	Parametric Tech Corp
PHILOSOPHICAL MUSE	LIFE HERO
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry	Jean-Claude Killy
TOP SALES TRAIT	COLLECTS
Empathy	Etruscan pottery

winter games for the International Olympic Committee. He has also inspired a younger generation of sales leaders through his own winning example.

Today, Pech is chief revenue officer of enterprise software company MongoDB. In that role, he is responsible for developing and executing the company's global sales strategy and managing a 550-person sales team. During a 25-year career, Pech has led software sales teams—at PTC, Think3, BladeLogic, BMC, BazaarVoice, and Fuze, the video conferencing platform—that have generated billions in revenue, consistently exceeding big growth targets.

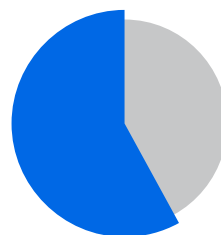
Pech's values, and his approach to building legendary sales organizations, have played a major role in that success. They owe as much from his upbringing—and relentless quest, from age 5, for Olympic glory—as they do

to his hero, Killy, with whom Pech started a lifelong pen-pal friendship when he was a kid.

"Killy is a player," says Pech, "in sports and business, and pretty much everything he does in his life. And he became an important role model for me."

THE DRIVE TO COMPETE

Pech's latest quest, at MongoDB, is to keep expanding the company's rapidly growing customer base, which currently includes 8,300 customers in more than 100 countries. After joining the company in 2017 to head up sales in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), he took on the role of chief revenue officer in February 2019. In March 2020, the company reported total revenues of \$421.7 million for FY20, up 58% year-over-year.



58%

MongoDB's year-over-year revenue growth since Pech became chief revenue officer in Feb. 2019

Pech's formula for sales success starts with character. "I don't think that we have a lack of very intelligent people out there," he explains on a recent video call from his home office. In the background are soothing wood accents, industrial lighting, mid-century modern club chairs, and a pool table.

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“What is more difficult to assess and to find are qualities like drive, character, and integrity. I am often impressed by people that I work with from that standpoint, and by the way they behave in the face of adversity and difficulties. I’m impressed by people where I look at them and I’m like, ‘My hat’s off to you. I don’t think I could have dealt with that, and you did.’”

That’s not a surprising take from someone who grew up on a glacier. At 5,400 feet, Les Deux Alpes sits in the clouds. A year-round ski resort, it gave the Pech family its livelihood and drive. His father, uncles, cousins, and his brother all competed in ski races and became ski instructors.

At his racing peak, Pech (pronounced Pesh) was among the top French skiers in downhill. Then, at 18, he realized that as good as he was and as hard as he trained, he would likely never win the Olympics like Killy. “It was a shocking moment, because your whole life is structured towards something, and then all of

a sudden you admit it’s not going to happen,” he says. “You have to reinvent yourself.”

Pech realized that the intense effort he had poured into skiing needed to be channeled into something new. He competed to get into the exclusive Montpellier Business School in the south of France. It took two years of trying, but in 1992, at age 20, he made it in.

Business school was an uncomfortable fit at first, not just because the 50,000-person city seemed huge. “My brother and I were racing machines from when we were 5 years old,” he says. “And all of a sudden you get into the business world.” Pech quickly threw himself into what he knew best—competition. He won seats on the student body and sailing committees. “I didn’t place first in the finance course, but I was the first at organizing things,” he says.

In 1995, shortly after Pech graduated, and after two years of military service, Montpellier’s alumni office sent him a



A competitive youth skier, Pech channeled lessons in perseverance into a successful sales career.

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fax about a job opportunity. The listing mentioned a jaw-dropping annual salary target: 500,000 French francs, or approximately \$100,000 today. “It was 10 times more money than I had ever dreamed about,” says Pech. The fax did not mention that it was commission-based, though.

The company was called Parametric Technology Corporation, now known as PTC, the Boston-based industrial software maker with \$1.3 billion in annual revenue. “I didn’t know anything about software and even less about sales,” says Pech.

But one aspect of the job hit close to home. As Pech says, “it was the closest version of professional sport that I could think of. There were rankings everywhere. It was a very meritocratic environment.” The opportunity also mirrored his former life—spent almost entirely outdoors and among fellow elite athletes—in two other ways. “I was not locked into an office, which for me would be the end of it,” says Pech. “And there was a team with me, and I got lucky enough to meet an amazing sales leader named Carlo Carpanelli, who had the greatest impact on my career.”

LESSONS FROM ONE OF THE BEST

At PTC, Pech also met another mentor, John McMahon, the company’s head of worldwide sales, and a tough-looking exec. Although he played the part well, McMahon was also

generous. “I learned a lot from him about holding people accountable and setting standards of excellence,” says Pech. “But I also observed that there is a way to do that with empathy.”

At PTC, Pech began developing his own strategy for building a great sales organization in the software business. “Everybody thinks that in order to be great, you need to have the best sales process, the best qualification process, and the right metrics to measure everything, which in some ways is correct—but not sufficient.”



Everybody thinks that in order to be great, you need to have the best sales process ...which in some ways is correct—but not sufficient.

Even more important, he says, is a sense of purpose—something he learned from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the French author of the children’s book “The Little Prince,” who was also a French aviator and fighter pilot in World War II. Saint-Exupéry once said: “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

“I respected this way of thinking, because it’s the same thing in an enterprise software

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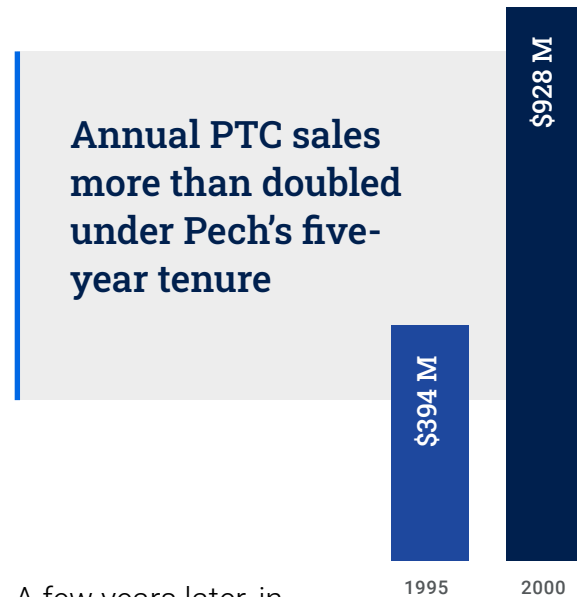
sales organization. People are never inspired by a sales process. People don't yearn for a qualification framework or even for a paycheck at the end of the month," he says. "There are companies where the more you comply with the processes, the more you advance your career. These are the bureaucracies. People don't go the extra mile in bureaucracies. They put in the emotional commitment it takes to be amazing if they understand there is something bigger in it for them, and that is what you see in a great sales team."

That "something bigger" is being part of and building a legendary sales organization with a culture of learning excellence. That requires creating a challenging learning environment where people are stretched and enjoy it, Pech says, but in an environment where there's an emotional attachment to a common goal.

What Pech helped build at PTC grew into an organization with 6,000 employees in 80 offices across 30 countries. During Pech's five-year tenure—during which he rose to regional director—PTC revenue more than doubled, from \$394 million in 1995 to \$928 million in 2000.

That year, Pech left PTC to embark on a series of other high-level sales jobs at other enterprise software companies. Among them were stints at BladeLogic, where, as head of sales in Southern Europe, Pech led a sales spurt to which

the company attributed most of its growth. When BMC Software acquired the company that year, Pech stayed on and helped expand BMC's sales in the same region.



A few years later, in 2015, after a brief period at BazaarVoice, Pech joined Fuze as a worldwide sales SVP. Then, in 2017, he joined MongoDB.

EMPATHY SELLS

Traveling most of his time internationally, he oversees MongoDB's global revenue operations. He also owns a country house, surrounded by olive trees, in an area known as Tuscia (Italy). The area was once settled by the Etruscans, a civilization that flourished for several hundred years and left behind art, pottery, sculpture—entire mysterious cities. Pech is interested in this civilization and collects Etruscan art, which he calls his greatest extravagance.

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He does it, in part, to remind himself that “everything comes and disappears,” he says. “That’s a great way to stay a little humble about whatever great things we think we do. Seen from 2,500 years from now, nobody will really care about them.”

His musical tastes run from Neapolitan opera to rock. It’s probably no surprise that the band he most admires is one that’s lasted for decades and turned its art into a world-class corporation. In short, he will “forever choose” the Rolling Stones over the Beatles. “Part of it is their duration, their adaptability and resilience to last over 50 years,” he says. “You see their endless creativity, energy, and professionalism, their ability to learn and reinvent themselves. These guys are still running around and producing great music, and I think, ‘Hats off to you.’”

Pech admits that the current global pandemic and economic downturn leaves him wondering about the future—not his own, but that of the sales teams who rely on him. “I have 550 people with me, especially younger people, who deserve to have a shot at doing great things,” he says. “The conditions we’re living in require leaders to think more creatively than we used to, to help those people fulfill their potential despite the adverse conditions.”

Empathy, he says, is especially needed today in motivating his far-off sales leads, many of

whom can’t get into their offices because of local lockdown rules and who are stuck at home, isolated and worrying.

“Over the past few weeks, I’ve been on video calls with younger members of my teams around the world,” Pech says. “They’re locked in an apartment somewhere, often away from their families and sometimes on their own. And you’re thinking, how do we keep them optimistic, motivated, and inspired versus lonely and in a bad place?”

You do it, he explains, by over-communicating, by picking up the phone and simply asking, “How are you doing, what’s going on?” Pech says he makes countless calls like that every week. While it’s a big time commitment, he adds, “sometimes I can ask just one question and then listen for 30 minutes. And when I can walk away from that call feeling like I propped somebody up, that’s an amazing thing to me.”

That’s true, in part, because Pech needed some propping up himself about 10 years ago. During what he calls “a motivational crisis,” he took some time off to refresh. He even wrote to his old pen pal, Jean-Claude Killy, to reconnect to his old self. To his delight, Killy wrote back—on official IOC stationary. His last sentence to Pech was as badass as the man himself. Killy wrote: “Cedric, remember: Big dreams shape an entire life.”

Learn more at
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