

7. THE PRODUCT FOR SALES

7.1 DEFINITION OF PRODUCT: A sale is the act of selling a product or service in return for money or other compensation. Signaling completion of the prospective stage, it is the beginning of an engagement between customer and vendor or the extension of that engagement.

Five Methods:

Selling a product isn't as complicated as it's made out to be. At its most basic, a sales program is defined principally by what you sell, who you sell to, and how you sell. Beyond that, it all boils down to staying focused on the details outlined next, suitable for both sales representative and for owners of small businesses

Method 1 of 5: Showing Enthusiasm for the Product

Love what you're doing when you're selling a product. The popular image of a salesperson as someone willing to "sell at all costs" is not the reality across the board in sales. A good salesperson loves sales, is motivated by what they're selling, and transfers this enthusiasm and belief to the customer. Indeed, the customer is given options, including the one to walk away, in order to avoid such undue pressure.

- Learn how to listen to customers and to read their body language. Avoid interrupting or disagreeing with a customer, and provide your customer with space to talk. Know how to interpret a customer's folded arms, eye contact, and manner of standing toward or away from you. Make the customer comfortable and you're off to a good start in selling your product.

Be knowledgeable about the product. There is nothing more infuriating to a potential customer than to come across a half-hearted salesperson who claims uncertainty about what the product can and can't do, what it's made from, and what happens when things in it stop working. It is absolutely vital to know your product range inside out and if you do not know something a customer asks of you, let them know you'll find out and get back to them as soon as possible

Help the customer see the perks. As well as getting good product information to the right people, it is important to translate the product's features into benefits for the customer, thus making it easier for them to buy.

- Have you used the product, tested it, tried it out, or worked with it--whichever is relevant?

- Do you feel comfortable about being able to talk to a customer as someone totally familiar with the product?
- Ask yourself one simple question: Why should a customer buy my product? If the only answer you can come up with is "So I can get paid," you're selling the wrong product.

Ensure that the product has been adequately explained. Good product information, including retail packaging, is important. Lots of salespersons and sales managers don't like to admit that sales can be completed by product information. They like to think it is their personal charm, intelligence, and determination that closes sales. For the most part, that is bunk. Not only can sales be made by product information, most sales *are* made this way. And this is more true today than in the past because of the proliferation of "big-box stores" and other forms of product sales without the benefit of interpersonal relationships.

- The product information should be informative, true and complete. Ideally, it should give the prospective buyer all the information they need to buy on the spot.
- For most prospects shopping without assistance, clear and easy to understand information, as described above, is important.

Make the benefits of the product loud and clear. Besides the actual utility, beauty, or even fame of the product, what are you offering above and beyond? Make it clear to the customer what key benefits the product brings to them, such as guarantees, warranties, and after-sales service.

Method 2 of 5: Connecting with the Buyer

Understand the motivations of the buyer. When presenting the product to the customer, bear in mind that most successful products and services are bought, not sold. They are bought by people who have a need, and believe that the product will satisfy that need. This is often the result of marketing rather than selling, however. Selling the product rather than just offering it for sale almost always involves an emotional component.

- Take some time to look at the marketing side of the product. What images and promises have been created by the marketing around the product that you're trying to sell? In what ways can you continue this theme where it seems most appropriate to maintain the promised satisfaction the marketing offers?

- During your presentation, confirm that your prospective buyer will want or need your product. You will need to do this through a range of methods, including observing their reactions, listening to them carefully, and asking them clear questions about what they actually need.
- If you're visiting your potential buyer's office, look at their wall and desk. What photos, posters, or images can you see? Are there images of family, pets, vacations that will provide you with a connection to this person's wants?

Know how to open with a customer. Instead of asking the close-ended question "May I help you?", ask the more positive, open-ended "Are you looking for something for yourself is it a gift for someone special?" And be alert to making comments on the product before getting into a deeper discussion with the customer, such as "These long legged computer stands are really popular this summer."

Convert the customer's motivations into the product's characteristics. In marketing, this is known as "positioning", and it consists of equating the product with the customer's hopes and desires. The following positioning factors are all of importance when selling a product:

- Position the product in the best spectrum of the market possible. Mark H, McCormack calls this finding your "biggest bulge of buyers", and not pitching the product too high or too low in terms of affordability and luxury.^[2]
- Position the facts about the product according to the person you're selling it to. You may have a handful of different facts, but it's up to your skill to know which of those facts best serve each individual sale.
- Position the facts so that they reflect the desired perception. However, don't fudge facts or lie outright. This is about perception, not deception.
- Position the facts so that they transcend the product itself. This means that the desirable, positive values associated with the product sell the product and have very little to do with the product itself. Companies that excel at this include Coca-Cola, Apple, and many designer goods or labels.

Understand all the aspects that feed into the end sale of a product. Advertising, merchandising, and marketing are support functions for selling. Selling is the goal of these support functions and a good salesperson needs to have a decent understanding of each of these aspects in a product's life.

- Read basic texts on marketing. These will quickly bring you up to speed on many of the tactics and techniques underlying advertising, merchandising, and marketing. In addition, texts on starting a small business will often provide useful overview information of this type. Read How to understand marketing for more details.
- If your product is more for work than for play, learn a little about finance to quantify its benefits. If it's for a business, learn more about accounting to explain how it will make the investors as well as the employees happy.

Be honest. Long-term lovers of your product will only come about if you've been honest with them. This means being transparent in your delivery of product information and also admitting your own lack of knowledge or mistakes you've made where needed. Don't be afraid of honesty; it builds trust.

- Think like (not about) your customers. Think about what you'd like to hear and learn about the product if you were in the customer's shoes.
- Don't take the easy way out and brush your customer off when stock is low or your knowledge is sparse. Always make a genuine effort to follow up customer wants, and to physically take customers to a product, and demonstrate it, where possible. A customer given a hands-on demonstration will feel more involved in the sale and more likely to purchase than one who is told "It's in aisle 5 that way" and given a brisk hand wave.

Give your customer some importance. Pay attention to his questions, answer them and make them feel like the centre of attention.

- If you aren't able to handle all your customers effectively, hire sales executives to assist you in business.

Method 3 of 5: Closing the Sale

Close the sale. There are many styles and methods of closing a sale. One of the most effective has the mnemonic, ABC: "Always Be Closing." As you confirm your prospective buyer's interest in the product, put forward trial closes like, "Does this sound like the product you want?". When answered in the affirmative, this may mean you have completed the sale on that product, and it is time to build the sale with related products.

Be prepared to give customers time to consider. Appearing overly pushy is a turn-off for many modern-day buyers who do their own savvy internet research before coming to see you. They may want to go home and do a quick online search; let them do so with your enthusiastic and supportive pitch in their mind. If you've been truthful, helpful, considerate, and enthusiastic and the information you've given them matches with what they read online, it'll be your business they come back to for the product, or your product they'll prefer over a competitor's.

Method 4 of 5: Improving Sales

Spread your product information. It is important to make your product information available through as many channels as possible. Today, the range of potential placements has increased a great deal thanks to the advances in communications. Give your potential buyers many possible places to find out more about your information including in the following ways:

- Promote your product through representatives, dealers, salesmen, radio, TV, word-of-mouth by customers, mail and email (in various forms), distribution at trade shows, seminars, telephone, fax, computer networks, product packaging, airline magazines, retail storefronts, space ads, and the Internet. And consider the worth of product placement in movies, sports games, and other big events that are televised.
- Use social media. This is now a very important part of getting products out into the broader, global marketplace. Places Facebook and Pinterest can be great launching pads for your product.
- Use local community events. Donating your product to a local school gala for auctioning to raise school funds can be a great way to get your product known, as well as getting the goodwill from the community who recognizes your generosity.

Get creative. Sales can only be increased by certain things over which you have control but which are not necessarily self-evident. Sometimes price changes are required; other times, you'll need tweaks to the product, or a broadening or contracting of your product range. All of this will be evident from undertaking regular inventory checks and follow ups on sales performance. Some methods to increase sales include:

- Selling more of your existing products to your existing customers - which probably means new sales methods will need to be implemented.
- Adding new products.

- Adding new customers.
- Having an exclusive product for a set period of time that everyone wants.

Method 5 of 5: Troubleshooting Poor Sales

Review. At regular intervals during and after the sale of your product, there should always be a review. Is the product selling well? If not, why not? Are stocks low or are you still tripping over product that has dust on it? Bear in mind the image that slow-moving or unsold products can create in the minds of a customer. Finding dust on items tells the customer the product has been there for some time and may be outdated. Seeing the same display month in and month out suggests to the customer that the product is stale and not very popular. Always review the viability of the products with these questions:

- Can the product be deleted from your line if it's not selling so well? Try not to add new products until you've removed the old ones or you may just have too many choices and less leverage with which to convince the potential buyer. If you're a business owner, you also risk tying up too much of your cash in stock that has the potential to go obsolete faster than you can move it.
- Can you liquidate obsolete products?
- Can you look back over your target market and sharpen the focus? You may have been missing the best fit within the market for your product.
- Re-evaluate product mix, product design, product location and selling methods if your product is in severe sales decline.
- You should be nice to the buyer.

TIPS

- Always try to spread word about your product!
- Know what your competitors/ buyer/ businessman or a businesswoman are doing and find ways to outsell their ideas. Does your product have added features, special warranties, or a better price?
- Using Independent Sales Reps (working on commission only). They will sell your product and get paid only when the sale is consumed. Many resources exists to find them online.
- Make your prices low. You will sell lots of products and get as much money as you would've done for making your item expensive and selling very little.

- A database such as Microsoft Access can help you organize, reorganize, and display the information your business generates for all kinds of insights. A personal information manager (PIM) program, often part of an email program, specializes in organizing contacts. A customer relationship management (CRM) program goes a step further by automating their use in marketing. For example, ACT! makes it very easy to get back to a potential customer every 30 days. Other computer programs, like Open Office.org are also extremely helpful in organization, running reports and similar tasks.