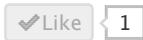


January 16, 2012

# Making Sales for Small Businesses More Predictable

Liz published this at 12:45 pm



## A Guest Post by Cynthia Kocialski

### Seeing Sales as a Solution

Every business needs revenue and the more the better. Most don't have cash reserves or access to capital like the big corporations to shore up operating expenses, and so getting sales right is crucial. What every small business wants to know is how they can increase sales with minimal effort and how their sales can be more effective.



I have to admit I didn't begin with a background in sales. I had to learn it by doing. Everyone does it this way. As far as I know there aren't any college degrees in sales. As I've gone through many start-ups, my view of sales is far from where I begin on my first start-up.

Without a sales background, I had an immediate dislike of this business function. It seemed a necessary evil. If someone mentioned sales to me in those early days, I'd cringe. I had visions of a sleazy used car salesman that would lie and cheat his way to closing the sale.

Now, I have a completely different outlook. Why? I looked at the sales from the customer's point of view. As any customer, I have many problems in desperate need of solutions. Most of my issues don't have easy-to-find answers. I want to know if someone can fix my problems. I want them to tell me about their solution. I am tired of dealing with the problem and I want it to go away forever, never to come back to bother me again.

Let's flip back to the sales side, your customer wants you to tell them the solution to their problem. You are doing them a favor. You aren't bothering them; they want to talk to you. It's only when you are trying to sell them something they don't need or want that you're acting like a sleazy, greedy, unethical used-car sales person.

Once I was able to see myself as not becoming the used car salesman, I was able to embrace sales and learn how to do it much better.

### Focus on the Customer

The first place to start is to begin by reviewing your sales of the past several months and to conduct some customer interviews. You want both the good and the bad customers, but focus two-thirds of your efforts on

the satisfied customers. For your existing customers, answer the following questions among your staff before conducting any interviews. Then look for similarities among customers.

- What problems are your customer trying to solve and what are they hoping to accomplish? There is a difference; the later are bigger customer goals.
- Is your customer using the product in the way you intended?
- Is there a specific feature to your product that they are using to solve their problem?
- What is the financial cost if the problem is not solved?
- Whose job is it to solve this problem? Who are your contacts and what are their titles?
- What problems are blocking the customer from accomplishing their goal?

Customer interviews are important. You hear established business talking about how they have lost touch with the customer all the time. If your company doesn't have any customers or your closing rates are low then customer interviews are immensely useful. I've sent my staff back to call on failed sales to ask questions. Most former prospects or potential customers will spend 15 minutes on the phone with you. You don't need many phone interviews, 15 or 20 are enough. Patterns emerge quickly.

When conducting customer interviews, add a few more questions to the list above. Prepare the questions you want answered ahead of time, but always be prepared to let the customer take the conversation where they want it to go.

- When your customer was in the process of buying your product, what concerns or questions did they have during this process?
- What do your customers think of your competitors? Is there anything you could learn from them?
- Have your customers interacted with your customer service and what did they think of it?

Why did you do all this work? Sales is a search for the customers that are most likely to buy. The shotgun approach of talking to anyone and everyone, hoping that someone will buy is not effective. You need to know who your most satisfied and happiest customers are and why they are buying. For example, if your happiest customers are using feature X with benefit Y, then why is this tenth on the list in your marketing materials. You want to find more like them, and not waste your time with the others.

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Author's Bio:

Cynthia Kocialski is the founder of three tech start-ups companies. In the past 15 years, she has been involved in dozens of start-ups. Cynthia writes the [Start-up Entrepreneurs' Blog](#) and has written the book, [Startup From The Ground Up – Practical Insights for Entrepreneurs, How to Go from an Idea to New Business.](#)

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Thanks, Cynthia!

Be irresistible.

–ME “Liz” Strauss

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