

TOP 12 TIPS TO GROW SALES



1.

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, MINDSET

I think it was Richard Denny, the well renowned sales trainer, who suggested that two key attributes of a great salesperson were knowledge and attitude. I've also heard a number of sales gurus talk about the need to have the right mindset so that's why I'm putting these three attributes – knowledge, attitude and mindset as the first of the 12 top tips.

In terms of knowledge you need to have a thorough understanding of all that you are offering alongside what's happening in the market environment you operate in which includes customer trends and competitor innovation. Your customers will be keen to tap into your expert knowledge.

Attitude can make or break a sales opportunity. If we like someone and we feel we can trust them then that increases our chances of buying from them. Having the right attitude towards your customers and potential customers will help you create trust.

Reflect on how the person you are interacting with will react if they feel like the most important person you have dealt with that day.

When it comes to mindset this is about thinking positively and it is particularly important when you are planning to make calls either to potential new customers or to follow up on quotes or to talk to existing customers about buying more from you.

You will be more successful if you go into those calls either face-to-face or on the phone with a positive mindset.

Particularly in the business to business sector relationships are really important and you can develop those much more easily by meeting people or talking to them on the phone rather than the easy option which is to communicate by email.

So pick up the phone and use it for what it was originally invented for – talking to people!

2.

WHAT DO BUYERS WANT FROM YOU?

Here's a list of some of the things buyers want, all of which if you provide will help you grow sales:

CHOICE : Enough to make a decision but not too much to feel overwhelmed.

ADVICE : You are the expert so as a buyer I'm looking for you to guide and steer me towards the product or service that best helps me solve my problem.

IDEAS : Offer me ideas and you have my attention. As with Choice I don't want too many, just one or two may suffice.

EASY TO BUY: If I can't easily buy your product or service I may quickly lose interest.

VALUE: I'm handing you my money what are you giving me in return, perhaps above and beyond the core product or service.

TRUST: If I feel as though I can trust you I will be much more inclined to buy from you.

We will elaborate on most of these in the rest of the top 12 Tips.

3.

MAKE IT EASY FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS TO BUY FROM YOU

We live in a world of convenience, where we expect everything to happen quickly and easily which includes buying your products or services. So the question to ask yourself is 'How easy is it to buy from your company?'

There are 3 ways to find that out:

Firstly ask current customers - in business we are often more keen to find out why people didn't buy than why they did buy so talking to current customers is a great opportunity to gather some really useful feedback. Talk to them though in person or on the phone. Don't send them a survey as you won't necessarily get the true answers to your questions and you won't be able to explore areas that develop in a conversation.

Secondly have someone do some mystery shopping - this could be a professional mystery shopper or a business associate or friend. Whoever you choose be specific in what you want them to do or the feedback usefulness can be severely diluted.

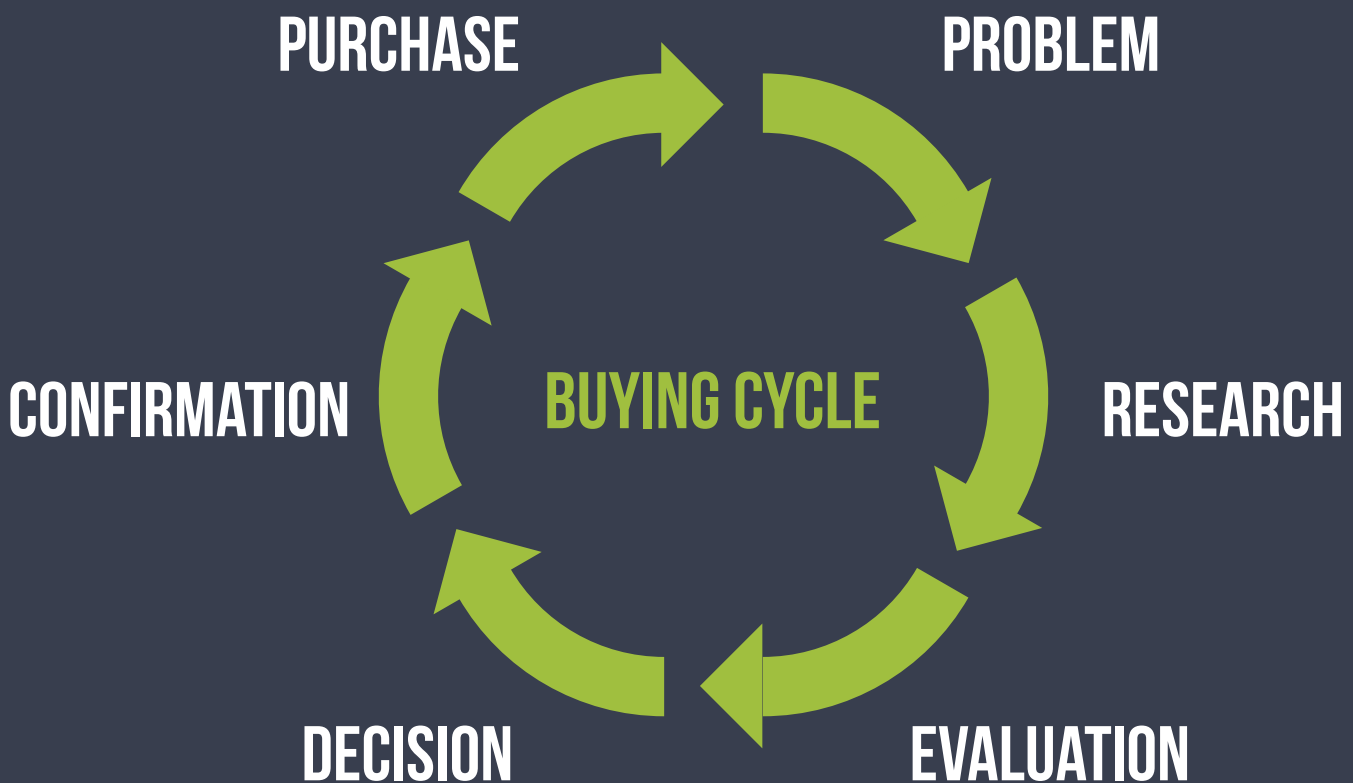
Finally try buying from your own company yourself. This may not be practical in a small organisation but it has the potential to give you some insights into how your company operates which you may not be aware of.

If you do mystery shop try and check all channels through which customers could buy your products including online and through third parties.

So why is making it easy to buy so important?

Several leading business research sources now reckon that 70% of buying decisions are being made before the buyer makes any contact with the company they want to buy from.

Here's how today's buying cycle looks:



This means that when potential customers do contact you they have highlighted your product/service as the one they want to buy and your company as the place to buy it from. At this stage their main objective has become to confirm to themselves that they made the right decision about who to buy from.

If it becomes apparent at this contact / confirmation stage that it is going to be more difficult to buy from you than the potential customer had anticipated then they may think they've made the wrong decision and will go elsewhere.

This makes first impressions significantly more vital than many businesses may realise. That first impression includes how my call is answered and handled, how the in person greeting works, how quickly my email or direct message is responded to.

Create a culture in your organisation that when the phone rings it is a buyer calling and one who wants to feel as though they are the most important customer you have had that day.

4.

HONE YOUR PEOPLE SKILLS, FOCUS ON THEM NOT YOU

We live in a highly digital world but people buy from people. Therefore one of the most important skills any sales person can have is people skills.

This will include recognising everyone is different and as such if you want to build a rapport/relationship with someone in a business context you need to be able to adapt to their style of conversation including the pace and tone that they want to go at, the speed of their decision-making and how they want to be treated.

Likewise you need to understand that businesses and people within those businesses are only really interested in themselves.

They are not interested in you, your products or services or your company unless what you have to offer will be of benefit to them.

So if you start your conversation or your presentation talking about yourself, your company and your fantastic products and services the person you are hoping to win business from could already be switching off.

Start your conversation by talking about the company or the person you are with.

More importantly get them to talk about themselves and their challenges (which ultimately you hope to solve) by asking carefully considered questions (see tip 5).

A lot of sales conversations lose early momentum simply through the seller racing into a sales pitch.

Sales can take time to achieve so be patient.

5.

ASK 'BETTER' QUESTIONS

Questions are really important in business conversations. There are essentially three types of questions which you can plan for :

Questions that you want to ask a prospective customer

Questions that they will want to ask you

Questions around concerns that they may have about your products or services.

Use the grid below to identify those questions and concerns.

Asking 'better' questions can be a great route to sales success so try and make sure your questions are really good questions that will produce answers that will be really useful for you to work with.

For example if you meet me and ask 'How's business?' (which is probably the most common question people ask each other when meeting particularly at networking events) how am I supposed to answer that?

Try instead asking questions that need a more specific answer, and which will help you gather the right sort of information which could create a sales opportunity. Here are a few examples of questions you may wish to ask:

What is the biggest challenge your business currently faces?

Which products or services would you like to sell more of over the next quarter?

What plans have you got for new products or services this year?

What are you doing to stay ahead of your competitors?

3 QUESTIONS CUSTOMERS ASK:

3 QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ASK:

3 KEY CUSTOMER CONCERNS:

6.

GENERATE IDEAS

Most forward thinking business people love ideas : things they haven't thought of, for example ways in which they can make better use of technology, tips for growing sales and managing people better, new marketing tricks etc...

Think therefore of yourself as an ideas person not just a sales person so that when you go to visit or are in contact with either an existing or prospective client you are armed with some ideas that will be of help to them.

Ideas will stand you out as most salespeople are completely devoid of them as they focus their entire efforts on 'getting an order'.

Your customer / potential customer will almost certainly thank you for your idea and may well use it even if they don't actually do any immediate business with you.

But don't be put off by that. You should welcome and embrace it. This is the concept in business known as 'Give before you Take'.

By sharing an idea that was useful you get yourself on the radar, your generosity will be noted and guess what when the customer does need a product or service of the kind you offer you will have positioned yourself away from your competitors.

So see ideas as an investment.

An investment in marketing your expertise. Back in my advertising days the easiest way to generate a sale was to offer up 3 ideas for the customer to choose from. They appreciated the work I had put in and when the time was right for them to advertise it was usually me that got the order.

7.

ASK FOR THE ORDER AND KNOW WHEN TO 'SHUT UP'

Two things that salespeople are usually not very good at are asking for the order and knowing when to shut up.

Asking for the order doesn't have to feel like you are being pushy or overly keen, it is simply a way of moving the sale to the next stage, and in so doing finding out whether your potential client is serious about your proposal or pitch. Sometimes buyers need a little nudge to help them make a decision and simply asking them if they are now ready to place the order can be that nudge. Particularly in the business to business sector some sales decisions never get made simply because the buyer hasn't been asked to place the order.

And this is where getting the right balance between asking for the order and knowing when to shut up really matters.

People often think that sales is all about talking and that to be a successful salesperson you need to be good at talking. To a degree that remains true - you need to be good at conversations but you also need to be good at knowing when not to talk, in other words when to shut up!

Often, but not in all cases, the more your prospective client talks the more likely you are to get a sale so your skills need to be focused on asking really good questions, listening very carefully to the answers, avoid interrupting when the answer is being given and then clarifying and confirming what has been said.

If you have put forward your proposal on the phone or in a face to face scenario (either in person or via a video link) and the potential customer has gone quiet whilst they consider your proposal it is very tempting to break the silence. Don't do it!

Sales is often about momentum and that includes someone thinking about whether to take up your offer. Be patient. Your potential customer will speak at some point - don't interrupt silence!

8.

MEET PEOPLE, MAKE CONNECTIONS, START CONVERSATIONS.

'The more people you meet the more business you do' – I can't remember who said that but I do remember seeing it in a book or as part of a presentation and I think particularly in the business to business service sector it is true. I can definitely vouch for it as a lot of my business has come from meeting people either online via LinkedIn, by attending events/shows/conferences or by going networking.

The key I think is to be personal and to be ready to start conversations because you never know who you might meet and start a conversation with that leads to a business opportunity. If you use LinkedIn make sure you send personalised connections rather than just pressing connect and sending the standard one that most people do. Personalising the connection will make it stand out and chances are it will start a conversation.

If you go networking here are a few tips:

- Make sure you take business cards
- Think about what you going to say when people say so what do you do? And when answering this question try and avoid using your job title and the name of your company instead focus on explaining why whatever it is you do exists in other words if it was me I would say I help businesses like yours transform their sales
- Meet as many people as you can by not getting stuck with one particular person, especially someone you already know, so be ready to move on . I have two particular tactics I deploy in this situation – firstly I simply say 'It's great to meet you but I'm sure like me you want to meet as many people as possible so let's go off and meet others' and secondly bring someone else into the conversation 'Lorna have you met Frank?' Whilst they are introducing themselves to each other I move to meet somebody else
- If you do meet someone of interest follow-up with a text or LinkedIn connection or even an email with a bit of a steer on what you would like to do next - meet up, have a phone call etc...but not a sales pitch!
- Finally if you go networking with a colleague make sure you split up, so don't hang around with each other and certainly don't sit next to each other.

9.

SPOT AND SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES

There will always be opportunities for you to create sales of your products or services. The trick is to be able to spot them and then do something about them. Opportunities will arise in conversations, through chance meetings, through casual comments people make, through discussions with existing customers, and through asking 'better questions' (see tip 5).

You never know when you are going to find yourself in the presence of a potential customer so always be ready to make the most of any opportunity and that includes ensuring that you are 'business ready' which for me means having a business card to offer and something to make notes on.

A lot of business has been done and will continue to be done through casual or chance conversations with people you may not know, or know that well. Those conversations often start with: 'So what do you do?'

That question is not an invitation to spend 10 minutes going through the A-Z of your business offerings but to succinctly describe how customers benefit from your offerings - in a sense what is often described as your 'Elevator Pitch' - although I'm not keen on that term as 'Pitch' sounds a bit too salesy for me during a first conversation!

And don't forget as you will see in Tip number 10 existing customers are great opportunities for new business.

Be alert and be ready for when an opportunity presents itself.

10.

YOUR NEXT BIG NEW CUSTOMER COULD BE AN EXISTING CUSTOMER

Existing customers know you, they like you (probably), they trust you (almost certainly) and they are buying from you.

They are therefore ideally positioned to buy more from you yet generally speaking we have a propensity not to ask existing customers for additional orders in case we 'rock the boat' and by asking them to spend more they suddenly start to think about buying less from us.

This is clearly a very negative mindset but it tends to be our default position in most cases. Think about how you would feel if when talking to a customer about a product or service of yours that they don't use and they say 'I didn't know you did that - if I had I wouldn't have bought it from company X (probably a competitor).

So make sure that existing customers are fully aware of all the relevant products and services that you have to offer. Think therefore of existing customers as a great potential source of new revenue.

If you are concerned about how to approach an existing customer suggest a review of what you are currently doing with an emphasis on ensuring your customer is maximising the benefits your product/ service offers.

Use the review to ask those 'better questions' with a view to the answers creating opportunities to do more business.

11.

CHALLENGE YOUR MARKETING

Particularly in SMEs and relatively new businesses ongoing marketing activity can go unchallenged either because there is no one working on marketing full-time or it may not be an integral part of the day to day business activity.

Marketing fundamentally exists to drive sales and therefore at least once a quarter your marketing activity should be reviewed and the question asked 'Is our marketing activity driving sales?'

It can be hard sometimes to prove if marketing is creating sales. Inevitably a certain amount of 'gut instinct' plays a part along with anecdotal evidence 'I saw your ad/Facebook post'.

There are lots of marketing activities you can measure - shares/likes/click throughs etc...but as the marketing experts would warn - be careful of viewing stats in terms of quantity when what you really need is quality which converts into sales.

As someone once said 'Its better to have 10 customers who 'love you' and buy from you than 10,000 who like you but never buy from you'.

Be ruthless with the challenge of your marketing because the danger is you continue to do the same things year-on-year or you feel you need to follow what you think are the marketing trends that everyone else is undertaking regardless of whether they are right for your business.

12.

BE A PRESENTER/ SPEAKER

The final top tip is perhaps one you were not expecting. I'm thinking around opportunities to speak/present at a business event or show. Search around and you will find lots of networking events looking for interesting speakers who can provide value to the delegates through the sharing of their expertise.

An event provides a 'captive audience' but that is not an excuse to use the time to bang on about how great your products/services are, how great your company is, how many awards you have won, what fantastic coffee you offer your customers etc...

Instead view your presentation as a 'non-sales' pitch which focuses on sharing with your audience ideas, advice and tips that they can benefit from. Be assured that you will create over time far more sales opportunities using this approach than if you do a 'sales pitch'.

I have certainly gained business on the back of speaking at events. So how do you get to speak in the first place? Check out the networking events in your area. Get on their mailing list. From that you will be able to relatively easily establish if they have speakers. Go to the events you would be keen to speak at, meet the key people and offer your services emphasising your focus on sharing your expertise not doing a 'sales pitch'.

In the run up promote that you are speaking and at the event ask the organisers and audience to take photos / share your advice. If you're not sure what to speak about a good method is the top tips route - for example I might do one called '5 top tips to help you grow sales' - that immediately gives your presentation some structure and your audience can book their place knowing what to expect from you. I'm sure you have 5 top tips in your area of expertise you can share with an audience, some of whom may be potential customers.

It's easier also in this format to create a summary of your presentation to hand out at the end / share on the event's website and / or Facebook / Linked In page.

For tips and advice on how to deliver a confident, engaging, educating and entertaining presentation download for free my '12 Top tips to help you deliver an awesome presentation'

GOOD LUCK

If you need help you to grow your sales here are 3 ways I can help you:

1. 'Sell More' - a half or full day company training programme to inspire, re-energise and motivate those responsible for ensuring you achieve your sales targets.

2. A three step sales transformation programme. Working along side you and your team I'll review your current sales activity, confirm your sales goals, put together a plan for achieving those goals and then help you implement the plan.

3. Filling a gap if you don't have a sales manager or sales director. I'll provide ideas, drive, training and advice for, depending on the size of your business, the equivalent of 1,2 or 3 days a month. You will enjoy all the benefits of having an experienced sales director on your team without the overheads.

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