



The Art of Selling

- When you are not a salesperson

As entrepreneurs, we do not always feel that we are good at selling, or perhaps we are more interested in developing, presenting or delivering products than in actually selling them. How do we get better at assuming the role of the salesperson and getting more orders?

Sometimes, we are lucky enough to have such a brilliant business idea, that it sells on its own. Clients call without us having to put any effort into selling. This is, however, the rare case scenario and even if we experience several such cases in periods, they are hardly a reliable source of long-term income.

For most of us, the situation is such that continuous sales efforts and strong client relations are what determine the turnovers that our new ventures need to survive. Sales bring us enough business and sufficient income, allowing us to continually invest in our business development. Despite the importance of focusing on selling, many entrepreneurs would rather postpone this task or give it a lower priority in comparison to other tasks. Why so?

Emotional barriers

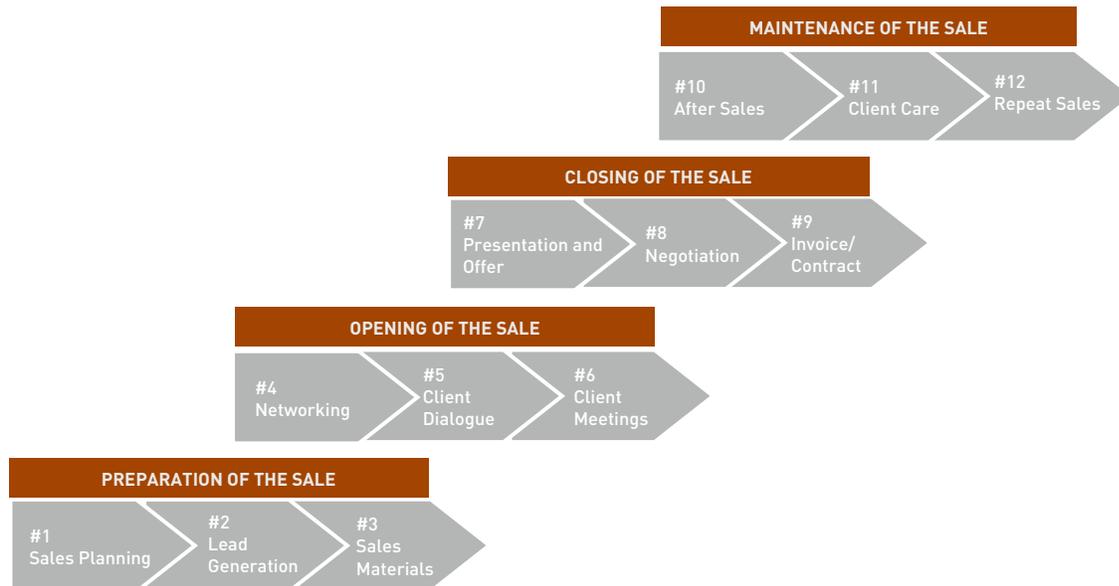
When developing our business, we need to look within ourselves to find out why we are unable to bring our businesses to the next level. This is also true when focusing on improving sales efforts. Our own mindset is often the greatest barrier we face in selling. When it comes to selling,

it is not uncommon to hear such comments as, “I am not a salesperson,” “I am not ready to sell yet,” or “I don’t feel like selling.”

When entrepreneurs say that they “are not salespeople,” the attitude rarely corresponds to reality. In actuality, entrepreneurs are typically the best salespeople for their products and services because they are naturally enthusiastic about them. Our enthusiasm and ability to inspire interest in our company are perhaps the most important sales techniques we possess. While we may be in the initial phases of offering a product or service, which does limit our ability to deliver, this still does not mean that we cannot begin the sales process.

Customer dialogue is especially valuable in the early stages of product development, when we can plant the seeds for long term customer relations in general. It is often our own personal limitations that prevent us from establishing contact with customers in the earliest stages of our business. We might tell ourselves that we “don’t feel like selling.” Underlying this statement may be an overall attitude of dislike for the stereotypical salesperson and a desire to

The Sales Chain: 12 tasks to be good at when selling



© 2005-2016 GrowthWheel International Inc. and David Madié

dissociate ourselves from this label. Perhaps, we prefer to see ourselves as creative product developers rather than as those sales types that push bad products on clueless people. It is, however, important to remember that good salespeople are people, who possess a strong interest in people and relations. A quality that is just as noble as being interested in gadgets or service concepts and one that is, in fact, critical when building long-lasting client relationships. One way to change your mindset concerning sales could be to look at it from a new perspective. All sales tasks consist of four very different phases. Surely, we are both competent and interested in the content of at least one of them.

These four phases in *the sales chain* (see model) illustrate the processes one is continuously involved in when selling. The sales chain also shows the different sales tasks connected with each phase and gives us the opportunity to examine, which of the tasks we find most appealing and for which we might need to get outside assistance. Selling is a trade that can be learned. To become good at selling, we just have to gain an overview of the tasks so that we can complete them one at a time.

The right preparation

The first phase of selling is *sales preparation*. What characterizes this phase is that we do not yet have contact with the customer, but are focusing on the important prep

work that prepares us for selling. The sales tasks involved here include: choosing the right client segments, generating lists of potential customers, and preparing sales material to be used for meetings, etc.

The preparation for sales is characterized by a high degree of desk work and is therefore one of the sales related tasks some entrepreneurs feel is easier to take on than actual sales. Perhaps, with proper preparation, we can even gain some of the energy and self-confidence that encourages us to seek clients more actively.

The initial contact with clients

The second phase of selling is *the opening sale*, characterized by being an outgoing and investigative process. The sales task here is to engage yourself in various networking activities and to forge relations that open doors and provide the introduction to potential clients. Other sales

tasks in this phase, include client dialogues through sales letters and personal calls with the intention of ultimately

scheduling a meeting in which further discussion about working together can take place.

Some entrepreneurs consider the opening sale the easiest part of the selling process, because the job of convincing the client has not yet begun. For others, it is precisely this initial contact that is difficult. Some find it easier to establish a

“When developing our business, we need to look within ourselves to find out why we are unable to bring the business to the next level.”

SALES PHASE	SALES TASK	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES
PREPARATION OF THE SALE	SALES PLANNING	Analysis of alternative customer groups Market analysis / customer interview Prioritizing
	LEAD GENERATION	Online research Database maintenance Buying of names / contact details
	SALES MATERIALS	Making client presentations Working on texts for website or brochure Collecting customer references / testimonials
OPENING OF THE SALE	NETWORKING	Network and conference participation Word of mouth marketing Lunch dates
	CLIENT DIALOGUE	Telemarketing Personal calls Sales letters and emails
	CLIENT MEETINGS	Planning visits and confirming meetings Agenda and preparation for meetings Summaries of meetings
CLOSING OF THE SALE	PRESENTATION AND OFFER	Job / delivery description Calculations and pricing Making offer letters and attachments
	NEGOTIATION	Preparation of sales arguments Negotiating Preparation of contract draft
	INVOICE/CONTRACT	Sending order confirmation Specification of invoice Making sales contract
MAINTENANCE OF THE SALE	AFTER SALES	Sending documentation Service arrangements Installation / educational activities
	CLIENT CARE	Evaluation process Cooperation meetings Periodical information / newsletters
	REPEAT SALES	Presentation Identifying customer needs Long-term cooperation agreement

dialogue later and allow someone else to make the initial customer contact.

Getting the order

The third phase involves tasks that are related to concluding or *closing a sale*. It is here that people, less comfortable with initiating a sale, feel most at home. The sales task in this phase involves preparing oral or written presentations that address the clients needs and spark their interest in an offer. Furthermore, it includes the task of negotiating the order, which requires a good number of skills such as being able to

find good ways of presenting the right sales arguments. Finally, another aspect of getting an order is to ensure that the client accepts an invoice, an order confirmation or maybe even a required sales contract.

If you are an entrepreneur, who likes to deliver the goods, you will probably be very good at this part of the sale. An important aspect of this phase is to communicate professional competence to inspire the customer's trust.

Building up strong relations

The fourth and last main phase in The Sales Chain deals with *sales maintenance*. This phase is not about establishing new client relations, but rather, about keeping and expanding relations with existing clients. The tasks involved, in this phase, can include after sales services such as documentation and education. It may also include client services that ensure quality collaboration and keep the client informed, while providing the best possible grounds for further sales.

The responsibility of maintaining existing client relations is probably the sales task that is least intimidating to entrepreneurs, who do not consider themselves good salespeople. At this point, the client relationship is established and we find that we are natural salespeople, because we are doing what we are most passionate about, namely developing and delivering our products and services to our customers. However, to become truly competent salespeople, we must take the necessary steps to master the full sales process, which leads up to this phase.

Competent sales

If we want to improve our company's ability to sell, we need to identify and strengthen the weakest link in our sales chain. We may, for example, feel that we are good at closing a deal, but need someone else to initiate the opportunity or that we are good at establishing the initial contact, but need someone else, who can focus on all the details, to define a deal and prepare a contract.

In a situation where there are several partners in the business, you might be so lucky that your partner

compliments your strengths and that the roles can be divided. In a one-person business, you might conclude that your business either requires one or two partners, or, that it is necessary to employ salespeople, who can take over or initiate certain sales tasks.

A trade that can be learned

As we have seen, there are many different sales tasks in each of the four sales phases that we must tackle repeatedly, not always in the same order. Each of these tasks are quite different in nature and appeals to people with different temperaments.

Fortunately, selling is a trade, and familiarizing ourselves with the different tasks will allow us to throw ourselves into them and improve along the way. If we start by focusing on the sales tasks we are most interested in, we can begin to identify with the role of salesperson – even if we initially did not.

Suggestions for the next step

- Find out which sales tasks you would like to get started with. Get inspiration in the chart following and remember, you do not always have to do them all.
- Plan actions and initiatives that can help establish the sales skills that you lack in your business right now.
- Decide on the next step to get going with some of the sales tasks you do not prioritize today.

© 2005-2016 GrowthWheel International Inc. and David Madié