



4

**Personal
Selling**

**START
MODULE**

4 Personal Selling

“Everyone lives by selling something”
Robert Louis Stevenson

The most important aspect of running your business is selling. A marketing plan may help you to think about your overall approach to marketing and may focus your mind by setting targets. But to achieve sales:

You need to communicate effectively.

You need to know the message that you wish to communicate to potential customers.

In many cases, you need to complete the sale through personal contact.

That will require, particularly for new businesses, a high level of personal selling. Unless you already have experience of selling you may find this uncomfortable but, like everything else in business, you will find that success comes quickly with practice.

Selling can be likened to fishing in that it requires the same preparation and care:

	Fishing	Selling
Potential	Must be fish in the pool	Must have potential customers
Equipment	Must have the right bait Must have the right rods and line	Must have good product Must have samples and literature
Temperament	Must have patience	Must have patience
Sensitivity	Must know when to strike a catch	Must know when to close the sale

There are four major tasks in the process of selling:

1. Prospecting and generating sales leads
2. Communicating the message
3. Negotiating and closing
4. Follow-up

Prospecting and Generating Sales Leads

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The first and crucial step in selling is to identify potential customers. Even when you already have customers or leads, it is vital that you continue to develop further leads. You can do this in the following ways:

- Prospect Initiated** Includes leads gathered when prospects initiate contact, such as when they fill out a website form, or respond to an advertisement.
- Profile Fitting** Uses market research tools, such as company profiles, to locate leads based on customers that fit a particular profile likely to be a match for the company's products. The profile is often based on the profile of previous customers.
- Market Monitoring** Leads are obtained by monitoring media outlets, such as news articles, Internet forums and corporate press releases.
- Canvassing** Leads are gathered by cold-calling (i.e., contacting someone without pre-notification) including in-person, by telephone or by email.
- Data Mining** This method uses sophisticated software to evaluate information (e.g., in a corporate database) previously gathered by a company in the hope of locating prospects.
- Personal and Professional Contacts** A very common method for locating sales leads uses referrals. Such referrals may come at no cost to the salesperson or, to encourage referrals, salespeople may offer payment for referrals. Non-paying methods include Asking acquaintances (e.g. friends, business associates) and networking (e.g. social media, joining local or professional groups and associations). Paid method may include payment to others who direct leads that eventually turn into customers, including using Internet affiliate programs (i.e., paid for website referrals).
- Promotions** For example, using free gifts to encourage prospects to provide contact information or attend a sales meeting.

You should analyse the quality of your prospects by financial ability, volume of business, location etc.

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Communicating the Message

You will need to communicate information to existing and potential buyers about your businesses' products and services and, in particular, your unique selling point (USP). You should learn as much as possible about potential buyers in advance. You should consider the approach and strategy for your visit, that is, your opening lines, responses, follow up remarks, etc.

You should be pleasant, confident and of neat appearance, trying to build a friendly (but not too familiar) relationship with the buyer. After the initial period of getting acquainted, you should attempt to relate your products to the buyer's requirements. The aim is to demonstrate how your product can satisfy the buyers' needs, that is, covering the features but concentrating on selling the benefits.

If you are visiting prospective customers, samples are a must. These should be perfect in every way. Similarly, you should have literature about your product or service which is clean, bright and without too much information. The literature which you must leave at every call or post/email to every sales contact should have a number of basic items, preferably on one page:

1. Company name.
2. What the company does or makes.
3. The address.
4. Telephone, e-mail and mobile numbers if applicable.
5. The USPs of the product or service.
6. Price, where possible or practical.
7. Business hours, where applicable.
8. Invitation to contact or call.
9. Include images where possible. It is said, 'one picture is worth a thousand words'.
10. A promotional word or phrase where applicable: new, special, unique, original, introductory offer, free quotation without obligation, free fitting etc.

Advertising can be costly and any business advertising for the first time will need to consider carefully the most cost effective form of advertising. A suitable budget should be built into the business plan and its use monitored carefully for effectiveness and control.

The advent of the Internet has created opportunities to advertise your products and/or services on a global scale.

A creative approach to how you utilise social media, for example, can be effective as regards both reach and cost.

Negotiating and Closing

Selling will be far easier if you develop effective negotiating skills, as will, for example, buying, discussing employees' wages etc. Negotiations should be collaborative and constructive, satisfying both parties. If one party 'wins' at the other's expense, this may jeopardise further business opportunities. Negotiating skills can be learned and improved through practice.

There are five essential stages in the negotiating process:

- Prepare.** Objectives must be specific, achievable and measurable. You must have a clear idea of what you want from the other party, you must be realistic and you must be able to assess how well you've done. Gather as much information as possible about the subject to be negotiated before you start.
- Discuss.** This is the process of exploring each party's needs, starting with tentative opening offers. If both parties are co-operative, progress can be made; if one side is competitive, problems may arise. Analyse the other party's reaction to what you say.
- Propose.** This is the stage where you are giving and receiving proposals and suggestions; remember to trade things, not just to concede them. You'll find this phrase invaluable, 'If you give (give us something), then we'll (give something)'. The face to face sales interview with a potential buyer is the most important part of the whole marketing function. It is at this point that your product or service is scrutinised by the person who can, with the right decision in your favour, make the all important contribution to your business; that is, orders, for without orders there is no business.
- Bargain.** After discussing each other's requirements and exchanging information, the bargaining can start. Generally speaking, you receive more if you ask for more. If conflict arises at this point, indicate that your opening offer is not necessarily what you will finally accept. When your offer is made, state this clearly. If you use words like 'approximately' or 'about', an experienced negotiator can challenge on a number of issues and change your offer dramatically.
- Agreement.** When the presentation is complete and all the questions dealt with, a sale must be closed and an order taken. This is usually the part that most people find difficult. You lack confidence in yourself or your own product, feel guilty about asking for an order, or perhaps you do not recognise the right moment to close the sale. Recognising this moment usually comes with experience, or with training, and normally includes the buyer's physical actions, comments and questions. Do not start bargaining again.

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Follow-up

It is always good business practice to follow up a sales call, whether successful or not, with an email or letter of thanks, restating the main points you made and confirming any arrangements or promises made. Having the agreement in writing is better than a handshake on the deal. The correspondence should mention the following:

The terms of the agreement.
The names of those involved.
The prices mentioned plus discounts etc.
Individual responsibilities.
Time schedules and any deadlines agreed.

You should also schedule a follow up call after the initial order to make sure there are no problems and assure the buyers of your interest and service.

Finally, enjoy the thrill of writing orders. It is a great feeling and it is the road to profit and business success.

The information contained in this document is for guidance only and should not be relied on without obtaining appropriate advice. The information is not intended to render legal advice and is general information only.