

A SALES STRATEGY THAT WORKS!

BY JOHN GRAHAM

**The most successful sales strategy
creates an environment that makes customers
want to seek you out.**

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Trying to get fish into the boat *before* catching them sounds crazy, something that wouldn't make sense to experienced fishermen. Even so, it's the most common error salespeople make, and it accounts – more than anything else – for lost orders and prospects never becoming customers. That's what happens when you try to get the order *before* you have a customer.

What salespeople do makes perfect sense to them. Unfortunately, it doesn't compute so well with their prospects and customers. They are so focused on mak-

ing the sale, they don't think about what the customer may be thinking. What they often say tells real the story. They like to brag about "wrestling the big one," even though "the big one" often gets away.

Here's the point: getting the fish in the boat is the wrong analogy to use in sales, even though it sounds somewhat macho and even a bit romantic.

The sales task is totally different. *The job is creating an environment so that customers will decide to do business with you.* If this is ac-

curate, then pushing for a meeting, getting a proposal out the door or anything else that attempts to cut short the process, more often than not, ends in disaster: a lost sale.

For selling to work well today, the prospect must first say, "This is the person and company I want to do business with." In fact, making sure this occurs is the salesperson's primary task. This is the difference between the traditional salesperson and one who understands today's selling environment.

Here are some thoughts on how to improve your selling

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record by being a magnet for prospects and customers.

The wrong talk can spring a trap. Incredible as it may seem, salespeople fall into the trap of talking about what *they* think is important – and it's fatal. Here's an example. A media rep called and said, "I think our station is a really good fit for your client. Perhaps we could get together and talk about it." I responded by suggesting that before we do that, it would be helpful if she would e-mail her analysis of why she thought her station was "a good fit."

Shortly, an e-mail with her answer arrived – which, even though she didn't realize it, triggered the trap. She was so intent on getting the sale, she failed to ask about our client's target customer. None of her comments was even remotely a close fit. When I pointed that out, she replied, "I still think it's a good fit." The sale was dead on arrival.

"Let's be sure we get our name out there." This may have been all it took some years ago, but it is not true today, whether it's an individual, a product or a company. If just getting your name out there could do the job, then Toyota would be selling more vehicles than ever, and Tiger Woods would be the world's most prominent celebrity, bar none.

Being known isn't what's important. What adds to your pa-

nache and builds credibility are the qualities you want to be known for. What's important for Nordstrom isn't the name; it's the link to extraordinary customer service that makes the store unique.

In a radio ad, a financial advisor says he was named "the number-one advisor in the country" by a highly regarded financial magazine. That phrase is a differentiator that separates him from the pack.

What you want the customer to think about when they see your name is the critical question.

Subterfuges make customers angry. Some marketers may think it's "cool" to trick people. It isn't. You might request an article or a report, but before the article arrives and certainly before you have a chance to read it, you find yourself sliding down a sales track at full speed. Such tricks only serve one purpose: to undermine the credibility and integrity of the company making the offer. Yes, the tactic may help grab a few sales, but it will alienate far more prospects.

Watch out for the early adopters. It's long been thought that getting the early adopters on board has enormous value and sets the pace for success. Whether it's opening a restaurant, launching a product or initiating a service, the steeper the better. And it actually seems to make sense, doesn't it?

Well, it might be a good idea to

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consider another view. Researchers Jonah Berger of the Wharton School and Gaël Le Mans of Barcelona Universitat Pompeu Fabra have shown that the “velocity of the adoption may affect the abandonment.” In other words, early adoption can result in a product or company becoming a “flash in the pan,” which can depress the interest of others and help something die out faster.

The early adopter concept has interesting implications when prospecting for customers. Trying to move the process along too quickly may undermine your chances of getting an order or keeping one. Pushing too fast or

too hard may damage relationships, whereas calculated or sustained persistence may produce more solid and longer-term results.

Don't let a lack of vision kill your business. It's easy to get clobbered by what we don't know. Before Apple launched the iPod almost a decade ago, there were dire predictions of its failure because no one would actually buy songs. It was the same story before the iPhone arrived: specifically, that it would be barred from enterprise. It was – until employees revolted and demanded that it be available to them.

Now, we hear it all again with

the launch of Apple's iPad. Predictions of failure are everywhere. As one owner of a small company selling management software systems said, “Even if there were no other issue with it, the most important reason I can't justify it for my employees, or my clients' employees, is that there's no ROI.” This was written eight weeks before the iPad arrived in the stores! Again, history will repeat itself.


Apple hits the target better than any other company because it's immersed in helping people do more of what they want with their lives. It's a good lesson for anyone in marketing or sales. It isn't the gadget that's important; it's what it allows people to do that creates satisfaction and passion.

If you want the sale, lay the groundwork. Leadership in sales is not a matter of push. Instead, it's a process of pulling the prospect in closer and closer. Even though selling is clearly a strategic activity, most salespeople seem to treat it as opportunistic. In other words, they fail to lay the groundwork that increases the probability of getting the order.

Whether its B2C or B2B, the “gotta have it” mentality is gone. No one wants to be taken for a sucker. No one wants to make a mistake. Even so, salespeople want to clear the way to get the order now.

A marketing executive contacted the regional rep of a well-known national direct mail company regarding a campaign for a client, providing the requested initial information. A couple of days later, back came a proposal, much to the executive's surprise. It was like going from zero to 60 mph in three seconds. Then after a week or so of silence, the prospect emailed the rep, “We'll take a pass.” The sales rep lacked a plan to

turn the lead into a sale, as well as enthusiasm to do so. There was no effort to engage the prospect. What could have been a significant order for the rep was lost.

The point is simply that getting the fish in the boat is the easy part. Creating the desire in customers to do business with you takes far more insight and skill. 



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