

Selling Creatively

The talent of a sales team can make all the difference, adding to a company's bottom line and driving value (which is typically influenced by sales volume). With all this at stake the approach a company takes to sales needs to be strategic, structured, and effective, and marked by sales people who are motivated, passionate, and knowledgeable. Establishing this type of sales force requires a commitment to training, excellent compensation models, and a willingness to get creative.

Before we explore the elements of a creative selling approach it is necessary to review the need for selecting the right type of sales team. While training is essential and a fundamental driver for the success of your sales effort, the disposition of your individual sales people and the dynamics of how they interact will also have a tremendous influence over your success. There are three types of sales person, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. It is not Tudog's position to assume a preference for one type over another, but rather to merely point out the differences. Some sales managers will like to have all of one type, while others might like a balanced mix. Either approach is legitimate depending on the dynamics of the company. Knowing the three types, however, brings you to the position where you can make an assessment based on this understanding. The three types are:

- Sales Service – this is an individual who typically interacts with the public and is there primarily to answer questions. The person is not charged with “selling” in the sense that they are not positioned to be persuasive, but more as a service.
- Sales Advisor – this is an individual charged with a bit more of direct sales responsibility. Also generally interactive with customers, this individual is placed as an advisor to customers who may be unsure of their options. This person needs to be a bit more capable of making buying suggestions, although they too are not mandated with the responsibility to seek out customers. Rather, they are there to interact with customers who arrive on their own accord.
- Sales Recruiter – this is an individual charged with seeking out and securing customers. The most aggressive and active of the three sales types, this individual must be able to profile and identify potential customers, gain access, develop a trusting relationship, and then secure and maintain the sale. This person is typically the better compensated of the three types, but also subject to the greatest levels of pressure.

With the understanding of the three types of sales person in mind, let's review the 6 elements that comprise creative selling. They are:

1. Training – before you send your sales team into the market to recruit and secure customers you need to make sure that they are completely trained in all aspects of the company, its products, its philosophies, and its policies. Your sales force is your face to your industry and how they represent the company must be consistent with the marketing claims your company is communicating. You must make sure that every sales person is fully versed in policies regarding product warranties, product specs and operation, and compatibility with other components. Also, your sales people need to know their customers, with a complete understanding of the market and who it is they are interacting with as well as everything there is to know about your competitors and their products. You don't let a sales person into the field until he/she has mastered all there is to know.

2. Profiling – the wait-and-see approach to selling usually does not lead to a maximizing of revenues. Therefore, a sales team needs to go into the market and draw the customer to the company. For this to be successful the sales team needs to be able to identify prospects and provide them with the compelling reasons to buy. The successful profile is born of a good understanding of the market (which is why it is the step after training) and the needs that are not being met.

3. Breaking the Ice – by understanding the market the sales person can identify which prospects are in need of assistance, and then they can use that need as the way to break the ice and initiate a dialogue with the target customer. In doing this, the company is beginning the relationship both with a compelling offer and as an expert seeking to serve and assist the prospect.

4. Product Introduction – introducing the product to the potential customer is a critical step in the sales cycle. The manner in which the product is described, the way it is positioned, the way questions are answered, and the structured of the offer all have tremendous impact on whether or not the sale is going to be secured. The trick is to be as focused on possible on benefits, ease of use, cost effectiveness, and how the product is a must-have (as opposed to a nice-to-have). If you can communicate these messages while being viewed (by the customer) as someone who is knowledgeable and sincerely interested in the needs of the company, there is an excellent chance your meeting will lead to another.

5. Closing the Sale – the close of the sale will most likely not occur at the initial meeting. In many cases the decision requires a series of meetings. At each you must maintain the same helpful posture, resisting the urge to sell harder. At the close you must make sure that you are flexible enough to engage in whatever negotiations are required. Also you must make sure that the structure of the deal you are offering is consistent with the types of structures the prospect is used to signing.

6. Maintaining the Customer – the sale is never the end of the sale. Once you have sold a customer the creative sales team views the close as the beginning of a relationship. The maintenance of the relationship will lead to additional sales in the future, without the need to go through the steps 1-3. The preservation of a good relationship will mean access whenever you have something new to introduce, as well as the trust to be able to suggest a purchase without the suspicion that you are trying to push a sale.

Creative selling is not about graphics and fancy messages. It's about fundamentals and execution. It's about knowledge and building trust. These are creative because not enough sales people practice them. Today the sales game is typically about numbers and playing the odds – hit enough potential customers and ultimately you'll make a sale. The time and cost are irrelevant because the sales forces are all 100% commission based and the company has nothing to lose. Of course this is incorrect because the company has plenty to lose, like reputation and time in the market. But the new sales people are less concerned as long as they are hitting their "numbers". Yet by selling creatively you'll not only hit and exceed your numbers, you'll do so faster, easier, and with a reputation that is admired, respected and sought after.