

SALES

Connect with your audience and win more business

By Michael DeVenney

IN SALES ONE NUMBER MATTERS MOST—your closing rate. Your success in sales depends on your ability to convert prospects to clients. It's as simple as that.

Simple but certainly not easy—and getting harder all the time. It seems like a vice closing on you. Research shows more is expected (quotas for salespeople have risen 20 per cent in the past two years alone), less resources are available to win the business and prospects are taking more time to decide (the average sales cycle has lengthened by almost 30 per cent in the past 20 years).

That's why you need to sell smarter, not harder.

Yet that doesn't seem to be happening. Closing rates are continuing to decline with 8 per cent fewer prospects converting to clients this year than in the previous year. What is behind the continued decline in closing?

We were recently interested in finding a company for our web business. A perky salesperson bounded through the door, shook my hand and exclaimed excitedly, "Do I have the solution for you!" Actually, no he didn't—he didn't even know me. His sale was done before it even started.

Our belief is that salespeople are not connecting to their audience. Rather than focusing on what is most important to their clients, we see salespeople focusing on their products and services. It isn't about how much you know about your product, it's about how much you know about your client.

A recent study outlined that 83 per cent of lost sales are the result of five key factors—all related to the connection with the prospect.

1. Salespeople don't follow the prospect's buying process—they follow their sales process.

2. Salespeople don't listen to the prospects' needs—they talk about their product or service and overwhelm them with information.



3. Salespeople don't follow-up—they expect the prospects to know and take the next step.

4. Salespeople don't wait—they are aggressive or desperate for the business before the prospect is ready to decide.

5. Salespeople don't explain the solution—they just talk about the features and hope the prospect understands how it solves their problem.

Finding, winning and retaining business is about building on your natural selling advantage while understanding what your prospect's natural buying initiative is. Maximizing your closing rate depends on connecting your advantage with your prospect's initiative.

We see successful sales achievers using five fundamental steps to maximize their closing rates and win in sales.

- First and foremost, successful salespeople know their selling advantage. Sales is a set of skills we can all learn, but we achieve success based on applying our own natural advantage for sales. Rather than going against the current, you learn to go with the flow and sell naturally. Profile your natural sales advantage.

- Understand your prospect's buying


process. Prospects have a profile for how they make decisions, the criteria that are most important to them and the steps they follow to take action. A series of questions can quickly put you in sync with your prospect's buying process and work successfully to help them reach the right decision. Ask first, sell later.

- Know your competitive advantage. You need to be able to provide a solution that is clear, consistent and measurable and most importantly connect to your prospects. Prospects need to understand that you not only connect with their situation but can provide a tangible solution for them.

- Following up is vital. Prospects don't call you or get back to you because you haven't given them a compelling reason. You need to give them a reason and a clear next step. Ask for it—they may just say yes.

- Track and follow your progress. Results are not the only part of the equation. Sadly, most salespeople measure only results and lose the full perspective of what is happening in each meeting from initial contact to client. When you track your progress throughout the sales cycle you can quickly and specifically see what is working and where help is needed. Rather than waiting until you win or fail, you can refine your approach along the way and increase your success.

It may seem oxymoronic but to increase your closing rate you need to slow down. You win more business by taking the time to connect with your prospect. Using your natural advantage for sales with your buyer's natural buying process maximizes your closing rate.

Brilliance, desperation, charm—they are not enough. The sale is not about you—take the time to connect with your prospect and close the sale. 

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