

Sell Sheet



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BY RICK DAVIS



Sales 101

IF YOU APPROACH **PROSPECTING** AS A DISCIPLINED SCIENCE, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER.

Too many people believe that selling is an art form, an inherited talent to schmooze with people. It is true that some selling skills are "art;" however, many others are pure "science." When you can recognize the difference, you quickly discover that the best way to

build your career is to first approach selling as a discipline, just as a great painter must first learn the skill of brushstrokes, perspective, and composition before painting the first masterpiece.

Similarly, prospecting skills fall into the category of science and, when

mastered, they make the art of selling much easier because they often can enable people of average talent to outperform even the most gifted salespeople. Yet way too many experienced salespeople remain without a reliable prospecting methodology. To them, prospecting feels like attending a "Sales 101" seminar, and they leave it for the rookies. But this is a huge mistake because prospecting *is* Sales 101, and without prospecting skills, the more advanced skill sets of qualifying, presenting, and closing have no foundation upon which to build.

The four most important prospecting skills are appointment scheduling, database management, territory management, and prospect rating. A salesperson that develops a prospecting methodology they can rely on creates a foundation that solidifies their career path.

Appointment Scheduling

The first lesson in prospecting is appointment scheduling. Whether it is meeting over the phone or a face-to-face encounter, an appointment requires a planned time. Many salespeople troll aimlessly through their territories hoping to "catch the decision-maker" waiting in the office, as if a chance meeting will somehow result in a positive discussion. Don't fall into this mode, because success rates rise dramatically, as much as triple your productivity in my estimate, when planned meetings take place.

Therefore, a "cold call" should be defined as a contact with the intention of scheduling an appointment. Even when a cold call occurs as a physical visit to a prospect, proper decorum requires that the salesperson not

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impose or interrupt someone's day. In this case, all too often a salesperson selfishly assumes that because he or she has arrived at the office the prospect should gladly take time for a handshake, coffee, a product dissertation, and a few jokes.

Database Management

Many salespeople don't adequately and systematically manage the abundance of information available to them. As a result, poor database management skills are perhaps the most astounding failure of salespeople in the 21st century. Yet there are numerous software programs available on the market to facilitate basic database management skills (e.g., Act!, Goldmine, Dbase, Outlook, etc.) And if those programs don't suffice, a simple filing system can be just as effective.

A great Sales Leader recognizes that knowledge is power and that his or her leverage in the marketplace is founded on the ability to know the *business* details of customers and prospects. Many salespeople will proudly boast of their ability to remember personal information about prospects such as hobbies, birthdays, and



spouses' names, but they fail to recognize that it is more important to understand the business issues such as the customers' market challenges, operational methods, and their decision-making processes.

You need to build a database that includes a separate record for each prospect and customer (database record, profile

sheet, index card, or whatever system you use) to highlight both personal and business information, plus basic information, including name, company name, address, phone numbers, etc.

Database methodology must become a priority in your career. Your filing system should be updated daily and it should include prospects and customers in the same physical location or computer file. Most importantly, you must use only one database method. I've seen salespeople create multiple databases, keeping business cards wrapped in rubber bands (eventually to be entered into the database when procrastination is overcome), while using a computer database for customers and a folder with prospect information written on beverage napkins. A system like this is doomed to create confusion and inefficiency. Thus, create one database that you update daily.

Territory Management

Building a high-quality database is the means—not the end—to a successful sales career. The purpose of a database is to create ready-made productivity in your career. For it to be effective, however, you need to *use* the information, not just *have* the information. For example, part of your database record should reference the zone of your territory where each

customer or prospect is located. If you first sort by zone and then alphabetically, you can avoid useless windshield time and create instant productivity because you can quickly reference your database records to locate a potential prospect or customer to contact (for a cold call) when there is a lull in your daily activity.

Keep in mind that your time is easily valued when you divide your annual sales by the number of sales calls you make. If you sell \$2,000,000 while making 20 sales calls per week (1,000 per year), then you are worth \$2,000 per sales call (\$2,000,000/1,000). If you want to increase your sales, the easiest method is to find time to make more sales calls. Using this example, one more sales call per day could be worth \$500,000 in a given year with 250 selling days (250 x \$2,000 = \$500,000). Can you see the science emerging?

Prospect Rating

If you want to take this science to a higher level, begin to rate your customers and prospects based upon their *potential* profitability. At first, this seems difficult. But when you learn to ask the right questions, you quickly discover that the value of a customer and/or prospect is very definable. For example, if a window salesperson meets a builder who constructs 15 houses per year (at an average size of 2,200 square feet) he probably knows that the builder will use approximately \$35,000 to \$40,000 in product (estimating 14 windows at \$150 plus 1 patio door at \$450).

Overall, the importance of rating your prospects has less to do with accuracy of valuation and more to do with time management. If you are not exactly sure of a

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prospect's potential profitability, it is not a big deal. Simply make some general estimates for the purpose of time management. Rate your customers and prospects using a simple system, such as A, B, C, and D. Grade A customers and prospects are the people you want to visit on a *frequent* basis. Grade B customers and prospects are bread-and-

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butter accounts to visit on a *regular* basis. Grade C accounts, lower-volume accounts or those that generate spikes in sales as a result of large, yet infrequent, purchases, are the types you may choose to manage on a project-specific basis, utilizing the phone to maximize your time management. Grade D



accounts probably are the ones you want to replace with better prospects.

Step by Step

Try the following steps to manage the science of prospecting effectively:

1. Choose the appropriate database management tool. Take some time to review the available software on the market, and decide which product will work best for you. Do not make the mistake of believing that the computer printout supplied by your employer qualifies as a "database." It is merely a list of names, probably in alphabetical order, with almost no qualitative information.

2. Write an efficient telemarketing phone script. The toughest phone call is always the first one. Many salespeople discover they have performance anxiety when it comes to making appointments over the phone. (Even with two decades of experience, at times I still need the crutch of a written script.) There is nothing worse than a salesperson who cannot get to the point, so write a script that is short and sweet. Your objective is to

get the appointment, and when you do, you are through! Do not try to qualify or present over the phone. Wait for the meeting.

3. Grow your database continually. Science requires systems and methods. If you are unwilling to constantly update the information in your database, then you need to rethink your commitment to prospecting. It is easy to manage existing customer relationships without a sophisticated database management system. If you are serious about growing your business, you need to con-

stantly cultivate your database information. When you get a referral, create a new record. When you meet a new prospect, create a new record. After a meeting, update your records. After a phone call, update your files. The longer you wait to enter valuable information, the more you will forget about your conversations.

4. Divide your territory into manageable zones. Most outside salespeople have territories that are 90 minutes or more in diameter. Therefore, it is essential to saturate each zone of the territory with numerous sales opportunities in order to maximize the value of time. Minimize your travel time in order to maximize your productivity.

5. Rate your prospects and customers. Given the choice between visiting a great prospect and a mediocre customer, you would probably opt to visit the great prospect. Yet most salespeople spend their entire careers driving past the offices and jobsites of great prospects. They fail to step outside their comfort zone, preferring to rely on the safe communication of existing customer relationships. If you use the rating system described

herein, you will discover that your database creates a visual tool of instant productivity. A quick glance at an "A" in your database reminds you to see a prospect frequently while you are in the area. If you are really prospecting aggressively (as you should be), you will hopefully discover that your database is constantly growing. In some metropolitan markets, it's not uncommon for a Sales Leader to retain up to 500 different records in his or her database.

Imagine how powerful it would feel to have detailed, qualitative information on that volume of business. Imagine how dif-

IF YOU WANT TO TAKE SALES SCIENCE TO A HIGHER LEVEL, BEGIN TO RATE YOUR CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS BASED UPON THEIR POTENTIAL PROFITABILITY.

icult it would be to remember all those details in your head. A rating system for customers and prospects provides a visual reference that may surprise you. Try it!

6. Travel smart. A salesperson who has a day with six high-quality meetings scheduled and clear intentions is more effective than a salesperson who randomly pops into eight offices for a few minutes of socializing. A salesperson that makes 25 phone calls (gaining eight appointments in the process) in one morning is infinitely more productive than a salesperson randomly driving by jobsites hoping to bump into a decision-maker.

Schedule as many appointments as possible every day, which will require using the phone to do so. But remember, while the quantity of your activity is important, it's not as important as the quality of your activity.

Of all the clichés that are spoken and ignored, perhaps the best is "Work smarter, not harder." Working "smart" means not confusing activity with productivity. Use the science of prospecting to manage your activity and watch your productivity grow. ■