



## Selling to Business: 5 More Tips

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In the last issue of Tech Line I offered five tips to help you sell your products or services to other businesses. In this issue I've got another five spot for you. But before I get into details, why bother? After all, selling is selling and marketing is marketing, right? Not really. It depends on what you're trying to sell.

Consider this: most marketing today is aimed at consumers, and by and large it's focused on commodity products and services that lend themselves to mass marketing. Athletic shoes, clothes, food, soda pop, beer, cars, restaurants, cleaning supplies all lend themselves to this kind of marketing. The sacred cow of mass marketing is branding, a method by which you get people to remember your company or product name.

Mass marketing also works for B2B (business to business) products as well, it's just incredibly expensive. Companies like IBM and Microsoft do this, but at their size it can be argued that it's not completely wasted, although I would argue that it benefits their ad agencies more than their shareholders.

For most small to mid-sized companies that *aren't* selling commodities, using traditional mass marketing techniques is inefficient. Targeted push marketing, where you drive a message and offer directly to those businesses that are a great match for your product or service, can yield a lower customer acquisition cost, reduced time to close, and more highly qualified leads.

### Tip No. 6: Aim at the Nearest Target

If you were standing on an archery range, would you aim at the targets farthest away? Or those obscured by trees or brush? Of course not. You'd shoot at the nearest target with a clear line of sight. Yet many people don't sell like this.

Some companies fire all their arrows in the air, thinking that in a target rich environment some will hit a bull's-eye somewhere. Others shoot at a near target, then a far one, then a small one, then a big one, with no rhyme or reason to their approach.

I'm always amazed by this approach to sales and marketing. If there are good visible targets in range, why waste precious arrows shooting at targets that will be harder to hit? How many times have you spent sales efforts on chasing a huge prospect that you had very little chance of landing, neglecting smaller winnable business at the same time?

There are un-obscured targets close enough to hit. To make sales truly efficient, spend your arrows on those, not the ones you can barely see.

### Tip No. 7: Get Your Anchor Down

Produce managers have known for years-and psychologists have proven-that if you price lemons at four for a dollar you'll sell more than if they are marked 25 cents each. The reason is that the quantity in the price (four) "anchors" the quantity in the buyer's mind. Anchors influence opinions up or down going forward.

Anchors aren't just for lemons: whatever first impression you make with a potential customer will anchor you and your company forever. Given a positive anchor, the same behavior will tend to create a more favorable reaction than if you start with a negative anchor.

### Tip No. 8: Keep it Simple

Recently I had a lengthy phone conversation with a prospect halfway around the world. The company indicated they had their marketing strategy figured out, and they only needed help with sales execution. But, they

admitted, sales were really tough and they didn't understand why. I asked what their value proposition was, and first the CEO responded for about five minutes, and then the second in command chipped in for another five. I told them that if they couldn't articulate what their company did and why it was interesting in about 10 words they probably hadn't really figured it out.

Most prospects won't wait for 10 minutes of explanation to decide if they should give you another 10 minutes. But if you can tell them in one sentence, they might decide to listen to another one.

During the Civil War, newspaper correspondents developed a story telling style as an insurance policy against the telegraph wires being cut while they were sending it back to the paper. It's still in use today. They would start with a simple statement of who, what, when, where, and why "After three days of bloodshed General Grant won a decisive battle over Lee outside the sleepy crossroads town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania." If only that one sentence got through, the reader would at least get the essence of what happened. The next paragraph would retell the story in more detail, and the next in more detail, and so forth. This also made it easy for the editors to cut the end off the story to fit the available space.

This is the way to tell your story. Start with a simple description of what you do, who would find it interesting, and why anyone would care. If you tell the right person about your business in that fashion, the best response you can hear is: "How do you do that?" That answer means you've hit pay dirt. The prospect wants to see evidence that it might work for them. "How do you do that?" gives you the opportunity to re-tell your story with more detail, just like those newspaper reporters from the Civil War. As the prospect becomes more engaged, there will be ample time for more and more detail.

### Tip No. 9: Don't Quit Too Soon

There's a fine line between persistence and delusion, and you have to know where it is. Take plenty of time and thought to develop the best strategy, and then give it time to work. Don't keep reinventing yourself on a weekly basis. But you have to know when you're throwing good money after bad. How can you tell?

The answer is progress. You have to set some progress goals and track them. If you're making satisfactory progress on key metrics—which should include sales volumes but should also include non-sales measures such as appointments, awareness indicators, etc.—keep going. It's easy to fall into the trap of deciding to open an office in New York in February and close it in May because there were no sales. But what other measurable

progress was made? Was it enough? Would it have led to sales? When?

One thing is for sure. Companies that continue changing their minds every day or week won't get anywhere. Give it some time.

### Tip No. 10: Work the Process

Sales is a process, and everyone knows it has steps. But many forget the purpose of step one is to advance to step two. And the purpose of step two is to get to step three, and so on until you get the check. If you know your process, and you work your process, you'll get to the sale.

People fall off the wagon a couple of ways here. First of all, they don't really have a process—each sales rep makes it up on their own. Sales may be the only department in most businesses where we don't expect people to adhere to corporate processes, but rather make it up on their own. Imagine if you did that in other departments like purchasing, engineering, and QA. It wouldn't make much sense, would it? Why does it make sense with sales? One of our senior consultants, Robin Samms, likes to point out that the sales playbook needs to be created by the company, not the sales rep, and then executed by the sales team. Getting it the other way around can lead to big trouble.

The second way people fall off the process wagon is by not tracking and managing the process. If you're not using some sort of tool to identify opportunities, track the sales process, record wins and losses and why, and compare forecasts to actual numbers, you're paddling upstream. Whether your company uses ACT!® or Siebel®, Microsoft Excel® or a white board, make it systematic and mandatory. You'll be glad you did.

So that's another five tips for selling to business. The thing to remember is that selling to business is just like selling to everyone else, except where it's different. If you can just keep that in mind, you'll do fine.



About the Author: John Browne is Founder and Managing Partner of Workpump Corporation, a Redmond, WA, based firm providing strategic marketing and sales assistance to B2B companies, with a strong focus on technology firms. John has spent over 25 years in the commercial software world, 11 of which were in executive management positions at Microsoft. For more information, contact John at 425-882-9971 or email him at [john@workpump.com](mailto:john@workpump.com).