5 steps to successful selling in a modern world
Sales people are often stereotyped for being too pushy, too arrogant and for constantly hassling you over the phone. But the face of sales is changing, and changing for the better.

In today’s modern world, classic sales techniques have quickly fallen by the way side, making way for the high tech, forward thinking and optimised sales forces of today.

Classic sales techniques are still successful and always will be, but looking to the next few years, the business world is poised to become more modern, more switched on and more advanced, and that means that sales techniques must be too.

In Five Steps to Successful Selling in a Modern World, we reveal the five best methods for closing a sale in today’s competitive business landscape:

1. Retention, retention, retention
2. Be social
3. Remember the importance of data
4. Utilise technology
5. Encourage a successful sales culture
Retention, retention, retention

Customer retention and customer satisfaction are more important than ever. If you are of the thinking that the only way to grow business is by acquiring new customers, then you are wrong. We all know, or at least we are all told, that it is 6 to 7 times harder to convert a new customer than to sell to an existing one. Account management and customer retention is one of the most important aspects of the sales process and an integral facet for every single business.

There are only so many customers in your target market, so every one you keep hold of will be one less for your competitors.

All customers are equal right?

Wrong.

All of your customers are important, there is no doubting that. But they are not necessarily equal. One customer might have an average spend reaching tens of thousands, whereas another may only spend a few hundred pounds/dollars with you every few months. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to know which customer is more important. Of course, you should be concentrating a larger portion of your time on keeping your most profitable customers, happy.
Providing added value is one of the best ways to retain a customer. As a representative of your company, you are the expert. You know your product or service better than anyone. It is essential that your customers view you as such, even as an extension of their operation. Your responsibility isn’t just to sell to these customers, but to solve customer issues and add value at every available opportunity. Tell them about any new products that may be coming soon, relevant business statistics and what your other customers are doing. Not only will you be adding value to your service but also raising your profile and setting their mind at rest when it comes to re-ordering from you.

It is vital that you become more valuable to your customer than the pound or dollar they spend with you. This is especially important if your customer only buys one product from you or you only have one product line. Adding value where you can, becoming more than what you sell will make the decision to replace you as a supplier very tough.

You’re in the know

Know your Pareto split:

Knowing who your key customers are is so important. You need to know your Pareto split. That is the 20% of your customer base that generates 80% of your business. Of course, you should be focusing more of your time on your most profitable customers. Take the time to work out who your top customers are.
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Be social

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Social media can be one of the best resources to garner unique insights into leads and can help you to make a more memorable first contact.

Taking the time to investigate leads, companies, and individuals can lead you to uncover crucial information on them, meaning you can optimise your time as a salesperson and make every call count.

Cold calling is swiftly becoming a thing of the past thanks to social networking. Getting leads to be more receptive can be a huge boost in your prospecting, so reference any mutual connections or simply ask them for an introduction. It isn’t rocket science knowing that a warm referral is likely to increase sales success. The power here sits with social media and its ability to quickly transform a cold call into a warm lead.
Sales 2.0

Sales 2.0 is one of the newest terms in the sales arena, and will probably become one of the most influential going forward. Coined back in 2007, the term ‘Sales 2.0’ captures the concept of taking sales to ‘the next level’ using online tools to boost sales performance. Sales 2.0 has cemented the developing relationship between salespeople and social media. The social tools at your disposal aren’t necessarily a way of generating leads, but a way of speaking directly to them.

Sales 2.0 is essentially a way of improving and accelerating the sales process, helping salespeople to define and target who to call, when to call and what to say.

Not only does Sales 2.0 benefit the seller, but also the customer. Buyers are increasingly a force to be reckoned with and are better informed today than ever before. With the incredible amount of instant information available to them online, prospects are able to self-educate and understand products and services before engaging with a salesperson.

How does this benefit you as a salesperson? It means sales cycles are shortened and prospects are educated and qualified before that first call is made. Qualifying the lead becomes a swift task and more prospects are sales ready by the time you reach out to them (or they reach out to you).

- 93% of marketers use social media for business
- 2 new members join LinkedIn every second
- 50% of Internet users have an active Facebook account
- 67% more leads from B2B marketers from using blogs
- 2.9bn hours spent on YouTube per month
- 190 million tweets are sent per day
Data drives pretty much everything we do in today’s business world. From sales figures and invoices to customer information and contracts. It is behind everything you could think of. Undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges in any business is managing, analysing and using the endless stores of data in a way that is both useful and efficient. Yet, despite the masses of data that is available at your fingertips, the time and effort involved in interpreting it has become difficult in recent years.

So, getting down to Big Data. In non-techy, human language Big Data means the growth and availability of huge quantities of information that traditional methods just cannot analyse. About 90 percent of all data generated is unstructured. In other words it doesn’t fit into an existing database. With data this vast you could make strategic business decisions if it is analysed correctly and put into a simpler format.

We have always had a lot of data, but today’s advances in technology means that it is now simplified and more easily accessible. We are still dealing with a lot of data; in fact, we are dealing with more data than we have ever had, varying in type and format. Over 90% of the world’s data was created in the last two years so it is no wonder that we are a data-rich world today.

When used correctly, data can pose a huge advantage to businesses of any size, in any industry.

Data in business

Let’s just take a moment and really think about it. There are companies today that are able to process data at an incredible rate. Back in 2008, Google was processing 20 petabytes of data per day, while Walmart handles 1 million customer transactions every hour and more than 5 billion people are calling, texting, tweeting and browsing on mobile phones at any one time. So processing and analysing data is definitely achievable, despite it seeming like a huge task.

With business intelligence software, data becomes the gateway to an easy sell. Presenting your customer’s sales data in one easy to use interface can make light work of identifying additional sales opportunities, finding out where any accounts may be slipping or where your competitors may be taking business from you. Data can really open your eyes to your business and your customer’s performance.

When used properly, data can supercharge any sales operation. Working together with your marketing team, you can send out personalised, targeted promotions and campaigns to a particular segment of your customers or prospects.

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Remember the importance of data
Quality data means quality results: there is little point in creating the world’s best advertising campaign if your data is a mess. Taking the time to cleanse your data, tidy it up and ensure it is up to date will make sure your campaigns are well received by the people who you want to see it.

Customer data is king: if you are a salesperson or marketing guru, a CRM system should rule your world. Every account interaction should be recorded, whether it is a prospect you are chasing or latest new customer based in the middle of nowhere.

Visualise your data to make it tangible: being bombarded with spreadsheets and endless rows of data is no one’s idea of a good time. Visualisation is the best way for us humans to understand data. Rows and rows of data aren’t quite as pretty as graphs, charts and infographics.

More data means more security: it’s a no brainer. The more data your business has, the more secure it needs to be. The Cloud is probably one of the most secure places to store your data today. With a home in some of the most obscure parts of the world, safely away from prying eyes, flood plains and even flight paths, your data can travel the world in seconds.
We all know the saying, “you need the right tools for the job”, and in the sales world, this is particularly relevant. We need the right technology, the right equipment and the right manpower to get the job done correctly and efficiently. In a sales environment, we are always striving to hit our numbers, to top last month and to chase down the competition.

Yet all too often, the provision of tools for a salesperson is overlooked. But, if these tools will help us to sell smarter, more efficiently and profitably, surely they are worth investing in?

**Utilise technology**

Sales tools can encompass anything from the latest business intelligence and CRM solutions to online meeting software or electronic contract signing mobile apps. Implementing tools and technology across your sales operation can help your business have a better relationship with your customers, building trust and increasing the amount of face time you have with them.

The addition of sales tools to any organisation is not to be sniffed at. Key advocate of sales tools and technology, Josh Saladin from Integrity Business Solutions, says that tools have helped him transform his business from zero to hero in just 3 years. With over 400 customers to date and a staggering $3 million in sales per year, Josh wouldn’t be without the sales tools that he uses today.

“Anyone can have a relationship with a computer, but it is the face time I have with my customers that builds trust and strengthens my relationships with them. I can now keep an eye on my customers and my sales intelligence tools help me to react proactively if I notice a customer may be slipping slightly one month.”

But results like this don’t happen overnight. Implementing sales tools and technology into your sales team in order to derive maximum value takes dedication and commitment.

**Tools of the trade**

Helping your team to streamline information, foster stronger customer relationships and keep themselves organised will ultimately help your sales department become a smooth, slick operation, growing sales and improving your bottom line.

**Top Tips**

- Adequate training needs to be delivered
- Those championing the tool need to share their vision with users
- Users have to understand the benefit that these tools can bring to their daily working lives
Get ahead with tech

Technology has come on leaps and bounds in recent decades, and advances have been particularly rapid since 2010. Smartphones now grace most households and offices today, along with tablets, computers and other gadgets.

In a customer facing sales position, having the latest technology can put you miles ahead of your competition. Imagine that you’re the MD of company X; one sales person comes to you completely unorganised with papers, notepads, catalogues and order books. The next comes to meet with you with everything saved on one slick, tidy tablet, order taking, product catalogues and their notes are all housed in one place. Which person would you consider more professional and be more likely to do business with?

Developing the technology you use as a company begins at home. Take your back office system for example. Regularly being pumped full of data, transactions, invoices, sales – this is where business data and technology really starts. Extracting this data is often a difficult, long-winded process that can cause a head on battle with IT departments. The advent of business technology is making this process easier, with the like of business, sales and customer intelligence solutions coming to the fore. Not only will they give you all the information your sales team needs but will present it in such a way that it is easy to interpret and action.

Sales on the go

Sales is one of the most mobile careers out there, and the advances in technology have served to ensure that it remains so. Office days are becoming less and less common in sales with more time being spent out on the road, clocking up the miles and actually being out there selling.

Technology means we are able to be more mobile in our personal and professional lives then ever before. High speed mobile networks, the Cloud and the smartphone are used by the majority of us.

The Cloud simply connects everything - from computing infrastructure, applications, business processes and personal collaboration - over an internet service. It enables software solutions to be delivered and accessed by you wherever and whenever you need through a compatible device.

For you as a user, anything that backs up and syncs data and is accessible on most web enabled devices is labeled a Cloud service. Take your Apple MacBook for example. When synced up with Apple’s iCloud service, you can access your documents from home on your iPad or even your iPhone. That’s the Cloud working at its simplest.

Where did it all stem from? Our innate human desire for everything, anywhere, anytime. It’s why we demand stores that open 24/7, why we allow smartphones to rule our lives and why we love the Cloud.

Switching to Cloud Computing is a huge step forward for any business and often puts that company a step ahead of its competitors in terms of flexibility. It also offers the unique ability to scale as the company grows, yet it doesn’t require the capital expenditure of other solutions. Typically provided as a pay as you go model, Cloud services are quick to deploy with minimal start up costs. What’s more, the Cloud isn’t going anywhere any time soon, as high speed internet connections become commonplace and with the advent of 4G mobile connectivity, the Cloud has cemented its place in the world.

Document storage in the Cloud is the perfect way to increase collaboration and productivity amongst employees. Online collaboration programs such as Google Docs, iWork and SkyDrive mean your employees can work together, from across continents and time zones, all saved neatly and securely in the Cloud.
Encourage a successful sales culture

A business culture is nothing new. We all talk about how important it is to promote a productive culture in the workplace. But what about a healthy sales culture? Every sales director will have an idea of what his or her team culture should be like, but how often do we see a specific sales culture in business?

Success breeds success

Sales operations should be a breeding ground for success, avid determination and the development of a competitive streak. Unfortunately, left to their own devices, sales teams can swiftly become counterproductive and can lose sight of the end goal, the thing that the entire team should be working towards.

Cultures within any sales operation should always be nurtured from the top by a pro-sales team of executives with a clear vision of what is to be achieved. At the top of any business, should be leaders, perceived as friends, not threats to the sales team.

Strategy is another area of your business that influences the culture trickling down through the entire organisation. Only once a clear and precise strategy has been developed can you and your team begin to sing from the same hymn sheet. A well-defined strategy will foster laser sharp focus amongst your business and a clear idea of your business mission.

Know where you stand

Every individual within your sales team should have an understanding of his or her position. We’re not trying to reinvent the wheel here, but it is the very basic components of your business that will produce a healthy sales culture. Knowing the part they play, exactly what they are selling, the company’s position in the market, where the ‘sweet spot’ lies with each customer or prospect, what each person should be doing and so on will put them on the right track to success.

Constructive feedback is paramount. Yes, everyone likes a pat on the back once in a while, but we must learn to take the good with the bad. Brutal feedback is harsh at times, but also necessary. Holding active discussions about areas for improvement and sharing ideas amongst the team are among the best ways to facilitate a positive sales culture.

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