
BUILDING A SALES PIPELINE



Awareness. Interest. Desire. Action.

Successful selling is a deliberate, thoughtful activity. You need a process that you initiate repeatedly. Whenever I talk with business owners or salespeople who aren't realizing the results they desire, the cause is usually the same: **They don't have a sales strategy.** Generating sales is a top priority for every business leader. For a customer to "buy" a product or service, we must develop AIDA: Awareness, Interest, Decision and Action. Let's look at each of these more closely.

No one cares how much you know till they know how much you care. Sales is all about building relationships that matter.

Awareness | The cognitive component deals with *cognition, or knowledge*; it is the power of knowing, perceiving or conceiving ideas about the product. It is dealing with the *basic information* that a consumer needs to know. A customer needs to be exposed to the product and understand its usage before he purchases it.

To build awareness, we must first determine how to get the target customer's initial attention – and draw them into the conversation of your organization. Sometimes presenting a shocking fact or statistic that frames the underlying problem is often an effective strategy to get their attention. Other times, a testimonial from an existing customer. Regardless of the approach, no sales will happen without first developing awareness.

Interest | We create interest by drawing the potential customer into a conversation (either in person or in a social tool). Raise customer interest by focusing on and demonstrating advantages and benefits. Keep them engaged. Establish a need. Create a bond. Being able to establish a need in the mind of the customer is the cornerstone of an effective marketing and sales campaign. A demonstration or illustration can help the recipients to further identify with the problem and want to actively seek possible solutions.

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Desire | This is the selling stage where you stoke the flames of the customer's desire until they are certain they must have what you are selling. This is often accomplished through the problem-solution technique. Seeing your solution as an exact fit for their problem builds desire - especially if having you provide the solution is an easier pathway than creating the solution themselves. Desire is like a fire, and can be stoked by many methods, such as: How other people approve of the item, an expiring incentive (discount, etc.).



Pretend that every single person you meet has a sign around his or her neck that says, "Make me feel important." Not only will you succeed in sales, you will succeed in life.

Mary Kay Ash

Action | This is the stage when the consumer, after having the knowledge and developing the liking or disliking towards the product, will ultimately lead into a *purchase* of the product or *rejection* of the product. Whether it's going to your website, picking up the phone or sending an order, the messaging needs to contain a powerful call to action.

Building a Sales Strategy

If your business involves selling a product, you are probably looking for ways to improve sales. A sales strategy will focus your efforts on your most important customer audiences, existing or potential. Here are the most important things to keep in mind when designing a sales strategy.

Sales Plan. Having a document that outlines your sales goals and strategies will help you to stay on track and assess your progress.

Sales Goals: These goals should be specific and measurable, not something like selling a million units. Base them on the nature of your product and try to break them down into manageable parts. For example, sell 50 units to end-users in 30 days and sell 100 units to local independent retailers in six months.

Sales Activities: These are your tactics -- how you plan to make the sale. You may say you'll sell direct-to-consumer through a website or via craft shows, for instance. Or this part of the plan may include activities like developing a sell sheet to send to independent retail stores.

Target Audience: Your sales strategy should also include those individuals or businesses you want to sell to. If it's end-users, for example, plan how you're going to reach them through Google ads, Facebook or your website.

Timelines: Put dates to all the above elements so you can define your steps within a realistic timeline. Don't forget that your timelines should be fluid--if you're underachieving, your sales plan can help you figure out why and define the corrective steps you need to take.

The Sales Funnel

A sales funnel, also called a purchase funnel, is the visual representation of how a sale proceeds in a linear fashion from customer awareness to customer action.



With the idea of the Sales Funnel, we use the metaphor of a funnel (wide at the top, narrow at the bottom) to monitor the sales process.

At the top of the funnel you have "unqualified prospects" – the very many people who you think might need your product or service, but to whom you've never spoken. At the bottom of the funnel, many sales and delivery steps later, you have people who have received delivery of your product or service and have paid for it.

The metaphor of the funnel is used because people drop away at each stage of a long sales process: For example, many of your unqualified prospects may have existing suppliers with whom they're very satisfied. Others may have needs which other competitors are better-placed to satisfy. Still others may love your products, but not have the budget to buy them.

Making the Sales Funnel Meaningful

Awareness: Identify people in the purchase decision for your product or service. Make sure they know you're an option.

Transition 1: Address their buying process and concerns. Confirm their dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Interest: Design actions to pull them through the buying process & address their concerns. Show them how you're better, faster or cheaper.

Transition 2: Qualify the prospect. Define ways they can see your value. Confirm you're a viable option.

Desire: Define the value proposition you bring such that you're seen as the better solution than their current one. Given them a reason to choose you.

Transition 3: Don't over-complicate the buying process. When the customer is desiring to have your service, make it easy to say yes.

Action: Close the deal. Begin with a simple Letter of Agreement ahead of a contract (if contracts are required).

By using the sales funnel, and by quantifying the number of prospects at each stage of the process, you can predict the number of prospects who will, in time, become customers. More than this, by looking at the way in which these numbers change over time, you can spot problems in the sales pipeline and take corrective action early.

For example, if you spot that very few mailings have taken place in a month, you might expect that in a few months' time, sales might dry up. Next month, you should make sure that more mailers than normal are sent out.

Use of the Sales Funnel shows roadblocks and times of standstill, or if there are an insufficient number of leads at any stage. This knowledge allows you to determine where sales people should focus attention and efforts to keep sales at the desired level and to meet sales targets. The funnel can also point out where improvements need to be made within the sales process. These may be as simple as implementing additional sales training or ensuring that sales representatives put sufficient focus on all steps of the sales process.

The Last Word

A sales strategy consists of a plan that positions a company's brand or product to gain a competitive advantage. Successful strategies help the sales force focus on target market customers and communicate with them in relevant, meaningful ways. Sales representatives need to know how their products or services can solve customer problems. A successful sales strategy conveys this so that the sales force spends time targeting the correct customers at the right time.

Planning and creating an effective sales strategy requires looking at long-term sales goals and analyzing the business sales cycle, as well as meeting with sales people about their personal career goals. Going through these exercises helps business owners and managers gain a more intimate knowledge of the sales intervals, seasonal changes and what motivates the sales team. After creating the long-term sales strategy based on long-term goals, sales managers should create monthly and weekly sales strategies based on the long-term strategy. This allows for short-term performance measurement of the sales team.