

Sales Process Defined

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We all have heard that as small business owners, we are all sales people. This is no doubt a fact when owning and operating a small business. As with any operational function, there should be some type of process or step by step way of doing it. Following a process, with repetition and practice, has been proven to contribute to a positive outcome. Yes, you guessed it! There is a process to selling - known as the sales cycle.

Some businesses sell products, some sell services, some a combination of both. A sales process or cycle applies to pretty much anything that you are selling. There are many variations of the sales cycle, but there is also a set of basic steps. Keep in mind that not all of these steps may fit your type or style of business and if they don't, that's ok. Modify them to fit your needs. Most salespeople and business owners use these basic steps as a starting point to creating their own sales process.

Creating your sales process is very important to the success of your business and your life. Let's open our minds for a second. If you really think about it, our days are filled with getting things done, making decisions, and achieving positive outcomes. If you write down the path of how you do some of the things just mentioned and match them against the sales process, there are definitely some similarities. This is probably where the saying "Everyone is a salesperson" came from.

Let's look at the basic steps of the selling process.

1. **Prospecting (finding new clients)** – The biggest mistake small business owners make when looking for new customers or clients is they try and target everyone and think that everyone is their target audience. This leads to disappointment and a low new client success rate. Spend some time identifying and prospecting to your target audience.
2. **First Contact** – You know what they say about first impressions – you only have one chance to make a good one. Once you know who and where your target audience is, make contact. This can be done by phone, email, Internet, advertising, signs, referrals, guest speaking, and various other ways, Be Creative.
3. **Determine the need** – Bill Gates would probably never buy a MAC computer, so there would be no point in trying to sell him one. Ask questions about your client's business and challenges. Narrow the scope as you go to identify specific requirements for your product or service. Gain agreement as you go.
4. **Qualify** – make sure your product or service is in the client's price range. In talking to potential clients, the two most common things you are going to hear is "I can't afford it" and "I am happy with what I have". Business people waste a lot of time and money barking up the wrong tree.

5. **Presentation** – This is your big chance! You are offered the opportunity to educate your prospect on your product or service. This is a very valuable skill set and definitely one that I would recommend practicing often. This is what I call the Make or Break milestone. This will tell your prospect a lot about you and your company. This is where you can gain a whirlwind of points towards closing the deal. Make sure your presentation is tailored to the needs you identified in step 3.
6. **Managing Objections** – No doubt you are going to get questions about your product or service. Don't take them personally! Develop a list of the most common questions people ask you about your product or service. Add to this list questions what you would ask a similar company to yours if you were looking to buy their product or service. What is preventing your prospect from buying your product or service? Sometimes there is just not a fit, no matter how you try and spin it. You have to know when to hold them and when to fold them.
7. **Closing** – This is what I call Dinner Night! If you close a big deal, reward yourself with a night out for dinner. Believe it or not, some people think this is the only step in the selling process. If you can skip all of the other steps and go straight to this step, you're a winner. Closing is your ultimate goal and all of the other steps are ways of getting you here.
8. **Reoccurring Sales** – Referrals! If you made your client or customer happy, you did what you aimed to do and they are likely to refer more business to you. Create a referral plan which would include a process to ask for and give referrals, and reward the people who consistently refer business to you. It is always good to have champions for your business.

If you don't already have a sales process, this should give you a good foundation or enhance the one you currently have.

Sell Hard, Sell Professionally, And Sell Ethically.