



“Hello, I’m Ready to Buy Whatever You’re Selling!”

EVER RECEIVE A PHONE CALL LIKE THAT? PROBABLY NOT; THE SALES PROCESS DOESN’T WORK THAT WAY. BUYERS START WITH MILD INTEREST, PROGRESS THROUGH INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS, AND MAY ARRIVE AT A BUYING DECISION. HOW DO YOU NURTURE THAT PROCESS?

There’s little question that a well-designed plan, when worked consistently, will improve sales, but do you have a way to measure the success of your plan? It’s easy to make the mistake of assuming that every person who expresses interest is ready to buy. This is not the case.

Even worse, some will drop a lead at the first sign of resistance. Sales professionals say that questions from a prospect are signs that the person is looking for a reason to buy what you have to sell. Much of the sales process must be invested in teaching, nurturing, and moving the slightly interested potential buyer through the process.

Nurture Leads

NURTURING IS MORE THAN JUST REFERRING THE PROSPECT TO YOUR WEBSITE AND MORE THAN JUST SENDING A SERIES OF “DRIP-MARKETING” NEWSLETTERS.

Any process that fails to deepen the relationship with the potential client is not nurturing. If the process doesn’t allow you to learn more about the prospect’s needs so that you can identify their problem and present an appropriate solution, it’s not nurturing.

Gleanster Research conducted a study in 2010 that showed half of all sales leads are not “sales ready”. Although this study is now more than 7 years old, it’s likely that little has changed and – if anything – the numbers are overly optimistic. It’s essential to move people from where they are (being interested) to where you would like the to be (ready to buy).



Regardless of whether you’re selling to a business or an individual, prospects are people first. You may be talking to a corporate buyer or a CEO, but you are not talking to a business. As a result, you’ll find more similarities than differences when comparing business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) processes. Whether an individual is buying a new television or a corporate CEO is seeking an architect for a new headquarters building, the seller must develop a trust relationship with the buyer.

The buyer’s ultimate decision will probably involve an emotional connection to the provider, which calls to mind the ancient adage that says sales people must sell *themselves* before they can sell a product or service.

Earning Trust

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON METHODS OF ILLUSTRATING THE SALES PROCESS USES A FUNNEL IN WHICH A LARGE NUMBER OF PROSPECTS ENTER THE WIDE TOP AND ARE THEN EVALUATED AND NURTURED THROUGH A SERIES OF STEPS UNTIL A SMALLER NUMBER PASS THROUGH THE OPENING AT THE BOTTOM AS NEW CUSTOMERS.

One of the first steps must be to establish trust and credibility. Much of this trust will come from your perceived authority in the marketplace. If you’re an architect, you must be seen as an authority on the subject, but there’s more: You must be perceived as a trusted advisor.

The prospective client who believes that you fully comprehend the challenges they face and can provide workable solutions is closer to selecting you to serve their needs. Trust reduces apprehension that a buyer feels when considering a new supplier.

Prospective clients may reach out because of your print advertising, direct mail, or website; even better, they might reach out because a friend referred them to you. Referrals are always the best possible leads, but even those leads aren’t sales ready.

Determining how to nurture prospective client depends on your ability to recognize a viable prospect. In other words, does the prospect *look* like your existing clients? For sales to individuals, demographics are important. For sales to businesses, you’ll consider a larger scale version of demographics. What

size company is best suited to be your client? What is the income level of individuals who are your best clients? Comparing prospects to existing clients will inform your understanding of how close a match they are.

Information Please

IN 1968, CBS BROADCAST A 17-EPISEODE TELEVISION SERIES FROM THE BBC CALLED THE PRISONER. PATRICK MCGOOHAN WAS NUMBER SIX, A SECRET OF AGENT OF SOME SORT WHO WAS BEING HELD PRISONER.

Those in charge wanted information, but McGooohan's character repeatedly said "You won't get it!"

All that is fine if you're a secret agent, but not if you're trying to convince someone to buy what you have to sell. Information is essential in building a reputation as a credible advisor who's worthy of the prospective client's trust.

But it can't be just any information. "Case studies" that are thinly veiled advertisements are irrelevant. So are self-serving boasts (derisively known as "puff pieces").

Give your prospects detailed, helpful, and useful information that's relevant to their needs. Regardless of how a prospect receives your message – print, email, website, radio, or television – you have only a few seconds to convince the prospect that it's worth spending their valuable time on.

Bad advertising is worse than no advertising: A bad advertisement will show your prospect that you don't understand their needs. You've doubtless received ads like these yourself. As you dropped the ad into the wastebasket or deleted the email, what was your opinion about the advertiser? I'm willing to bet that it wasn't positive.

What's needed is an informed conversation. Speak less; listen and watch more. Think. Learn what problems the prospect is facing and consider what you, your product, and your company can do to help. The architect that I mentioned earlier must understand that the CEO doesn't want to buy a building. Instead, the goal may be to save money by consolidating several operations from various locations at a single location. On a more grandiose scale, the CEO might be constructing a monument to his or her ability to lead.

The architect's response to each of these situations would need to be different. In either case, the response would need to convince the CEO that the architect has the expertise to deliver what the CEO is looking for – cost savings or monument. The architect who treats the frugal CEO as a monument builder or the ostentatious CEO as a penny-pincher will not be the one who designs the new building.

Avoid telling prospects what features and benefits you can offer until you know which features and benefits are of interest to them.

If the prospect downloaded your "Selecting the Right Television for Your Room" document, you can begin to provide additional information about buying televisions – screen types, sizes, internet connectivity, and such.

But before bombarding prospects with information, ask how they prefer to be contacted: Email, mail, or phone? Would they welcome weekly updates on the subject? Those who are truly interested in what you have to offer will generally provide this information and they will appreciate your being honest and direct about it.

Be Personal

ADDING SOMEONE'S NAME TO A MESSAGE DOESN'T PERSONALIZE IT.

Mail merge has been with us for decades and one of the best indicators of a mass mailing is an email or letter that has the recipient's name repeated throughout.

A message without the recipient's name can be very personal if it's written well. There is no cookie-cutter template for what to provide, but the best way to prepare a general message that addresses a specific need is to write a letter to a person (real or imaginary) who has that exact need. When you identify a prospect as one who has the needs you've addressed in one of these carefully prepared messages, you'll be ready to respond.

Such messages can be modified slightly to better align with the prospect's needs. This might include feeding back some information that the prospect has provided. The message must be focused precisely on the prospect's needs. Case studies, demos, and videos may all fit into the mix as long as they are concise, accurate, and useful.

And Then ...

WHEN YOU'VE IDENTIFIED THE PROSPECTIVE CLIENT'S NEEDS AND COMMUNICATED YOUR EXPERIENCE AND YOUR SINCERITY, IT'S TIME FOR THE NEXT STEP: PROPOSE.

The prospective client should perceive you as an authority and possibly be ready to have a meaningful conversation. Realize that you'll lose some prospects at this point. The prospect need not be lost permanently, though; recycle leads that won't be productive immediately so that additional contacts can be made later.

For those who accept your proposal, your work with the client (no longer a *prospect*) has just begun. Relationships need to be nurtured and built because existing clients are the best source of new business: The client may buy more of what you have to sell, purchase related products, or refer relatives and friends to you.

One of the best ways to continue the relationship is to be proactive following the sale. Contact the client with additional information about how to use your product or service and confirm that everything is working the way the client expected. Skip this step at your peril!

The new client who has a problem with what they bought may feel that what you sold was defective. As a result, you'll lose any future sales to that client and you'll lose the client's good will in the market place.

Customers or Clients?

IN THIS ARTICLE, I HAVE OFTEN USED THE TERM "CLIENT". UNLESS YOU SELL COMMODITY GOODS, YOU SHOULD STRIVE TO HAVE CLIENTS, NOT CUSTOMERS.

A customer is someone who purchases goods or services; a client is someone who purchases goods or services *based on the recommendations of a trusted advisor*.

Customers buy. Clients have a relationship. Some might say that this is just a semantic difference, but words are perceptions and perception is reality. When you think about clients as people who have relationships with you and your business instead of people who simply buy your product or service, you will treat them as clients.

When you treat people as clients, their perception of you, your credibility, and your authority will all be enhanced. 