



B2B Sales Strategy

Improve your sales techniques

In this guide we explore the key aspects of making a sale:

- How to persuade someone to listen to you in the first place
- What to say during the early conversations
- How to build trust and create a relationship
- How to be sure you're ready to send a proposal and close the deal
- The factors you should consider before even pursuing a lead
- Five different types of salesperson, who is most effective, and why



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Stage 1: Access

Get approval to talk, a raised-hand: “yes, I’m interested.” Establish the fact you are useful. Do this by demonstrating your value, not by explaining it, but remember your prospects are busy and don’t have time to take in complex messages before they start trust you.

Short emails (<100 words) or quick phone calls work. Long copy can work in some situations if you’re good at it, but be careful. Stick to one message at a time.



Stage 2: Rapport

Demonstrate a clear understanding of the prospect’s business and objectives. If you just pitch what you sell, there is nothing to distinguish you from other salespeople. Show you understand their business and objectives.

Make every contact point useful. Keep asking “why?” until you get to the root of the matter then demonstrate how your company can help. Be useful.

Stage 3: Decision

How do different parts of the organisation view the problem? The CEO, accounts team, other staff? Who are you talking to, what messages do they have to pass on and how will they do it? Who is the decision maker?

Take, and keep, control of the sales process. Demonstrate, and hold firm on, value over price.

Provide a clear, powerful proposal that it is very easy to understand and very easy to say ‘yes’ to.





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Stage 1: Access

This guide isn't about lead generation, and the effort required at this stage may vary. Cold-calling is unsurprisingly harder than following-up enquiries from your website.

The purpose of this first stage is to get a “raised hand”: discover that someone is interested in what you have to say and sell, and to then convince them it's worth investing time in talking to you.



Keep it simple

Your prospects are busy, and may not have time to take in complex messages, especially in early communication.

In most cases, use short emails (50-250 words) or quick phone calls, however the more someone trusts you, the more you can say. Little and often is better than occasional and complex.

How to Talk

<i>Don't...</i>	<i>Do...</i>
Open with: “Hi. My name is John and I worked for XYZ Corp ...”	Open with: “We're working with other legal firms and have found that...”
Use word like: Industry-leader, groundbreaking	Use words like: Secure, save, improve, reduce, speed-up
Leave a voicemail that's a pitch for your service	Leave a voicemail explaining you've sent over a valuable report
Send bland “just checking in” / “have you made a decision?” emails	Send emails with links to relevant articles, resources, guides, tips

Ask for less time

Ask for a five-minute call instead of a fifteen-minute one, or a fifteen-minute meeting instead of an hour. Be absolutely on-time, and when the time you promised is used up, ask

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if they want to continue. Demonstrate that you respect their time.

Be useful

In the early parts of a sales process you, the salesperson, are the product being sold: provide useful, interesting, fresh ideas and suggestions.

Demonstrate a clear understanding of the prospect's business and objectives. If you're just giving a pitch, there is absolutely nothing to distinguish you from other salespeople.

Make every touchpoint useful. Calling to find out how they got on in a sales meeting with a competitor is of no use to them. Offering them a list of questions they should ask the competitor before the meeting is. (Make sure you've already answered them.)

How can you reframe the customer's problem to make it easier to understand, and demonstrate how your company can help?

Prioritise

Know there is a difference between what is most important to the prospect, and what is best for you to sell. They are more likely to make a purchase – especially a first purchase – if it's a key area they are concerned with right now. Clearly link the benefits to their business of a relationship with yours.

Prospects are already overwhelmed with interruptions and sales messages: the salesperson is a waste of their time. You must demonstrate clear value through useful, relevant information. It might take 20+ touches to move things forwards.

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Stage 2: Rapport

Know the prospect's business, their risks and worries, the reward to them of success, and clearly demonstrate how your company aligns with theirs. If you can identify with their critical business objectives and core beliefs they will want to work with you.

Ask yourself: why should people buy from you instead of someone else? Don't just explain, but demonstrate the answers.

Once you have access

The narrative should change to demonstrate how working with you will improve their business and make their lives easier:-

- By delivering a sizeable impact
- In a clear and simple way

By helping to guide your prospect's thinking, including suggestions they may never have thought of on their own, you will start to be seen as a valuable asset, perhaps even part of the team.

Even the busiest person is still interested in relevant ideas – suggestions and information that will help them to achieve their business goals.

Sell your value

Don't begin with consultative questions – start by detailing some general assumptions around their needs and your solutions to them. Once there is interest and curiosity, start asking questions about specifics.

Buyers are fed up with answering questions and probes from sales reps who deliver no value, and are less likely to spend time helping reps discover their needs.

The greatest impact occurs when:

- You offer a unique and valuable advice
- You help the prospect understand alternative options



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- You provide ongoing help, support and advice
- You warn about potential pitfalls and how to avoid them
- You educate the prospect

You are more likely to succeed if:

- Your way of working aligns with your prospect's
- The prospect has support for the decision across their organisation.

Listen for key words you can pick-up on and offer solutions for, such as:

- Dissatisfaction
- Frustrations & headaches
- Delays
- Troubles
- Concerns & worries

Act as you mean to go on

Behave as if you're already working together. Work with them as if they're already a client. Be the trusted source, the person they go to with questions. Help them, support them.

WHY?

Always ask why. Why aren't you happy with your current provider? Why are you worried about XYZ – what might happen? Keep asking until you get to the absolute root of their problem. Then give examples of how you've solved that problem in the past, and how you could do so again for them.

Simplify complexities

A big barrier to change is the accompanying complexities. Demonstrate how you simplify these for the client – how onboarding works, how little negative impact there will be in the short-term, especially compared to the reward in the long-term.

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Create a decision map from the prospect's perspective, from first contact to completed sale. Where are the bottlenecks and risks? How can you help mitigate these?

Get cross-company buy-in

How do different parts of the organisation view the problem? The CEO, accounts, staff? Who are you talking to, what messages do they have to pass on and how will they do it? Who is the decision maker?

What do you need to do to help your prospect sell the idea to their colleagues? What messages do different people need to hear to get on-board?

Simplify complexities

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Have a decision map from the prospect's perspective from first contact to completed sale. Where are the bottlenecks and risks? How can you help mitigate?

How does the competition fit in?

Who are you up against? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How can you use these to your advantage, and how can you help the client understand why you are the best fit for their business?

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Stage 3: Decision

You've found a good prospect, they're interested in what you have to say and you've moved far enough forwards to make it worthwhile asking for a final decision – the complexity of this will depend on your business, but it may involve writing a proposal or preparing (and presenting) a pitch.

Stay strong

Take, and keep, control of the sales process. Demonstrate, and hold firm on, value over price. If people are involved who are not decision-makers or influencers, work to replace them with people who are. Fight pushback on price by emphasising value.



Make the decision easy

Lead the conversation with questions that drive an understanding of why the prospect needs your services / products.

Make it clear how the value of your service far outweighs the risk of not using it: the cost of not changing, of continued problems, the downfalls of inaction from a business perspective.

Prospects should understand why they should take action, and why doing it now is right.

Provide a clear, powerful proposal

One that is very easy to understand and very easy to say 'yes' to. This might be delivered in-person, electronically or posted, and may involve just the two of you or more. Remember too that you may need different versions of the proposal for different people at your target company.

- Build credibility and show your prospect you understand their challenges
- Connect those challenges to a bigger problem or opportunity they hadn't previously considered
- Show prospects the numbers behind why they should think differently
- Create an emotional connection between the pain in the story you're telling and the

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pain they feel every day in their organisation

- Show them the solution: the new way they should be thinking about their business
- Demonstrate how your solution is the best one out there, and how it fits with the new way a prospect should be thinking about their business

Follow-up

Don't forget about someone once you've sent through a price or proposal, and don't lose your nerve.

I've been close to losing significant sums of money in the past through second-guessing what the client was thinking. Once I was worried my quote was too high, and just as I was about to send through an email offering a discount, the approval came through. A lucky escape!

Keep in-touch, but don't hassle. Continue to treat the prospect as a client. Continue to send through useful information. Don't repeatedly ask "have you made a decision?" – instead focus on confirming your position as someone helpful who can be trusted.

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Appendix 1: Tracking & follow-up

As your pipeline expands, you will work with more leads and get more business – it's important to make sure you keep track of who you're talking to, what you've said and, critically, what you need to do next.

Exactly how you categorise your contacts and what you say when is of course up to you. It might be worth investigating dedicated pipeline software, or at the very least working out a good way of categorising your contacts in Outlook or any other CRM you use.

Here's a suggestion:

Lead	They don't know we are, we need to help them understand why we can provide something useful.
Suspect	They're in the target market, and know who we are, but we're not sure how interested they are.
Prospect	They have a clear need for and an interest in what we do.
Opportunity	They've expressed a direct, clear interest in working with us.
Closing	Pricing / quotes have been sent, and we need to make sure they give the go-ahead.
Client	Yes! Time to start on-boarding and post-sales support.



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Appendix 2: Types of salesperson

In *The Challenger Sale*, Brent Adamson and Matthew Dixon ran factor analysis on the ratings of salespeople at over 6,000 companies to create five statistically-sound categories.

It's important to note that these are not absolutes: people can of course share traits from multiple categories. They give the example of finding heat, sand, arid heat, cacti and scorpions together: you can be sure you're in a desert, but it's perfect common to find, say, sand in other locations.

Each category can also be successful in sales, but of the high performers they identified, 39% were classed as 'Challenger'. Most business owners incorrectly expect 'Relationship Builders' to be the most successful.

The Hard Worker

- Doesn't give up easily
- Self-motivated
- Interested in feedback / personal development

The Lone Wolf

- Follows own instincts
- Self-assured
- Deliver results but difficult to manage

The Relationship Builder

- Classic consultative rep
- Builds advocates internally
- Creates relationships with prospects

The Challenger

- Different view of the world
- Loves to debate / pushes customer

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- Strong understanding of customer's business

The Challenger is the most successful of all five profiles, and offers a unique perspective to the prospect. They have communication skills (that means listening as well as talking), and are excellent at understanding the prospect's business and what's important to them.

They are comfortable discussing money, and confident to pressure and challenge the prospect, suggesting alternative ideas to their preconceived notions.

They will:-

- Teach customers something new and valuable about how to compete in their market.
- Tailor their sales pitch to resonate with the decision-maker's hot-button issues.
- Take control of the discussions around pricing and challenge customer's thinking around the problem.

The Problem Solver

- Highly detail-oriented
- Reliable responds to stakeholders
- Ensures all problems are solved



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Appendix 3: SCOTSMAN sales scoring checklist

The SCOTSMAN system can help you to qualify a prospect, and make an informed decision on whether the time is right to a) create a proposal and b) ask for the sale. It is a good way to avoid wasting time on unlikely prospects.

Solution

Do we sell what they need?

Competition:

Who are we competing against, and how do we match-up against them?

Originality:

Do we have a Unique Sales Proposition (USP) which makes us stand-out?

Timescale:

Do we know their timescale, and can we meet the deadlines?

Size:

Is the project too small to be profitable, or unmanageably large?

Money:

Is there a budget, is it reasonable, and can we realistically match it?

Authority:

Are we speaking to the right person, who else is involved and what is our relationship?

Need:

How important is this project to their business?

Scoring

You probably shouldn't proceed if you score 0 or 1 in any single area, or 16 or less overall.

A score of 16-21 in total suggests it's worth taking action to qualify further.

A score of 22+ in total is positive and you should proceed.



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	0	1	2	3	4
Solution – do we sell what they need?	No.	Significant gaps.	Mostly, but significant customisation required.	Mostly, but a little customisation required.	Yes.
Competition – who else is bidding?	Don't know.	Others involved, including current supplier. We may not be the best.	Others involved, including current supplier. We are the best fit.	Preference voiced for us, or we are current supplier. We are the best fit.	We are the only bidder, or all others are very weak.
Originality – do we have a Unique Sales Proposition?	No relevant USP.	May have some USPs, but not sure, don't know about competitors.	Confident in our USPs and know our competitors'.	Prospect understands our USPs.	Our USPs have been added to the prospect's requirements.
Timescale – can we deliver on-time?	Don't know.	We know them, but they don't fit our schedule / cycle, and we can't change.	We know them, but they don't fit our schedule / cycle, but we can change.	Realistic for us, without disrupting other opportunities.	Realistic for us, and unrealistic for our competitors.
Size – is the project too big or small for us?	Too small to make a profit, or 10x our biggest project to-date.	Too small to make a profit, or 5x our biggest project to-date.	Small, but with future potential, or 3x our biggest project to-date.	A good size for us.	A good size for us, and important for future development.
Money – are we too cheap or expensive?	We don't know their budget.	We roughly know the budget but think it is unrealistic.	We know the budget but will struggle to meet it.	We know the budget and expect to be close to it.	We know the budget and expect to be within in.
Authority – do we have a relationship with the decision makers?	We don't know decision makers. Strong competitor in place.	We know the decision makers, but have little or no relationship.	We know the decision makers, and have some supporters, but so do competitors.	We know the decision makers and have a strong relationship with them.	We have excellent relationships who are an active part of the process.
Need – how important is this deal to the prospect?	Don't know.	We know the need, but don't believe it's critical.	We know the need, but there are other approaches they are considering.	Pressing need, and the prospect must choose one of the options presented.	There is a critical need for the solution we are offering.

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Appendix 4: Further reading

Many of the ideas in this guide are detailed further in the three books below:

- *Snap Selling*, Jill Konrath
- *Predictable Revenue*, Aaron Ross and Marylou Tyler
- *The Challenger Sale*, Brent Adamson and Matthew Dixon

You could also consider:

- *The Psychology of Selling: The Art of Closing Sales*, Brian Tracy
- *Fanatical Prospecting: The Ultimate Guide to Opening Sales Conversations*, Jeb Blount
- *Predictable Revenue*, Aaron Ross
- *When Buyers Say No: Essential Strategies for Keeping a Sale Moving Forward*, Tom Hopkins



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Thanks for reading

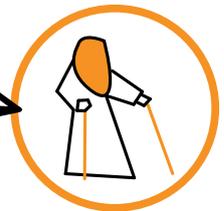
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