

3 Ways You Can Increase Sales Without ‘Selling’



Forget the stereotypes. These counterintuitive approaches really work.

May 30, 2019 7 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Why does the negative stereotype of a *salesperson* – and “selling” as a profession – persist in our culture?

Related: 7 Bulletproof Strategies to Increase Sales and Make More Money

The simple answer is, we don't trust salespeople. We love buying things, but we hate being sold to! When was the last time you met a salesperson who you truly believed was putting your needs ahead of his or her own financial interest?

As an entrepreneur, you may see a serious dilemma here. To be successful, you have to constantly sell: to customers, investors, strategic partners, employees and new hires. En route, you must figure out how to help each of these constituents embrace your vision, products and business model – but not come across as “sales-y” in the process.

Do the math.

I am a mathematician by education and an actuary by training – and have even been called a bean counter. You may picture me wearing a pocket protector, sitting in a back room mumbling about my red stapler – far from clients.

This couldn't be further from the truth. I've won sales awards, sold my own companies and helped clients sell theirs. I don't share this information to impress you. I share it to *impress upon you* that you can sell a lot and not become a caricature to do it. With apologies to David Mamet (*Glengarry Glen Ross*), you don't ever have to be closing.

What you must do instead, to increase sales and to maintain your integrity, is to adopt three counterintuitive habits.

1. Give away your secrets.

The biggest challenge for any salesperson is to build trust with customers. An effective way to do this is to demonstrate that you place their interests ahead of your own. This is not an easy thing to do, especially when would-be-customers know that you are paid (directly or indirectly) for selling a certain product or service.

The most effective way to set yourself apart is to do something your competitors would never consider doing. You want to stand out as “unlike” everyone else.

Example? In 1959, competition among car manufacturers was

heating up. Volvo engineer Nils Bohlin invented the three-point seat belt. Volvo believed it was more important to share this life-saving invention than to keep it secret and profit from it. By opening the patent for use by other companies, Volvo started building its “safety-first” brand focus – which it still proudly touts today.

One way to gain credulity is to give away your power. You can give away information that your competitors use to their advantage. You can also let customers learn things about you or your company they otherwise might not be able to learn on their own.

Related: 3 Sales Strategies to Help Increase Your Business in 30 Days

Unsure what to give away? The most powerful thing you can do is to ask your customers these questions:

- What have you disliked in the past about working with someone in my industry?
- What would make the interaction better for you this time around?
- What is the one thing you wish you’d known before you made your decision?

These questions will help you figure out what to give away.

2. Seek out unlikely partners.

Any manufacturer can overpay and sell its soul to get on to Walmart’s shelves, place expensive Facebook ads or pay an arm and a leg for Google Adwords. But such overbidding amid a crowded auction only results in your overpaying for new prospects. This is not a smart way to build your company.

Rather, figure out how something you already have could provide a solution to someone else’s problem. The most efficient business development will come from unlikely

sources. Consider the following examples:

In an interview for the biography *Getting All You Can Out of All You've Got: The Jay Abraham Story*, Abraham said, "You have to do things very differently if you want very different results." One of his earliest and most impactful success was working with Icy Hot. The company was going under, because it couldn't afford advertising and despite the fact that its customers loved the product.

Abraham's stroke of genius was to send cases of the product to radio stations in return for ads. The stations could collect the money and ship out the product (at no cost to the station). All they had to do was send Icy Hot the name and address of the buyers so the company could solicit additional purchases.

By taking a 93-cent loss on each tube, Abraham helped the company add a million new customers and over \$10.5 million in annual profit – in less than two years.

Another unusual partnership? Walmart and BuzzFeed partnered in 2017. Now, BuzzFeed Tasty videos drive customers to Walmart's ecommerce site. Walmart didn't have to spend time and money to create its own video library to drive sales; and BuzzFeed found a new revenue source.

A third example: Dunkin' Donuts and Waze teamed up in 2012 to put all Dunkin' retail locations on the map on everyone's phone. In 2017, Waze even created a way to order ahead at Dunkin' Donuts through the app. Selling doughnuts through a driving app (that helps people save time by planning better routes) by shortening the time waiting for coffee? Brilliant.

Need hints on where to look for your own unlikely partner? Ask yourself, and everyone who will listen, the following questions:

- Who else sells, or wants to sell, to my ideal client?
- What do my clients buy before, after, or instead of my product or service?
- What unique qualities, characteristics, hobbies or interests do my ideal clients have? Who else might be interested in that group?

To receive more referrals, make more referrals. Unsure whom your clients need to meet? Make it a practice to survey these people every year.

Ask them what their goals are for the year, what they worry about most and what they want to finally check off their to-do list. The answers will keep you busy with potential referral opportunities that will help you gain their trust and appreciation.

3. Leverage your limitations.

Another common complaint from ideal clients is the “yes” phenomenon.

Clients get frustrated when a business owner immediately says, “Yes, I can do that,” then doesn’t follow through or spends a lot of time (and money) learning *how* to do it.

Consider instead that clients and prospects are actually willing to accept your honest answer of “no” or “I don’t know, but I will research the best solution for you.”

They don’t expect any entrepreneur to know how to do *everything*. But they do expect – and respect – honesty and effort.

More sales, less selling: By changing your focus from sales to education, you become valuable. By focusing on the needs of your clients, rather than on your products or services, you build trust. By going out of your way to help others in your field and in your community, you show that you care.

Rather than looking at customer service and the supply chain as expensive business units that threaten your profitability, see these valuable interactions as invaluable opportunities to demonstrate who you are and what is important to you. *Them!*

Related: 4 Sales Strategies to Increase Your Average B2B Deal Sizes

Once your potential customers and colleagues see you as valuable, trustworthy and caring, you will never have to sell anything ever again.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/332004>