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Sales

**During the
Pandemic
of 2020**

Author

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Introduction

Sales success during an economic downturn is often the by-product of a great positive attitude, a commitment to persistence and the ability to have fun on the job. Individuals who excel in sales during tough economic times skillfully blend time, energy, perseverance and creativity to consistently achieve above-average results. These professionals never have to resort to outspending the competition or offering deep discounts, but they outsmart their competitors instead.

Remarkably, when top sales professionals change jobs, their success continues. This is because the foundation of their long-term success rests on an adherence to a few basic sales principles. There is no magic formula, and it is not rocket science. When the going gets tough they use common sense sales practices that anyone in business can begin using today to deliver extraordinary results during a slow economy.

Like the Energizer Bunny, top sales performers consistently outperform the competition during post recessionary times. They seem to just keep going, and going, and going. They also completely disregard the never-ending bad news that seems to guide their competition.

Over the last 26 years, I have managed sales teams during 4 North American recessions and 2020's global economic crash.

I have had the opportunity to observe some of the most innovative and productive sales and marketing professionals.

In the next few pages, I will share with you what I have experienced firsthand, including my 10 powerful guidelines for achieving sales and marketing success after a global pandemic.

1) Keep Your Foot on the Gas

This is by far the easiest principle of success to implement.

When the economy seems headed for a long and deep recession, most of your competitors will instinctively hit the sales and marketing brakes. Those dollars budgeted for sales, marketing and social media have likely been cut or frozen. It's a safe assumption that in 2020-21 your competition will further reduce expenditures for sales, social media, direct mailing, advertising, trade shows, promotions, and so on.

In the first quarter of 2020, when the economy was strong, it was a safe bet that your most prized clients received an array of marketing, advertising and social media impressions from your competitors. In addition, your clients also received lots of one-on-one sales attention in the form of e-mail, direct mail, sales visits, phone calls plus entertaining.

What a difference! Today these same clients are lonely! Why? Very few companies are calling, writing, sending e-mail messages, or visiting.

That's good news for you!

Ironically, clients who would only grant you a few minutes or not return your call for weeks, will now welcome hearing from you with open arms. Before the pandemic, your company was just one voice in a choir of vendors—today you can sing a very profitable solo, but you'll have to hurry.

Why? McGraw-Hill has studied each of the recessions and economic slowdowns during the last five decades. The researchers' findings clearly prove that those companies that continued to be aggressive in sales and marketing during these economic downturns experienced revenue growth of 275% during the inevitable recovery.

In contrast, those businesses that cut back on sales, marketing, and advertising enjoyed only a 19% increase in revenue during the same upturn.

According to a recent study by Penn State's Smeal College of Business, "Companies that position marketing as an investment, and not an expense are the ones that traditionally have come out of modern downturns both strong and profitable."

That means you must disregard conventional wisdom, virtually get out in the marketplace and keep contacting clients and prospects alike. An economic downturn is a great time to romance away your competitors' most profitable clients. You cannot accomplish this sitting at your desk waiting for things to get better. The coming recovery will be over before you know it. You must act quickly to take advantage of this opportunity.

2. Your Most Profitable Investment of Time is to Focus on Existing Customers First

Why? It costs five times as much to acquire a new client than it does to motivate an existing customer to start buying again. Repeat business is your most powerful engine for hitting your post pandemic sales goals! Remember, most businesses quickly reduce their marketing, social media and sales efforts during a downturn. As a result, they tend to focus their abbreviated sales resources on finding new clients.

That strategy violates a long-standing prescription for success - invest 60% of your time on existing customers, 30% on qualified new accounts, and 10% on prospecting.

Too often we take our existing clients for granted. As a result, we spend little time communicating with the very people who were paying our commissions and salaries. Remember the words of a wise old advertising executive from Texas: “Don’t neglect your horses to find new ponies.”

Business professionals who consistently outperform their competitors understand one simple rule—the greater the competition in your area, the greater the importance of consistent follow-up and customer service. In short, your existing customers must feel appreciated. When your current customers feel appreciated, they become walking, talking billboards for your company.

3. Take Direct Aim at Your Competitors’ Regular Customers

Your post pandemic success in prospecting for new clients depends upon identifying potential customers who will buy your products and services, plus are comfortable with your price range.

The good news is that your competitors’ clients fit the bill perfectly. In fact, year after year, research has confirmed that 17% of an average business’ customers would readily switch if just asked. Over time, many customers have continued to do business with their current suppliers simply out of habit.

Yes, this means that today, 17% of your competitors’ clients are ready to listen and switch. According to the Guerrilla Group, 68% of repeat customers who switched suppliers on their own accord, did so because of the indifference of just one employee.

During the economic recovery many of your competitors will embrace conventional wisdom. In short, cutting spending on services and keeping staffing low.

This is an exceptional time for you to start aggressively romancing away their frustrated clients. Time is of the essence! This downturn will be over very soon. Right now, you have a lucrative window of opportunity -so act quickly.

One reliable source of intelligence on your competitors' clients is your very own staff. Many of your frontline employees may have worked for the competition in the past. Even if they have been furloughed, ask for their ideas, guidance and insight.

4. Constantly Shop the Competition

You can't effectively steal business if you don't clearly know what you're up against. For example, imagine how surprised you would be to learn that a recently hired NFL coach never looked at film of the opposing teams.

Imagine you own stock in Domino's, and you learn that the company's top management has never ordered from Pizza Hut, or Papa John's. You might be tempted to quickly sell that stock.

Great sources of intelligence on your competition are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Alerts and Mention.com.

The best place to start shopping the competition is with the three companies to whom you frequently lost business to in the past. Kick their tires and observe every aspect of their business that touches customers.

Many successful companies assign one key staff member to each major competitor. Doing so ensures that useful sales, marketing and social media intelligence will be gathered regularly.

You'll learn that most of your competitors have at least one big vulnerable spot that you can spotlight in your future sales and marketing to romance away their customers.

In addition, spend time talking with your key suppliers. They probably service each of your regional competitors, so they would be able to provide valuable insight that you would not get through simple observation.

5. Inject Fun into Your Business Mix

This is the single most powerful, yet least understood, competitive tactic to use as we recover from a pandemic.

Tom Peters, America's foremost management guru, states that 70% of all decision makers would switch suppliers today if they simply could find one that was more fun to do business with. If you have any doubts, take a long look at Southwest Airlines.

Let's face it, Southwest is not exactly an easy airline for business travelers. They make their customers stand in one line after another. They offer no assigned aisle or window seats. They provide no lounges or free drinks; and never extend free upgrades to their most frequent travelers. But what makes Southwest so successful is that flying with them is fun!

Better yet, their passengers brag about them, thus generating lucrative word-of-mouth advertising. While the entire airline industry recorded horrendous financial results after September 11, 2001, Southwest was the only airline to report a profit during the following quarter. According to Nasdaq.com, Southwest's industry-leading balance sheet, low costs, and strong track record for generating cash flow should enable it to survive the current financial crisis and potentially gain market share in the aftermath.

That is a feat they have accomplished during every quarter of every year since 9/11. No other airline can make that claim.

Travel is too often perceived as something that must be endured. If you can mix fun and entertainment into your existing customer's experience, your competition's clients will soon hear about it.

Marvin Martinez, a bellman and front desk agent at the San Antonio River Walk Marriott says, "We all bring out smiles in our own special way. Me, I'm a performer. Every day I'm on stage in front of my biggest fans: my guests. When I walk into the lobby, I'm on! I'm an aggressive hospitality animal. My guests always leave satisfied."

6. Recruit Partners in Profit

All the customers you serve have one thing in common: they also patronize other businesses on a regular basis. In short, each of your clients concurrently drives revenue to lots of companies every day. As a rule, these providers invest their limited marketing dollars to attract the same type of person you are looking for.

During a slow recovery, successful companies often work together with non-competing businesses to pool marketing resources and manpower. For example, FedEx Office often teams up with local hotels and rental car companies to share leads. They strike strategic alliances with restaurants, tourist attractions, resorts and shopping centers. These companies see Fed Ex as a partner not just another supplier.

How do you find out who these other companies are? Ask your current clients to help you identify other local businesses they patronize on a regular basis. Your regular customers will be impressed that you took the time to seek their input to help improve your service.

Credit card companies are also a wealth of intelligence information. They know exactly which businesses your clients are frequenting. Credit card companies are always locked in a fierce battle for market share and may welcome local partnerships. Better yet, they may provide you with co-op marketing dollars.

If you work for a franchised company, the odds are that you may have never met the individual account managers assigned to your brand by each card.

If this is the case, call your franchisor's marketing department

and ask which staff member works with the credit card companies. That employee can provide you with a local marketing contact for each card.

When you call your franchisor, always start with the marketing department and not the finance department. Why? Marketing works with completely different business contacts and you need to speak with your credit card's marketing people.

7. Practice the Art of Generating Free Press

Suppose you were given the task of selecting a restaurant for a special family celebration. Coincidentally, you recently read a blog post about a local chef who had just won an Iron Chef contest. Later that day you spotted a half-page, four-color expensive advertisement for another local restaurant.

Which of these two is most likely to motivate you to make a future reservation? Obviously, the blog post has far more credibility than does a big, paid advertisement.

According to *eWorkingwomen.com*, "Free press is one of the most powerful ways to spread the word about your business." Why?

"It hits either a targeted market or a general audience—with little impact on your sales and marketing budget. It gives you an edge on your competitors who don't pursue free publicity.

Any time you generate an online recommendation or a story/ photo on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram-It is more credible than paid advertising.

The reader often perceives free PR as a soft endorsement from the platform or publication.”

According to Monique Harris, president of The Connection Bank, “...when you talk about obtaining dirt-cheap publicity, sending out old fashioned news releases is the hands-down the best method.”

She reports: “For the cost of an hour or two of creativity, you can actually land on the pages of many popular blogs, websites, print publications, podcasts or live Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn events.”

News releases, also referred to as a press release, can be used for several reasons including announcing a new renovation or describing an upcoming special event. Traditionally they are one page long. Clarity and brevity are essential in this game. You should always send releases to the press via e-mail. Most publications and trade journals will list their writers’ e-mail addresses on their web site.”

Don’t forget to send copies of press releases to existing and prospective clients. This can be done via e-mail as a PDF or even old-fashioned snail mail. Always produce more copies of a news release and use it just like a new piece of sales collateral.

Why? Clients view almost press release as more important and factual than expensive four-color sales collateral—it simply carries more authoritative weight.

For a great source of Public Relations ideas, check out Joan Stewart's electronic newsletter, [*The Publicity Hound's Tips of the Week*](#). It is chocked-full of tips, tricks and tools for free publicity. Joan, a former newspaper editor, is a frequent contributor to newspapers, magazines, and trade publications. To sign up for her e-zine, visit her Web site at www.PublicityHound.com.

8. When It Comes to Advertising, Outsmart the Out Spenders

In many companies, the advertising budget is the last to be increased when the economy begins to recover. Ironically, that means the publications and major platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn plus independent websites may take a massive hit to their advertising sales targets for 2020-21.

Why? Their clients have fewer “advertising dollars” to invest. Even in a recovering economy, advertisers are often forced to pull their ads just days before the publication goes online or to press. That can be good news for you.

Why? Print publishers will not allow big blank pages to be included in their publication. Online publishers will often make very creative deals to earn even a little income.

With that in mind, identify the two or three blogs, publications and websites you want to be featured in. Then call -not email- their sales representative or publisher. Sales representatives are rarely called during a sluggish recovery. You can bet they’ll be interested. Make it clear that you’re not currently able to be a regular advertiser, but that you can help each other.

Explain that you are willing to act quickly when they get last-minute cancellations. In return, you will expect to pay a significantly reduced fee for the ad space. As a rule, you should offer to pay no more than one-tenth to one-fourth of the current list price.

I can guarantee that at first, the sales representative/ publisher will not seem excited about your proposal.

Just sit back and wait.

In a few weeks, when a big advertiser backs out their commitment to buy an inside covers or a banner ad, you just may get a call.

Why? Your contact will look better if he or she gets something for that empty premium space.

When Janet Attard, president of Attard Communications, Inc., a Web developer and content provider to the online industry, was asked how to get free publicity on industry blogs, podcasts and yes, even old-fashioned radio stations, she offered the following advice:

“Familiarize yourself with each target blog, podcast and/or radio station's audience. Then target the host of the podcasts, editor of the blogs or the salesperson(s) at the radio station. Please note, due to the recent pandemic, staff s changes at each outlet may have occurred. Make a call or send an e-mail to each. The information on Google and LinkedIn may not be current.

Reach out via LinkedIn or email. Identify yourself as a spokesperson for your company and the business issues that affect your industry.

Why? Because of the immediacy of podcasts and radio, their producers/hosts often have precious little time to hunt down information sources when a story breaks.

Send your new contacts both updates and news about your company. Please understand what news is to your new media contacts.

Never forget that your company's new renovation, discounts, packages or widgets will not be discussed as news unless it has true news value.

If there is a human-interest angle in your product or service, do promote that.

When contacted, be a good guest. Know your material, and answer the editor/host's questions, by keeping the audience in mind. Keep your answers on the short side but provide enough real information so the audience comes away feeling they've learned something."

If your boss is considering capping the advertising budget again, remind her of what J. Welsey Rosberg, Senior VP, Meldrum & Fewsmith said. "Studies consistently have proven that companies that have the intelligence and guts to maintain their overall sales, marketing and advertising efforts in times of business uncertainty will get the edge on their timid competitors"

9. During an Economic Recovery, Loosen Your Death Grip on E-mail

E-mail is a great tool to follow-up with a client immediately after a sales call. It is a lousy tool to depend on solely for selling. Why? Prior to the pandemic, your customers spent over 8 hours a work week plowing through their e-mail. That is one full day a week that is was lost to slogging through and responding to a mounting avalanche of e-mail messages.

The Washington Post recently coined a new phrase: “E-mail Bankruptcy.” This term describes a popular new tactic undertaken by people who have become swamped by an unmanageable number of unsolicited messages. Those declaring bankruptcy are deleting all old messages and starting fresh.

The good news is that in 2020 you can easily grab the attention of your customer by dusting off an old sales tool. Last year, the amount of first-class mail dropped in the United States by over 9 billion pieces. In fact, the amount of first-class mail has been rapidly declining since 2001. You may have even noticed that those blue neighborhood mailboxes have almost disappeared.

I strongly recommend you write your clients and prospects an old fashioned, personalized letter and mail it in a business envelope using a first-class stamp.

Why? When your customer receives your letter, it will be a pleasant surprise. In fact, they may feel slightly nostalgic as they start looking for the long-forgotten letter opener that has recently become an heirloom. Your message may take a little longer to reach your customer, but you will effectively cut through the clutter and grab your client’s attention.

Remember, it is not how many communications you send out in 2020 that will drive recovery business. Specifically, it is how many get read and acted on that will drive sales.

If you are pressed for time and must send an e-mail, consider the findings reported by Graphic Design Monthly. When marketing to a client, it is best to send your message Tuesday through Thursday between 9:30 am and 3 pm. If you are marketing directly to consumers, send your message Friday through Sunday between 5 pm and 8 pm.

By following these guidelines, your clients will be receiving your e-mails at the optimal time, thus increasing your open and read rates.

Bill Todd has just published a new book entitled, **How to Write Email That Generates Sales**. It was written specifically for business people who use email for sales, marketing, business development and customer service.

The book teaches you how to write an effective email that is opened, read and acted upon.

To download a free copy, [click here](#).

10. Persistence, Persistence, Persistence

It's official, "persistence, persistence, persistence" has replaced "location, location, location" as the three most important words during the pandemic.

The single most powerful strategy you can employ in pursuit of success during lousy economic times is to just outsell the competition. No rocket science is required—just good, old fashioned determination.

According to Orvel Ray Wilson, co-author of *Guerrilla Selling*, “Bad selling done on a consistent basis will always outperform brilliant selling done sporadically.”

The average salesperson works an average of 53 hours a week. Ironically, these same people only spend, on average, eight hours a week talking directly with clients. By doubling the time, you spend speaking to clients, you can triple your sales performance.

It is also important to become professionally persistent when pursuing new accounts. Research tells us that in 2020, you must approach a prospective customer at least 14 times before he or she decides to buy from you. With so many people working from home, that number should quickly go up.

The good news for you is that the average salesperson gives up after 1.8 sales calls on a new account. In fact, 48% of salespeople quit after they have made the first call. Another 20% call it quits after the second call, while 7% give up after the third call.

Bestselling business author Tom Peters says, “Any idiot can come to work with a 25-item to-do list. The brilliance is never doing 20 of them.” Simply put, we often get sidetracked with unimportant tasks that keep us from doing our primary job—generating revenue.

To combat this tendency, I recommend you place a simple white label on your phone and your computer screen. On this label, boldly print your revenue target for the remainder of 2020 and all of 2021. Every time you look at either of these labels, ask yourself, “Is what I’m doing now directly contributing to the achievement of this goal?”

If the answer is no, simply stop what you are doing and get back on track!

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