



SALES SAVVY FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Better Marketing Means Less Effort Selling

"What – me do sales? I have a business to run!"

As a small business owner, you wear many hats. Even if you don't feel comfortable selling, you know you need to make sales or you won't have a business. The good news is that if you plan your marketing properly, your marketing strategy becomes the framework for your sales activities and it will be easy to sell your product or service.

Your marketing plan must describe your target customer group and provide timelines, costs and individual responsibilities that show exactly how your marketing/sales activities will be implemented. In today's fiercely competitive business environment where fewer staff have to do more and where profit margins are low, every dollar you spend on marketing must count. Having a solid rationale for your sales activities will give you confidence as you represent your product or service. With a good marketing strategy you won't need to associate "selling" with the door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman.

This is the first article in the 2009 series "Sales Savvy for Women Entrepreneurs". Each article in the series will provide information for you to use to overcome your potential barriers to sales so you can implement your marketing strategies.

Understanding the Difference Between *Marketing* and *Sales*

Misconceptions about the relationship between sales and marketing are behind much of the fear associated with "selling". One of the simplest definitions of selling is that it is focused on the needs of the seller, whereas marketing addresses the needs of the buyer. The company that focuses on sales targets sales is preoccupied with the need to convert its product into cash and most likely assumes that consumers need to be persuaded to buy. If this is the case, the company employs a host of selling and promotional techniques to achieve their sales targets.

Marketing, on the other hand, is about satisfying the needs of the consumer by making available a product or service at the appropriate price and giving the information to consumers in a way that helps them understand how the product or service meets their needs. Think *marketing* in terms of the strategy or plan for generating awareness and interest in your product; think *sales* in terms of turning consumer awareness and desire into profitable transactions.

Focus on Being Focused

And just who are the specific consumers your business needs to reach? It's not enough to say, "Everyone is my customer – our product/service would benefit everyone!" While you may have several different customer groups, there is one customer profile likely to use your products and services more

frequently than others. If you want to learn more about identifying and meeting the needs of your target market you can order the learning guide *Focused Marketing* from www.womensenterprise.ca. When you're clear about the benefits and results you can provide to your ideal customers, you can identify your market position – what makes your company different from your competitors.

When you focus on the market most likely to need and want your product or service, you reduce the rejection factor associated with a fear of sales and your time and marketing budget is spent where it is most likely to achieve results. Many businesses get off track by losing sight of their target market and start employing a broad-based, “shot-gun” approach to marketing. For example, a business owner buys space in her community newspaper because a sales rep shows up on a day when the owner is worried about sales and offers her a “great deal” if she runs four advertisements next month. Contrast this to the owner who identified many months in advance (through her marketing plan) that her town's daily newspaper is where she needs to advertise for 10 consecutive days before Valentine's Day because that is where her target customers will get their buying information. She's budgeted for it, has the ad ready to go well in advance and has the extra staff in place to deal with the expected surge in business.

Debbie Chabot, of Patsi Cola Candy Company, realized the importance of having a research-based marketing plan in place as a precursor to sales when she opened an old-fashioned retail candy store in Golden, BC. The business meets the needs within a certain sector of the Golden tourism market – tourists who like candy stores – although young families and youth who live in Golden are another important customer group.

“I would never have opened a business without knowledge of our target market, and in this case it was the target markets that helped to determine the type of business we opened,” says Debbie. “We determined who our initial customers were and organized them into areas associated with such factors as profitability, growth potential, product mix and seasonality. As the business has grown, we perform ongoing research as well as observation,” Debbie says.

Through her Terrace-based sign business, [Silvertip Promotions & Signs Inc.](#), Janice Paulitschke understands that she is in the business of helping other businesses promote themselves as opposed to simply making and selling signs. “It was a natural fit to go after the business community as our main target market,” says Janice. “We know that they will need us for tradeshow, special events and especially at Christmas for staff recognition and customer appreciation gifts. Determining this market has substantially increased sales.”

Having a good marketing strategy so you don't have to put as much effort into selling makes sense. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs can easily become sidetracked in their marketing efforts when they become preoccupied with reaching sales objectives. It is helpful to refer back to your marketing plan, review the rationale, and make sure you're basically implementing the plan as you created it.

At the same time, your marketing plan has to allow for flexibility when there are sudden changes in the marketplace or other unpredictable events. Successful entrepreneurs develop the knack of constantly redefining themselves and listening to the marketplace in order to come up with new products and services.

Carrie Rickards of Essential Department Store Inc. in Invermere has made a few significant changes to her marketing based on the feedback from her loyal customers and her own business intuition. Carrie realized that there was an opportunity to meet the needs of her customers who were quilters. She expanded the area in the store dedicated to crafts and even set up a classroom for quilting. Knowing and responding to the market combined with excellent customer service and the variety of goods her store carries, "is what makes my business different from the competition," Carrie points out.

Research shows women may even have a biological edge when it comes to market research. Simply put, women are able to integrate intuitive thinking about what is important to the consumer, with the analytical challenge of measuring the importance of variables. Some research suggests that male marketers are more likely to use one approach or the other.

Even with a comprehensive marketing plan in place, at times your personal skills, sales incentives or other tools and techniques will be needed to nudge your sales along. In subsequent articles, we'll look at how to address potential barriers to sales and tips for implementing that all important marketing strategy.

Around the corner or around the province, Women's Enterprise Centre is helping women start, grow, and succeed in business by offering business advisory services, business skills training, business loans, resources, publications and referrals.

Call us at 1.800.643.7014 or email info@womensenterprise.ca from anywhere in BC.

All examples cited are BC business owners who have volunteered at Women's Enterprise Centre events.