

Jump Start Your Sales Plan

by Patrick Butler



FINE TUNING YOUR SALES APPROACH TO FIT YOUR PERSONALITY AND COMFORT LEVEL

In these times, you have to actually market your services to prospective clients in order to have a thriving appraisal business. We've all read the marketing books and magazines and have heard a lot of the same ideas over and over again. Despite the abundance of good marketing advice, most appraisers simply fail to implement their marketing plan. In some cases, an appraiser may feel uncomfortable with giving a sales presentation, and that may be the main reason for the failure to even initiate a marketing plan. After all, why try to get

an appointment with a prospective client if it only leads to a face-to-face meeting that makes you so nervous? This article describes various ways to overcome such problems.

Other appraisers may actually enjoy meeting with prospective clients but never get around to setting up those appointments – call it procrastination if you'd like. The second part of this article will help you discover the importance of actually designing a realistic plan and overcoming typical implementation obstacles.

Scenario #1: You're reluctant to meet clients face-to-face

One of the biggest obstacles to successfully implementing a marketing plan is an appraiser's reluctance to actually meet face-to-face with prospective and current clients. This is a huge stumbling block to getting a sales plan implemented because the end result of many marketing efforts will usually result in a face-to-face meeting with the client. So if you have a reluctance to meet with your prospective clients in this manner,

you'll likely not implement any of the sort of marketing (mailings, phone calls) that could result in a face-to-face meeting.

There are two solutions to this problem. The first is to actually analyze why the selling process is uncomfortable. Is there some part of the sales process that can be changed to make it easier? The second solution is to hire a sales professional. Let's address each of these solutions in detail.

Determine your comfort level before you draft a plan

Generally speaking, you'll find the more personal approach of actually meeting your prospects face-to-face to be the most effective in getting new business. How can you manage this process so that it feels sufficiently comfortable for you to go ahead with your plans? You can do this by analyzing your comfort level with the various approaches to selling and choose those 'easier' approaches over the more difficult ones. By doing so, you can ease yourself into the process and hopefully become more comfortable over time. If you absolutely can't find a comfortable approach, you'll need to hire someone else to do it. We'll address that later in this article.

There are easier ways to meet with your client

While you may envision a sales meeting with a prospective client to consist of both of you sitting across from each other at a big desk, there are actually easier ways to accomplish the same sort of meeting. There's no need to set yourself up for failure if you just aren't comfortable with that sort of approach. In the box to the right are some different ways to meet with your prospective clients without having to resort to the big desk syndrome. They are listed in order from easiest to most difficult—which is best for you?

Enlisting the help of a sales rep

If you still can't muster the courage to

give your own sales presentations, there is another way to get the job done. Hire your own sales representative, or rep. Let's face it, we are first and foremost appraisers and some of us were forced into becoming salespeople without really having those desires. The first thing you need to do before hiring a sales rep is to decide what

part(s) of selling process to delegate to the rep. You'll obviously be paying that rep and you'll save money if the rep doesn't have to be responsible for the entire sales process from start to finish. The yellow box to the right takes a look at some of the sales steps individually, exploring how a rep may help.

Four Easy (Not-So-Threatening) Ways to Meet with Clients and Prospects

- 1 • A breakfast or luncheon appointment with your prospective client is usually much less formal than meeting in the client's office. The act of eating a meal provides sort of a framework for your meeting. The meeting usually ends when everyone is finished eating. A lot of discussion will occur between 'bites of food,' preventing you from having to give a twenty minute speech.
- 2 • Consider giving out some sort of advertising premium on a regular basis. You can actually drop off your gift at your client's office and they'll look forward to seeing you on a regular basis. For instance, my friend who owns a title company has supplied his clients with glass candy jars imprinted with his company name, logo, and telephone number. He sends his sales staff out routinely with a large supply of candy to refill those candy jars. Believe me, every one of his clients looks forward to his sales reps coming through the door with a large bag filled with candy. Maybe you can do the same sort thing with quarterly calendars or a newsletter. You get the idea- just pick some sort of premium that your client would look forward to receiving and you'll suddenly find yourself welcomed into their offices with open arms.
- 3 • We'll talk later about using a sales rep exclusively for all your sales efforts. But at this time you may already have someone else in your office who is good at sales and can accompany you to a sales meeting. This takes a lot of pressure off having to do everything yourself. Consider bringing this person along for moral support. You can watch this person try to sell and at the same time, learn a thing or two about their sales techniques. This is a very common approach used at companies who have a full time sales force. They effectively teach their newer salespeople, in part, by allowing them to go along with more experienced salespeople.
- 4 • Finally, giving a group presentation or seminar to prospective clients is probably the most difficult type of sales encounter. However, this type of presentation usually garners the best results. That's because you can have your prospective client and everyone else on his 'team' meet in the same room. You can make sure that everyone involved in the decision making process hears the same story and can get their questions answered. A successful presentation of this sort also gives you the appearance of being an authority in your field. This should be your ultimate goal.

How a Sales Rep Can Help Through Various Steps of the Sales Process

- 1 **Initial leads** - The beginning of the sales process starts with determining who may have a need for your services. A good rep can start at this point in the process, but you'll have to compensate him accordingly. Maybe you don't like to give a sales presentation yourself but still attend a lot of industry meetings and generally keep up with what's going on. Develop an organized way to write these prospects down to be able to supply your rep with details.
- 2 **Routine prospecting to those leads by mail** - You may find that direct mail solicitation works best for finding new leads. Fortunately, most of our prospective clients are of an 'industrial' type and there are literally hundreds of mailing list brokers and directories who publish lists of such clients. By implementing a consistent direct mail routine (possibly even using postcards) you can ensure a constant supply of new leads for your sales rep. Decide whether you or your rep will handle this sort of direct mail prospecting.
- 3 **Actually making phone contact with those leads** - Perhaps you don't mind talking to prospective clients on the phone but just feel uncomfortable having to meet them. Fine. Do your own cold calling and let your rep handle it from there. If there is going to be any telephone solicitation, however, I recommend that it be from your rep so all contact with your company comes from one source.
- 4 **Giving the actual sales presentation** - By far, this is the number one reason you'd probably hire a sales rep. There's a lot of planning that needs to be done between you and your sales rep before they can successfully represent your firm. You'll need to outline what items the rep has responsibility for and which ones will require your approval. The majority of reps usually need permission from the business owner before negotiating fees. You may also want to either supply, or approve, all sales materials used by that rep.
- 5 **Sharing a rep with someone else** - Consider hiring a rep who is already working in the same business but simply selling a related service.

Scenario #2: You're good at sales but just never get around to your plan

Perhaps meeting prospective and current clients face-to-face is easy for you. It's just that you never have enough opportunities to do so. That's because you never get around to implementing your marketing plan. To start, you'll need to connect the benefit of your labor (income) with your activities (prospecting). It's difficult to stay on track if you can't realize the benefits derived from your marketing activities.

Realize the importance of consistency

You need to realize that there aren't secret methods for getting business that your competition doesn't already know. The difference between the success and failure of your sales efforts has very little to do with the type of sales effort you engage (face-to-face, direct mail, etc.) It will most likely be a result of implementing it in a consistent fashion and sticking to it. The

more you analyze the efforts of other sales professionals, the more you'll realize that intelligence has nothing to do with it! Persistence will take you very far in this business.

Appreciate the fact that your consistent efforts may hit the client at just the right time that they have a need

This works especially well in our profession because the client may be disappointed with their regular appraiser's work at any particular time. Your sales effort may reach the client at the same time they are reviewing someone else's work. Consistency can ultimately garner a response from a client because of the typical ups and downs of their satisfaction level with their existing appraisers.

Routinely analyze the results of your efforts to stay on course

Track your inbound sales according to their source. Once you start to imple-

ment a focused sales plan you'll actually be able to place a dollar amount on your efforts. You'll then be able to realize, for instance, that my last 20 sales visits accounted for \$32,000 in business. This will provide you with a real-world measure of how well your sales efforts are succeeding. It's very difficult to stay on course with your marketing efforts if you can never measure the results of such efforts.

"Yes" Will Come to the Persistent

Recognize that failure is absolutely necessary in order to achieve success. You'll simply have to get past those 'no' clients if you are ever to find the 'yes'



If you have been tracking your sales results and know, for instance, that you typically get a new client for every 3–4 presentations, that client who just rejected you has put you closer to getting a ‘yes.’ You wouldn’t know this without having diligently tracked the results of your previous efforts.

clients. This sounds much simpler than it is to implement, but keep it in mind when you are walking out of a prospective client’s office after being told they are happy with their current appraisers. If you have been tracking your sales results and know, for instance, that you typically get a new client for every three to four presentations, that client who just rejected you has put you closer to getting a ‘yes.’ You wouldn’t know this without having diligently tracked the results of your previous efforts.

Also realize that our business is extremely sensitive to changes in the real estate market. So if a prospective client doesn’t have a need for your services, that can easily change if interest rates drop, for instance.

Hopefully after reading this section you’ll appreciate the concept of implementing a sales plan in a consistent fashion for the best results. It’s actually easier to be consistent over time. If you’ve been with the same sales plan on a consistent monthly basis for the last year, for instance, you’ll really feel the pain if you never get around to this month’s mailing. Your client will be waiting for it.

How to stay motivated over the long term

I once worked at a real estate company where the owner was extremely successful. I saw him answer a question asked by a new salesperson. The salesperson asked, “What does it take to be successful in this business?” The owner responded “I could tell you, but you wouldn’t do what it takes anyway.” His point had to do with the fact

that actually knowing what to do is easy, but actually getting around to doing it is the hard part.

Find out what motivates you over the long term

Many people only get short term gratification from motivational seminars. It’s been said that virtually everything you need to know has already been written. Don’t reinvent the wheel, but rather, learn from others and just apply it. By planning for the long term and seeing the results, you’ll be more apt to stick with your plans.

Force yourself to be productive

Make a goal of spending a certain amount of time for phone calls each day, or a certain number of successful contacts. To keep yourself on track, develop a sales tracking form where you can review your progress on an ongoing basis.

The importance of a written plan

Do you actually have a written sales plan? Probably not. And if you do have a written sales plan, is it very specific with precise steps?

On a daily basis...

When it actually comes down to it you should make some sort of entry in your calendar on a daily basis. The reality of engaging in a sales effort is that it indeed takes up some of your time. If you never get around to actually scheduling time for this, you’re bound for failure. This will also assist with the typical sales roller coaster that can be experienced when you are

very busy. When you are busy, you have less time to implement your daily activities, leading to a business slowdown maybe a month or so later. Then the marketing starts up again. This sort of roller coaster approach can be very unsettling. Definitely outline your sales steps down to a daily basis to eliminate this.

Flowchart Specifics

Create a sales plan flowchart to identify the steps required to make a sale. You’ll need to identify logical steps that you need to complete for each sale such as initial phone calls required, mailings, and appointments. Put yourself on a time plan to accomplish each step individually. Consider buying some sales software such as Act or Goldmine which will assist you in following through with each step.

At some point, you’ll actually have to have your sales steps scheduled in your planner. If you haven’t actually set aside time to implement your plan, you’ll likely not have time to do it.

What’s best for you?

Hopefully this article has allowed you to gain some insight into some typical reasons why appraisers fail to implement their sales plans. But now you should realize that an effective sales approach isn’t something that just happens by itself. By determining the aspects that make you feel uncomfortable, you’ll be able to decide whether or not to hire someone else to help. Hopefully, you’ll also realize the importance of actually setting sales efforts as a normal part of your daily routine.



About the Author

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