

Chapter 2: The Basics of Selling

Thousands of people begin selling promotional products every year, and they all do so for different reasons. Some want to own a business, while others strive to control their own destiny, but most do so in order to make a living. To meet the goal you've set for yourself, be sure to get started the right way.

Many people experience problems early on because they believe there is too much to learn in a short amount of time. So much is thrown at them at once from suppliers, service providers and the like. Don't worry – the practice of selling promotional products is simple when you take the right approach. Here are some tips to help you get started.

Tip 1: Determine Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Selling can be difficult, so make sure that you are well versed in its principles from the beginning. Reach out to a mentor to learn selling strategies, or obtain some sales training before you begin making calls. The skills you need to sell promotional items are no different than ones you need to sell other goods and services, so ask yourself if the selling profession is right for you.

Tip 2: Get an Industry Certification

When selling promotional products, you can gain more industry knowledge when you obtain industry certification. You can earn several designations from providers, that require you to take in-person and on-line classes, that train you on important issues and techniques. Distributor Central is a leader in helping distributors learn the best practices of selling in today's market.

Tip 3: Present Yourself Professionally

Help potential customers form a positive opinion of you on the spot. For instance, your business card is one constant that identifies you to the world, so make sure it's something to be proud of.

When I started my business in the early '80s, I changed my card three different times in the first five years, in an effort to stand out from competitors. My first card was printed on a very heavy card stock; followed by a rubber card; and lastly, a wooden card. By changing up the look and feel of my business card with unique shapes and materials, I was able to make a lasting first impression.

Tip 4: Be a Planner

It is essential to manage your time properly and to know what you're going to do long before you do it. At the end of the day, make notes to yourself that detail what your activities will be for the next day, and lay out the next day's samples and catalogs if you're going to make outside calls.

I used to wait until the last minute to get organized until I almost lost a sale because of it. I showed up for a sales call but had forgotten a product sample the customer wanted

to see. Since I didn't have the sample, the sale was postponed until I could get one to him. I was lucky to have closed the sale at all.

I learned my lesson and changed the way I put my sales materials together. I never – and I mean *never* – go to bed until I have everything ready for the next day's calls. Sometimes, I even load the car the night before.

Tip 5: Attend Promotional Products Shows

This is a great way to become familiar with the products, get to know suppliers and make personal connections, which is especially important when you're starting out. Here are just a few things to keep in mind when you begin attending these events:

Make a plan.

Before you enter the hall where the show is taking place, do a little research. Examine the show's program and note which suppliers offer the kinds of products you think are suited to your current customers. This way, you'll have beneficial conversations with the suppliers who may really help you grow your business, and you can spend more time getting to know their products instead of running from booth to booth.

Shop services, too.

Among the exhibiting suppliers at shows, you'll also find service providers who are offering solutions that will make your transition into the industry easier. Instead of spending time at your first show listening to several different service pitches, keep things simple and visit the ASI booth first. It's always located in the center of the show floor, and it's a great place to start.

Find knowledgeable reps.

Don't start conversations by talking about pricing. Instead, ask the booth representative to show you the hottest selling products and explain the target audience for each. If the rep doesn't seem knowledgeable, kindly excuse yourself and move on to another booth. Just like in any business, some suppliers are better than others, and you must spend time only with ones who are on top of their game!

Tip 6: Find Products

No distributor knows everything about every product before they make their pitches. I've been in this business for 30 years, and I still learn about new products every day. Take baby steps by learning the products of a few suppliers and effectively presenting those. Don't fall into the trap of learning too much about everything without having anyone to sell to.

Search for Products

With so many products available, you need a fast, effective source to find them. Often, looking online is the fastest way to find them. There are several web-

based product search engines available, but the one I have used for years and recommend is Distributor Central. It features effective options, offers a complete array of products from thousands of suppliers, is easy to use and is suitable for any product inquiry.

All you have to do, to use Distributor Central, is sign up, unlike other search services, which require you to pay a continuous monthly or yearly fee. Joining our built-in community comes with numerous valuable benefits. For instance, you'll have access to professionally designed website templates to be used to promote your distributorship and other valuable selling tools, absolutely free!

Print Catalogs

Print catalogs are still a necessity in the industry. Many people who are just starting out spend too much time trying to get a handle on the large amounts of catalogs they receive. After placing a few orders, it will seem as though every supplier in the industry ends up sending you theirs, too. The best way to keep organized and contain the clutter is to file them by categories. Select a few suppliers from each category and place those in individual folders, then file the others at the back of each category in one miscellaneous file.

Tip 7: Understand Price Codes & EQP

When you purchase promotional products, it's usually the case that the bigger quantities of products you buy from suppliers, the bigger discount you'll get per item. The price code system in product catalogs will help you figure out what your price and discount will be based on what quantity you will be ordering.

There are two pricing codes: One code labels products A through I, and the other uses P through X. (Both follow the same structure, just using different letters.) Each letter is associated with a percentage. For instance, (A) means you get a 50% discount off the listed price per item. A (B) indicates a 45% discount off the listed price per item, and so on at 5% intervals. Since ordering larger quantities of items means bigger discounts, (A) will be assigned to the largest quantity. In the P through X price code system, (P) indicates the 50% discount rate.

The letters are usually found somewhere close to the pricing grids that are shown under products both in catalogs and online.

Here are the price codes and their associated discounts:

- A (or P): 50%
- B (or Q): 45%
- C (or R): 40%
- D (or S): 35%
- E (or T): 30%
- F (or U): 25%

G (or V): 20%

End Quantity Pricing (EQP or last column pricing) refers to the lowest price of a promotional product. A lot of people focus too much on getting EQP. They worry that other people are getting lower prices and obsess over it, which is a waste of time. The best way to sell promo products is to focus on the sales and not the exact amount the supplier is charging. Never expect to get EQP pricing from a supplier until you've developed a solid relationship with them. That happens over time by placing orders and paying them in a timely fashion.

Tip 8: Diversify Your Customer Base

Many distributors get way too comfortable when they attain most of their sales from a few large accounts. This approach works great as long as things are rosy, but the loss of just one account can turn high expectations into a disaster overnight.

Examine your customer list to make sure that there's a balance in the number of companies serviced and volumes sold. The majority of your income should come from numerous small and medium-sized accounts rather than only a few large ones. You don't want to be significantly affected financially with the loss of a large account.

Tip 9: Know Important Industry Players

Distributors

As a distributor, you purchase promotional products from suppliers and sell to end-buyers. Along the way, in between the buying and selling, you add value to those products through customization and excellent customer service.

Distributors can be one individual to a large company, and you'll have to get to know your competition.

Competing with Current Distributors

It's difficult to compete head-on with established distributors. A smart approach is to start by offering products to your current customers or acquaintances. Once you obtain sufficient product and industry knowledge, you'll be able to branch out and call on larger companies.

Suppliers

Suppliers either import or manufacture blank promotional products to sell to distributors. Once a distributor places the order, the supplier often imprints the product with a logo. Suppliers can be small specialty businesses or large companies operating at high volumes. When you develop strong relationships with your suppliers, it can be the key to your success.

Decorators

This part of the promotional products supply chain is responsible for customizing apparel products for customers. The two most popular kinds of decorating methods are embroidery and screen printing. Whatever kind of decorating you need for your products, make sure you find reliable decorators whose quality of work you can trust with this extremely important part of the process.

Regional Associations

These are made up of distributors, suppliers, service providers and multi-line reps that function primarily as networking groups. Most offer monthly luncheons or dinner meetings as well as yearly tabletop shows. The cost to join one of these associations runs around \$100, and they are located in all parts of the country.

Multi-Line Reps

Representing products from several suppliers, multi-line reps work on commission to make calls on distributors. They are a bridge between distributors and the suppliers they represent, and they can be quite helpful in solving problems or expediting orders.

Promotional Products Association International (PPAI)

This non-profit group offers different services to people in the industry. The association is made up of distributors, suppliers and service providers. It charges a fee for membership, which is based on the dollar amount of products you're selling in a calendar year. PPAI is located in Irving, Texas, and puts on a large show in Las Vegas each year.

Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI)

ASI sells memberships to distributors, suppliers and service providers. They are a privately held company located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA and sells different products to their subscribers. ASI puts on three regional shows in Orlando, Fort Worth and Chicago. The company also runs traveling shows that visits major cities.

Tip 10: Listen for the Sale

To exceed or maintain your sales objectives, you must always be listening more than you are talking. The information you glean from what prospects say is more important in creating success than anything you can ever say about yourself or products. This premise seems strange to many salespeople, and because of this, they become no more than mediocre industry sellers.

The four things that are required to produce sales are:

1. Call on qualified prospects
2. Sell creative ideas
3. Ask pertinent questions
4. Always **listen**

Most salespeople are pretty good at mastering the first three points, but they often have real difficulty when it comes to the listening part. Average salespeople talk too much, and when that behavior is combined with the act of non-listening, they never learn what prospects really need or want. Save yourself from this dilemma by following these tips.

1. **Be quiet.** You won't learn anything unless you remain silent and always remember never to break the silence first after you speak. If you do, you won't be told the information required to move the sale forward. Stay silent until other person talks.

Action Tip: If you have a hard time staying quiet, a good way to quell the talking urge is to look straight at the customer and count backward silently.

2. **Focus.** While waiting for prospects to provide their answers, make sure to give them your complete attention. Block out all distractions to make sure that your attention is focused on what prospects are saying at that moment.

Action Tip: To keep your attention on what is being said, look directly at your prospect's face and focus on their nose, ears or mouth. By doing this, you are forcing yourself to be cognizant of what you are being told.

3. **Let them know you care.** When a buyer answers questions, hang on their every word and appear sincere by nodding, smiling or making eye contact with them. Never glance away or check your cell phone when someone is talking.

Action Tip: To limit the number of possible distractions, put your cell on silent when making presentations.

4. **Be a repeater.** When someone says something meaningful to the sale, repeat the statement back and ask for clarification if you don't understand. This shows the buyer that you are listening and engaged.

Action Tip: To make sure that you are absolutely clear about everything you hear, repeat the prospect's responses back in your mind while they are being made. You will be better able to react quickly when the prospect finishes talking.

5. **Be empathetic.** When prospects say things that diminish the chances of closing a sale, such as, "Our budgets are tight right now," make sure that you appear empathetic toward the predicament. Let them know you understand, and then immediately start proposing alternate solutions. The majority of sales are made at later dates because of the information learned during the empathy stage of listening.

Action Tip: Think about all of the possible objections you could encounter and have responses prepared ahead of time to combat them.

- 6. Ask effective follow-up questions.** Address any concerns that are preventing the sale from taking place. This act of probing is something you must master in order to clarify objections that will get prospects talking again.

Action Tip: When objections come up that stifle the selling process, ask this: “What do you think would be good for you?” This turns the selling burden back on the prospect and creates an opportunity for you to offer additional remedies.

The process of completing sales is made up of several variables, with the biggest one being the act of **listening**. To reach the goals you have set for yourself, always be sure that you are listening more than talking.

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Effective Communication

Communicating effectively with everyone will allow you to:

- Identify good prospects
- Become more efficient
- Eliminate rejections

These are the building blocks of selling. If you master them, your sales performance will improve dramatically.

Great salespeople have one thing in common: They know what to say and when to say it! They have learned how to talk to prospects in an effective manner and are able to carry on meaningful conversations with anyone. Top sales performers don't need to read from scripts. They possess a diverse range of knowledge that enables them to exchange information in all situations. To hone your communication skills, always try to do the following.

- **Be well read on a variety of subjects.** This makes it possible for you to talk with people from any age group or income level.
- **Make eye contact and smile.** It will increase your chances for a positive response exponentially.
- **Keep gossip to a minimum, and never use profanity.** We're all so connected that you never know who might see your email messages or overhear your conversations. The easiest way to lose a sale is by talking negatively about someone to a prospect, then learning that he or she knows that person.
- **Be curious.** Start conversations by asking about a person's family is a great icebreaker. Most people love to talk about their family and pets!

- **Listen.** Refrain from interrupting too frequently.
- **Be agreeable and resist the urge to correct people.** People react negatively to a person who acts like a know-it-all or talks down to them.
- **Ask for permission, and always be polite.** When you connect with someone on the phone, ask if it's a convenient time to talk. Never launch into discussions with anyone unless you have asked if they're available, which shows them that you respect their time.
- **Ask questions.** You'll understand why people think the way they do and become a better salesperson.

As I mentioned before, the sale of promotional products is a very straightforward business. If you take the time to learn sufficient information about the products of a few solid suppliers and match them to your current customer list, you will increase your income nicely. Make sure to ease into the market slowly and without getting distracted by misinformation. By adding the sale of more of these products to your current business model, you'll expand your sales like never before. Now, it's time to learn how to market yourself.



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- * Limit one offer per sales person, per order.
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- * Free Die up to \$80.00 net value.
- * Minimum 2nd column qty.
- * Limit one offer per sales person, per order.
- * Not to be combined w/any other offer or quote.
- * Coupon must be attached to order.
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