

Chapter 4: Get Clients Through Prospecting & Marketing

I've been selling promo items for more than 30 years, and sometimes I think I've seen it all, but every day I learn something new. From experience, I know how rewarding and exciting my job is, but I understand how challenging it is as well. I've produced \$25 million of sales at high profit margins for my company over the years, and here's my realistic take on what you need to do to succeed in this highly competitive industry.

Cold Calls

Definition: Develop clients from unknown sources

Benefit: Increase customer base

Approach: Organize a plan and never deviate

Obstacles: Extreme tenacity is necessary

Cold calling is an arduous method to employ when building a distributorship. In spite of this, thousands of people have become successful due to their efforts of placing large numbers of calls and not being intimidated.

To make this type of business creation work, you must possess a terrific personality, be witty and be able to think on your feet. The best way to start out is by visiting local companies and explaining what you offer, and then asking if you can assist them in their marketing efforts. This relaxed, soft-sell approach is superior to high-pressure efforts, yielding better results than barging into places and stating that you offer thousands of items at cheaper prices.

Cold calling on the phone works only after you've made hundreds of calls. Here, too, you must be able to think quickly, have a significant telephone presence and be able to respond rapidly. I am not suggesting that you shy away from cold calling, since numerous distributorships have begun this way. But if you do use this method, you must be tenacious and not quickly cowed. Don't be afraid of objections.

Here are the steps to help you combat objections and close more sales:

1. Limit Product Choices

Instead of offering a dozen product variations, provide three options and then determine if you are headed in the right direction. By limiting choices, you'll limit objections. When I offer three varieties in my approach, prospects end up buying one of them 90% of the time.

2. Impress Buyers

Chances are that potential buyers are already purchasing from your competitors. To remain competitive, use testimonials. Ask your current clients for comments referencing your work, and show them to everyone working with your

competitors. I keep more than 20 letters touting my work on hand and provide them when necessary.

3. Deliver on Time

A common problem that stifles salespeople is when they take on rush orders and are not able to deliver them on time. To fulfill rush orders, you need to build strong supplier relationships. That includes paying invoices on time and meeting with suppliers in person (especially at shows). I have strong relationships in place with at least 20 suppliers who are happy to process rush orders in one- to four-day periods.

4. Negotiate Prices

You don't want to set based on price, but there are cases in which prospects have budgetary restraints. When someone asks for better pricing, ask him or her how much they think is fair. They are usually more than willing to let you know what they want to pay. Never arbitrarily lower prices without first knowing what the customer is willing to spend. Tell prospects if they pay in advance, you'll offer a more favorable deal.

5. Keep Long-Term Customers

When people change jobs, you may lose the account. To avoid this, stay in touch with former clients and ask if they know who took their place. Reach out to the new buyer and schedule a meeting. When you meet, take the time to point out your previous work for the company and ask to continue the relationship. Through maintaining relationships with former customers, I've been able to keep old customers and gain new ones.

6. Handle Radio Silence the Right Way

It can be frustrating when a prospect doesn't get back to you – especially if you have called and mailed samples several times. Select a time when you know they are not available and leave a message along these lines:

Joe, it's Don Sanders. I'm sorry for being a pest. Since you have not gotten back to me, I believe that you may have moved on regarding the placement of an order. I promise not to bother you again, but if you ever need something, I would love to help you with those products.

About 40% of the time my prospects return calls and apologize for not doing so earlier, and they eventually place orders.

Networking

Definition: Create prospects by using social and personal contacts

Benefit: More relaxed method of prospecting

Approach: Match personality and interest to like-minded people

Obstacles: Must be organized

To grow your business, start creating bonds with individuals you meet during social interactions, especially in casual settings. This form of prospecting is the most effective, and these relationships tend to last for long periods of time. Clients from networking events are buying from you based on friendship and trust instead of price. Below are a few suggestions of where you can get started:

1. Friends and Neighbors

I ask friends and neighbors for referrals, and my largest customers have resulted from those efforts. When I started my business in 1982, my best friend's girlfriend happened to be the marketing director for a fledgling French bakery. I ended up selling that company more than \$900,000 worth of products in 11 years as they grew from a single location to more than 75 bakeries nationwide. In another instance, a college friend of mine introduced me to the purchasing manager of a major corporation, and I sold her more than \$1 million worth of products during a 13-year period.

2. Existing Customers

I had a client who abandoned his career to go to law school. While at school, he sold for me part-time to make extra money. After a few weeks, he met the personnel director for a large retail chain at school and sold her several orders. Upon graduation, he gave me this account and I sold them more than \$3 million worth of products over a 10-year period.

3. Chambers of Commerce

Several times during my career I have rejuvenated my business by joining a Chamber of Commerce and attending their activities. Through one Chamber of Commerce, I sold orders to more than 50 new customers and most become repeat buyers. The key to recruiting new business through a Chamber is to qualify people, as soon as you meet them.

4. Volunteer Opportunities

When you put yourself in positions to meet like-minded people, you dramatically increase your chances of reaching new clients. The most new business I ever earned resulted from volunteering with a local historical society. I sold the organization many orders and also met 11 new customers, with four of them turning into high-volume accounts.

5. Alumni Groups

In my case, I belong to the Frog Club, which supports Texas Christian University athletics. During football season, I attend weekly luncheons as a means to pick up new clients. By going to places and meeting fellow enthusiasts, you are given the chance to expand your customer base.

6. Political Campaigns

With the political season happening annually, I pick candidates when they

announce their intentions and start working for them. By doing this, I'm able to come in contact with those who share my political philosophy. I've taken many accounts away from competitors as a result of meeting new people while working on campaigns. Elections give you a chance to meet people who think just like you do!

Attending Networking Functions

A benefit that local Chambers provide to members is an opportunity to attend several networking events each month. Here are a few tips so you can get the most out of these functions:

- Attend on a regular basis.
- Spend your time with potential buyers and not continual talkers.
- Meet as many people as possible, find out their profession and ask how you might help them.
- Follow up with your network connections immediately after the event and schedule a meeting within 2-3 days.
- Approach new contacts casually. Say you were in the area and wanted to continue the first meeting's conversation. If they are unavailable, leave your card and a note, and get in touch with them by phone and email the next day.

By repeating this process after networking opportunities, you will generate a steady stream of prospects. Never forget to ask pertinent questions at the time of introduction, and always follow up in a timely manner.

Social Media Marketing

Definition: Creating connections by using online services

Benefit: Discover customers not found by traditional means

Approach: Develop online presence to attract like-minded individuals

Obstacles: Communications must be worded correctly

Social media marketing affords you the opportunity to connect with large numbers of people quickly and efficiently. Some distributors consider shared interest marketing to be a fad, while others believe it is the key to success. It is my opinion that creating online connections is a significant step in building bonds to develop business relationships that last forever.

Keep these thoughts in mind when dealing with social media marketing:

1. Brand Recognition

Social media allows you to promote your brand. It's easier for prospects to learn more about you, and you also become more recognizable to existing customers. Plus, significant numbers of people will likely make an effort to comment on your

services or products. When more people discuss you, your brand becomes more prevalent to everyone.

2. Increase Brand Loyalty

According to numerous reports, brands that frequently engage on social media enjoy higher rates of customer loyalty.

3. Higher Conversion Rates

Social media leads to higher conversion rates because it enhances the personal touch of selling. Brands are more humanized with social interaction. Individuals like doing business with people, not companies.

4. More Chances to React

Every communication posted on social media platforms becomes an opportunity to create an order. When you post something on social media, individuals can post reactions and share your post, further encouraging discussions and increasing the likelihood of a sale.

5. Increased Traffic

Without the use of social media, your inbound web traffic is limited only to people currently familiar with your brand. Every social media profile you add creates more paths to your site. Additional content added to sites generates inbound traffic, which produces leads and conversions.

When other distributors are using social media and you aren't, you fall behind the pack when the selling race begins. You must prevent competitors from taking business away by creating an effective online presence today.

Referrals

Definition: Business created by past performance

Benefit: Effective way to increase order flow

Approach: Consistent service and innovative product recommendations

Obstacles: Requires high levels of performance and years of experience

Colleagues, associates and friends are sources of referrals. Over the years, I have derived more than 25% of new business from referrals. The ability to receive referrals on a consistent basis is an excellent way to grow your business. When sales come from outside recommendations, someone else started the sales cycle on your behalf. If a neutral party touts your work, he or she clearly trusts your abilities.

The first step is to make sure you are referable and that you deliver products and services in a manner that exceeds client expectations. If you aren't meeting customer demands, you will not be able to generate referrals. Always go above and beyond the call of duty. Give customers a reason to recommend you.

Once you know you can deliver, the next step is to design a referral program.

Create Your Own Referral Program

1. Exchange referrals with like-minded service providers you completely trust.
2. Recognize and thank referral sources with phone calls, emails and by sending handwritten notes (the best approach). Always express appreciation.
3. Include a "Referrals Always Appreciated" tagline in your email signature, on your business card and with all written communications. Add a link to a form on your website and under your email signature for your clients to submit a referral.
4. Use social media.
 - Include social media icons and links in your email newsletter so readers can easily share content.
 - Keep your social media profiles updated and include a link to your profile in online communications.
 - When generating traffic, reach out to visitors and followers and request referrals. On Twitter, ask for a retweet.
 - Be helpful in forums. Post insightful comments that validate your expertise.
5. Make sure that clients know everything you offer so they are able to refer all your services within their professional and personal network.
6. Inspire confidence in your referral sources by letting them know that most of your business comes from repeat customers.
7. Offer a guarantee.
8. Treat everyone like a partner. When you pay suppliers on time, they will back you and help you in tight situations. Let customers know you view them as strategic allies, and find out if they feel the same about you.
9. Offer free products in exchange for new business created.
10. *GIVE* a referral. It's the best way to get one in return.

By employing the tips shown above, you are putting yourself in the position to receive that kind of call several times per week!

Testimonials

Definition: Validation of prior customer services

Benefit: Reinforces image of expertise

Approach: Allows clients to assist in selling process
Obstacles: Requires tenacity and high self-esteem

The most efficient way to let anyone know they should do business with you is to show them tangible evidence. You can do this by sharing quotes from existing customers who are happy with your service. Prospects then know that you're reliable.

Ask clients exactly what they think about your service. When you receive positive feedback, ask for permission to use them to share with prospects. Most clients will be more than happy to allow you to repeat their comments in any manner you choose. If the feedback is negative, you have the opportunity to take the actions necessary to correct mistakes. Either way, the practice of obtaining testimonials will allow you to tout your professionalism or correct errors!

Below are just a few of the testimonials I've received over the years:

"Don provides us with great service, and his ideas are the best!"
– Kay McCarthy, Bombay Company

"When we need rush orders done, we count on Don Sanders Marketing to make them happen!"
– Mike Harrison, Mike Harrison Real Estate Company

"The ideas that Don brings us are spot-on for our customers and the occasion!"
– Liza Orchard, Idea Orchard

"Don Sanders has provided us with great service for more than 13 years!"
– Randy Stone, Harris Methodist Health System

"Quality products and great service are what Don provides!"
– Karen Lovell, Baylor Homecare

Easiest Ways to Get Testimonials

1. Always exceed client expectations.
2. Communicate with customers frequently.
3. Ask clients if they are pleased with your services.
4. Always correct mistakes in a timely manner.
5. Never make excuses.

Direct Mail

Definition: Increase sales by using mass mailings
Benefit: Cover large industry segments
Approach: Must employ creative mailers
Obstacles: Need to update mailing lists constantly

Direct mail is a terrific way to increase business in today's market. At one time, there were many distributor mailings, and most of them were not very creative. Today, very few dealers are using direct mail and instead opt for email marketing. Since the use of direct mail has diminished and fewer distributors use it, mailing a prospect today will actually make you stand out.

What Happened to Me

Several years ago, more than 35% of my sales came from "The Dallas Times Herald." Then, I picked up a copy of the paper with the headline, "Herald Sold to the Morning News – This is Our Last Issue." It cost me one-third of my business and made me realize that I must expand my customer base. I designed a bounce-back card that offered a gift to recipients who mailed the card back.

To start the mailing program, I hired college students to call companies to find out the name of their marketing director. I did this based on industry segments, such as trucking firms, funeral homes, architects, attorneys, etc. After the students secured the names, they were entered into a database and I mailed the return cards on a set schedule. When anyone sent one back, I made a personal visit in order to drop off the gift and explain the benefits of doing business with me.

Fortunately, the card program worked, and during its first year of implementation, I acquired enough customers to replace the volume lost when my large customer was bought out.



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\$40 REBATE COUPON

- * Offer good on an order of \$500.00 or more (product & tooling only).
- * Limit one offer per sales person, per order.
- * Not to be combined w/any other offer or quote.
- * Coupon must be attached to order.
- * Offer expires 12/31/20.
- * Use code: DS-2020-40

FREE DIE COUPON

- * 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.
- * Offer expires 12/31/20.
- * Use code: DS-2020-FD