

Lesson 14 Worksheet: Sell without Selling Your Soul

This worksheet will help you take an ethical and creative approach to selling your artwork, products or services, delivering maximum benefits for you and your customers.

The ideas are most directly applicable to freelancers, business owners and sales and marketing professionals. But they also apply to employees negotiating salaries, and to anyone who needs to 'sell' new ideas to others.

1. What problem are you solving?

Why did you choose to do what you do?

Who are you here to help?

What problems can you solve for them?

And if you're an artist or entertainer ...

How do people feel after they encounter your work?

What difference does it make to their lives?

2. Look and listen

(a) Your online audience

If you have a large group of customers, use the marketing approaches from Lesson 13 to interact with them online. This will give you a lot of qualitative feedback about their likes, dislikes problems, needs and wants.

Additionally, you should monitor the following hard data over time:

- Numbers of website visitors
- Most popular pages (by pages viewed)
- Most popular pages
- Sales pages: ratio of visitors to sales

(b) Before a sales meeting

If you land a sales meeting with a company representative, you are being negligent if you don't do your research beforehand.

i. Research the company:

- Look at the company website
- Google their company and product names, as well as “company name sucks” or “company name problem” (to unearth any real or perceived problems)
- Twitter search their name and product names
- Read customer reviews on Amazon and product review websites
- Also look through trade journals
- Ask people in your network what they know about the company.

ii. Research the person(s) you will be meeting:

- Search for them on Google, Twitter, and LinkedIn (don't add them as friends or contacts yet - it might look a bit stalker-ish!)
- If they have a blog, read it.
- Ditto their Twitter feed and social networking profiles, which can give a wealth of information about their personality, background, opinions, likes and dislikes.

(c) In a sales meeting

You need to be prepared to deliver a 'pitch' - i.e. a clear statement of your offer and typical benefits. Some people will ask you to open a meeting with this. But if you get the opportunity, start by asking them questions (see question 3) and demonstrating that you are listening and understanding by:

- Allowing them to talk without interrupting with proposals
- Taking notes
- Summarizing what you hear and asking whether you have 'got it'

3. Ask questions

Much of the art of sales is the art of asking questions. Here are three of the most useful types of question to ask:

(a) Problem questions

- What kind of problems is the company experiencing?
- Why did they invite you in today?

(b) Implications questions

When you hear about a problem you can help with, it's tempting to rush forward and offer solutions. But in *SPIN Selling* Neil Rackham recommends following up problem questions with questions about the **implications** of the problem.

Not only will this help you understand the situation better, it'd also heightens the other person's awareness of the magnitude of the problem – and the bigger the problem, the bigger (and higher-priced) solution you can offer.

- What are the implications of the problems?
- What effect do the problems have on the company's sales, staff, morale, reputation, finances, etc?

(c) Solution questions

Rackham points out that it's more powerful for the prospect to describe their ideal solution than for you to propose it. So ask:

- What kind of solution are they looking for?
- What specifically, needs to be different for problem to have disappeared, offer the goal to be achieved?
- What effect will it have on the areas of the business affected by the problem, as identified by your implications questions?

4. Sell benefits, not features

For every product or service you provide:

1. Make a list of what you consider its most important **features**.
2. For every feature on your list, make a list of **benefits** it delivers to your customers (see the lesson and resources if you're not clear about the difference between features and benefits).
3. Find out from your customers which benefits are most important *to them*. You can ask them directly, or notice which ones they mention most often, or pay close attention to their emotional response while talking.
4. In sales copy and sales meetings, make sure you *clearly communicate the benefits*, including just enough description of the features for the benefits to make sense.

5. Price yourself *into* your market

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to pricing, but the following questions will help you consider the issue from different angles before you come to a decision.

(a) What's your minimum possible price?

Now take each product or service and ask:

- What's the minimum you need to earn from this per year?
- What's the minimum number of units you are confident of selling per year?
- Divide A by B - this gives you the minimum price you need to charge per unit to stay in business.

NB this is **not** the price you should charge, it's a benchmark that you can't undercut. It could be your last resort in negotiations, or the deepest discount you offer.

For each product, is this figure lower or higher than the figure you picked at (a)? If lower, then you're going to need to step outside your comfort zone!

(b) Where do you want to position yourself?

Compare the figures from (a) and (b) with your competitors' prices.

- Do you come out lower or higher than them?
- What will this say about your business to your customers?
- Are you comfortable being judged in this way?
- Do you want to be perceived as a high- or low- end brand? What pricing structure fits this aspiration?

(c) How much value are you delivering?

- Think about the difference your product or service makes to your customers' lives.
- Does it save them time? Help them earn money? Reduce stress? Gain pleasure, knowledge or skills?
- What are those benefits worth?
- What would you be happy to pay for those benefits?

(d) If you think you need to raise your prices

If you come to the conclusion that you need to raise your prices, but you feel uncomfortable or you're not sure how to justify it, here are a few options.

Do a 'value reality check'

- Do you really believe your offering is not worth the higher fee?
- If you don't, you need to add value in order to raise your price with integrity (see below).
- If you honestly believe it's worth the money, then start acting like it!
- If you're not sure, get informed opinions – from colleagues, a mentor and/or your customers.

Add value

- What else can you add to the offer to make it more valuable?
- If it's a product, can you add a guarantee, training or a service element?
- If it's a service, can you incorporate a product?

Find customers willing to pay more

If your current customers aren't used to paying higher prices, look for customers who are used to paying a premium price, and find ways to appeal to them.

Offer a range of price points

If you're not sure all of your customers will be able to pay the higher prices, another option is to offer a range of products at low, mid and high prices, to cater for different budgets.

This can also help deepen your engagement with your audience, as some of them move from low-priced products, towards progressively higher prices (and greater value) as they move up the price scale.

Suck it and see!

Sometimes you just need to be a little braver. Put the prices up and see what happens. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Another benefit – to you and your clients – is that when you feel you are earning good money for your work, it boosts your confidence and enthusiasm, which in turn means you're delivering better quality. So raising your prices (and therefore your promise of value) becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

6. Deal with politics

This question mostly applies if you are selling to an organization. But sometimes it also applies to individual customers (if there is a Significant Other with an influence on their decisions!).

Who are you talking to?

Do they have the authority to make the purchase?

Who else will be involved in discussions *before* the purchase?

Who else will they have to justify the purchase to *afterwards*?

What risks are they taking by making this purchase?

How can you make them look good for choosing you?

7. Make an offer

(a) Online

See the section on writing sales pages, from Lesson 13 on Marketing. And remember the call to action!

- Click here
- Buy now
- Add to shopping cart

(b) Face-to-face

If you're not yet comfortable asking for a sale directly, practise a few key phrases to use when the customer is giving you the 'ready to buy' signals:

- "That's \$57 please."
- "OK, if you'd just like to sign here..."
- "How would you like to pay??"

(c) Selling to organisations

You probably won't close the sale on a first meeting, but make sure you at least get an **advance**, i.e. a concrete next step towards closing the sale. For example:

- "I'll speak to my boss and call you tomorrow."
- "I can ask the board to see you on the 26th – can you put a presentation together by then?"
- "If you can get the proposal to me by the end of the week, I'll get back to you the following week."

Here are some common responses that *don't* qualify as advances:

- “Thanks for coming in, it was really interesting to talk to you.”
- “We’ll definitely consider this.”
- “We’ll get back to you if we ever need anything.”
- “Can you put this in writing for me?”

Note that the last one sounds more promising, but the prospect is actually asking *you* to do something concrete, not promising anything in return. It does give you the opportunity to respond by asking for an advance:

- “I’ll be happy to put a proposal together, as long as we have a meeting in the diary when we will review it.”

Here are a few more ways to ask for an advance:

- “So you’ll talk to your colleagues next Tuesday. How about I call you on Wednesday or Thursday to get their feedback?”
- “Which would be most useful to you? A formal proposal, or would you like to meet again first?”
- “Would you be able to talk to the Finance Director next week, to see if she’s OK with the figures? Once we get the green light from her I can finalise the proposal.”