

How You Too Can Run A Profitable IT Business Without A Sales Force

Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan

Imagine if you will. You command an army and you want invade a fortress. You have two options to achieve your objectives...

You can use brawn power: Search the land for the best battering ram operators, hire them and keep battering the gates of the fortress while the archers inside take out most of your soldiers. Yes, you can win, but it will be a pyrrhic victory.

Or you can use brain power. Search the land for an expert who builds the type of fortresses that you want to invade and question him about the weak points in the walls.

Then, in the dead of night, approach the fortress and at the weakest points, start taking out enough bricks, so you and your soldiers can penetrate the fortress and make an ambush on the army inside.

As a former soldier myself, I tell you, I would go for the latter option on any day.

Client acquisition is pretty much the same.

You can either assemble an army of hyper-aggressive salespeople and send them out to “attack” the market by dialling for dollars or pounding endless miles of pavement day in day from dawn to dusk or you can hire one copywriter who can write for you one “printed salesperson” and all you have to do it is to print as many “salespeople” as you want to.

Sales as we know it has changed pretty drastically over the last decade. Sometimes in the 90s came the Internet, and it started changing buyers’ attitudes towards salespeople.

And if we call that change merely negative, it’s as much of an understatement as calling Jon Brower Minnoch¹, the fattest man ever lived (over 1,400 lbs), a chubby guy.

Anyway, the change of the sales terrain was pretty earth-shattering.

Actually, over the years, I’ve found eight reasons why buyers avoid meeting salespeople...

1. Buyers are plain scared of meeting aggressive, manipulative salespeople who don’t take no for an answer.
2. Buyers can obtain all the information they need to make buying decisions without meeting salespeople.

¹ <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/records-3000/heaviest-man/>

3. Buyers' plates are already piled high with mission-critical initiatives². There is no time to meet strangers.
4. Buyers are tired of sitting through almost identical, hype-ridden dog-and-pony-show style sales presentations.
5. Buyers, regarded as highly trusted and respected folks at their organisations, don't have peer-level relationships with sellers' lowest level, least trusted, least respected and rapidly fluctuating people: The sales force.
6. Buyers have lots of questions, but they know that, instead of honest answers, salespeople twist their answers in order to make quick sales.
7. Buyers and sellers have opposing agendas. Sellers want to make easy sales and quickly move on. Buyers want to make the right purchases to resolve their issues.
8. Buyers don't want to partner with sellers. They want to buy what they need and get on with their lives. Salespeople are obsessed with the partnering because they try to create up-sell and cross-sell opportunities for themselves.

So, hiring more salespeople and having them dial for dollars or knock on doors is just as futile as a fart in a windstorm.

In her 1992 book, *The Popcorn Report*, Faith Popcorn reported that people were cocooning. That is, they didn't want to be disturbed. Now fast forward today, and what you find is that people are borderline paranoid about having their lives interrupted.... especially by strangers, like salespeople, who also have a very strong social stigma against them.

In 2004, the Gallup Organisation surveyed the population on the topic of trusting professionals. After politicians, salespeople turned out to be most annoying and distrusted professionals. And popular movies like Sinclair Lewis's "Babbalanza", Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" and David Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross" have moulded people's perception about salespeople as glib, smooth-talking class act shysters. We've all heard the phrase, "If you can't find a job, you can become a salesperson." And people do their best to avoid them in any way they can.

In the last Millennium, in an Internet-less world, salespeople were needed to provide information for buyers to help them to find out about products/services' details.

Not anymore. Nowadays companies put their merchandise on their websites and buyers can investigate them whenever they need them.

So, as the Prophet Mohammed put it so eloquently many years ago...

"If the mountain doesn't come to Mohammed, then Mohammed goes to the mountain."

That is, if sellers can't go to buyers because all they find there is very high barbed wire fences, vicious dogs specially trained to attack salespeople and "No Solicitors" signs, sellers had better have buyers come to them.

² According to the National Association of Professional Organisers, the typical executive has 59 hours of urgent work on his/her desk.

And this simple realisation has...

Turned The Game Of Selling Upside Down

With the proliferation of the Internet came the unbelievable rise of Internet marketing gurus. Love them or hate them, they are here to stay, and they have an earth-shattering lesson for businesspeople.

These gurus are here to stay because they realised that if they want to sell more, what they need is not more salespeople to chase after the market but better marketing to magnetically attract the right buyers. Marketing that is so powerful that it can make the sales force obsolete.

As management legend, the late Peter Drucker put it a few years ago...

"There will always, one can assume, be need for some selling. But the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous."

So, let's see six action steps that IT business owners can take to reinforce their marketing and sell more by doing less selling.

1. Change your marketing from self-centred, image-driven institutional (corporate) marketing to education-based, value-driven, results-accountable direct response marketing that sifts, sorts, screens and selects the cream of the crop (top 0.5-2%) of your target market, and unceremoniously dumps the rest into the welcoming arms of your competitors.
2. Convert your marketing materials from talking about yourself, your company and your company's achievements to talking about your market's afflictions and aspirations. When you talk about industry-specific problems, always expand the problems to long-term consequences. What happens if the problem is not solved? It's like a doctor's telling their patient, "You have advanced cancer and, statistically, you have two months to live". This is not scaremongering, but reality.
3. Always use the kind of language that executives use in boardrooms amongst each other when discussing their companies' futures. You may sell CRM software, but your buyers want to hear about higher sales through better communication between salespeople and their prospects.
4. Use your marketing in such a way that it becomes an effective buyer selector. Create a Perfect Client Profile³, including both demographic and psychographic profiles of the perfect buyer, the perfect company and the perfect project. Then create all your marketing materials with those attributes in mind. Match both the look and feel and the copy of your collaterals to your perfect client.
5. Automate your marketing because up to the last section of the buying cycle, buyers don't want to talk to you anyway. A large segment of marketing is about serving valuable content to your market to attract the right prospects and to aid their decision-making. Focus on creating great content and let the market use it as a buffet.

³ <http://www.varjan.com/information-products/perfect-client-profile-development-toolkit.shtml>

6. Offer buyers plenty of your free content and make sure they can consume it before you attempt to set sales appointments with them. If you make it time period bit too long, that's not a problem, but if you make it too short, you can scare buyers off pretty swiftly.

And if you do make these six changes to your marketing while you're flooded with business, you can't exhibit the typical signs of being hungry for new business. After all, you're still fully booked on your existing services.

On Summary

In his book, *To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others*, author Daniel H. Pink mentions some high-tech companies, like [Atlassian](#) or [Palantir](#) that operate very successfully without salespeople.

According to research by Hubspot, nurtured emails get 4-10 times higher response than standalone emails. Gleanster Research estimates that 50% of all sales leads are qualified to buy, but are not ready to buy yet. If your salespeople, in hot pursuit of their commissions, force them to make buying decisions, they leave you forever.

Yes, salespeople can harass the market with their appointments but that approach, besides being very expensive, is also very ineffective.

But smarter marketing enables small businesses to connect with buyers who are interested, motivated, self-qualified, and pre-disposed to do business with them. They are also pre-empted to their pricing, which eliminates sticker shock and price objections. It also makes sure that you don't waste precious resources on those only in search of the lowest prices.

When it comes to selling, we have two options with two drastically different consequences:

Option 1: Cold prospecting grunt work of hassling prospects into appointments and manipulating them to buy.

Prospects' response: "Who are you? I've never heard of you. I don't know your products and services. I don't know what you're doing here. What are you trying to sell me?"

Option 2: Putting out valuable content to the market and have self-qualified prospects come to you, ready, willing and able to do business with you at your prices and on your terms.

Prospects' response: "I've read some of your content, listened to your audio and watched your videos. I've seen you speak and regularly read your newsletter. I like what you sell and what your company stands for. When we're ready to buy, you're the company we'll come to."

The way you can replace traditional selling is developing and distributing valuable content. That is, selling in print. It's about writing compelling content and marketing messages that result in specific actions on the readers' parts.

I can write a letter, print it out in 10,000 copies, send them out to 10,000 prospects and let them qualify themselves and come to me whenever they are ready to buy, well, I prefer that.

I'm just not brutish enough to hustle my muscles to chase down 10,000 people and do the same dog and pony show presentation 10,000-times, hoping that maybe five of them talk to me. Or I'm just lazy. You decide.

So, I just send out 10,000 letters and wait for the response. And the response comes. It always comes.

Selling is neither magical nor mysterious. It's the natural consequence of consistently applying basic marketing fundamentals. And in today's market, valuable content is one of those fundamentals.

The problem is that many IT business owners try to replace marketing fundamentals with phony sales tricks. To that David Ogilvy, the legendary advertising man briefly said, "Stupid bastards, aren't they?"

So, is it possible to run a blazingly profitable it business without a sales force? Well, it seems it is. Why don't more IT companies do it?

I've heard an IT executive put it this way, "We find it easier to hunt down and arm-twist buyers to buy our products when we are ready to sell than to stop and think about how we could have them come to us and buy from us when they are ready to buy."

What do you think?

About The Author



Since 1998, after a 16-year industrial stint as an electronics/computer engineer, project manager and technical buyer, Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan has been working with privately held information technology companies and independent IT professionals to market and sell their complex, high-ticket and hard-to-explain IT solutions to high-end, sophisticated clients, using crisp, clear and compelling sales copy, so his clients don't have to rely on the haphazard and unpredictable nature of using armies of salespeople and don't have to use ugly, filthy, mind-numbing cold-prospecting grunt work to acquire clients. For more information, you can visit Tom's website at <http://www.ITBusinessWriter.com>