

Sample Chapter

Chapter 1: What Is an Unstoppable Sales Machine (and Why Do I Need One)?

The Four Things That Are Stopping Your Sales

There has been a growing divide in how businesses of any size sell their products or services. First, there's what I call the "old-school" method of sales—meeting with people to share gourmet meals, overly expensive coffees, and maybe even a few rounds of golf, eventually convincing them to buy your product or service. Traditionally this is how manufacturers, distributors, professional service firms, managed service providers, and SaaS companies have sold.

Then we have what some might consider a more "modern" approach to sales. Terms like funnels, digital marketing, ad spend, social media, and landing pages scatter across this landscape. The method drives prospective customers from wherever they are to a landing page and then converts them to paying customers from this point. Conversion comes from written copy, an explainer video, or for complex products or services, there may be a call or demonstration.

This approach is increasingly common for companies that sell apps, software, and other products or services delivered online.

Then along comes the pandemic.

Regardless of your approach to selling pre-pandemic, new challenges presented themselves. Companies that used the old-school way of selling could no longer visit with customers with travel stifled. Even companies that sold their products or services online were directly impacted by skyrocketing online advertising costs.

To make matters worse, proven methods to reach prospects and customers that were once effective quickly deteriorated as phone lines went unanswered, as did emails, which fast accumulated in the wake of the world moving online.

Regardless of how you sold before the pandemic, companies and the executives that led them approached this new challenge predominantly in one of four ways:

1. **A Blockade:** Like a highway being closed, the challenges presented by the pandemic and ensuing shifts in how customers preferred to buy seemed impossible to overcome. The perception was that since their ability to meet with customers and prospects was off the table, their ability to sell was also no longer possible.
2. **Surmountable:** Some companies believed that the challenges presented by the pandemic were surmountable. Like a tree blocking the road. Whether you cut the tree up or drag it off the road, moving forward would require effort, but it was not a complete blockade to their ability to sell.
3. **A Mere Hindrance:** Some companies approached this new world as a mere hindrance, like water blocking a part of the road. They recognized that although some approaches to selling had been directly impacted and possibly changed forever, there were other methods to sell that they could pursue.
4. **Minor Annoyance:** These are like a pothole in the road, some companies considered the pandemic as an annoyance. They recognized that by accelerating their testing speed and adopting new sales approaches, they could propel themselves to new sales revenues without ever skipping a beat. Best of all, the faster they could do this, the greater chance they had of capturing market share from their competitors.

These barriers represent the mindset behind sales. Those that viewed the challenges presented by the pandemic as a mere hindrance very quickly adopted new approaches

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and went on to have record sales revenue. Those who foresaw the limitations provided by the pandemic as impossible are no longer in business.

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Case Study: Connecting with Customers during a Pandemic

A client had historically built relationships by having salespeople and sales representatives meet with would-be and existing customers face to face. When the pandemic hit, they initially decided to wait and see what would happen. As with many, there was a belief (or possibly a hope) that they would be able to return to business as usual, meeting with prospects and customers within a few weeks. However, as the weeks turned into months, their sales (and leads) began to fall off, leaving them in a precarious position.

We treated the situation as a minor annoyance, introducing and testing various methods to connect with and reach customers. We used a combination of phone, email, and direct mail to reconnect with existing customers and introduce the company to prospective customers. Information collected during dialogues about customer circumstances by industry was compiled and used to develop scripts and direct mail pieces for prospects in similar industries. Additionally, all outreach commenced focusing on the customer and their situation, asking if there was any way to help versus trying to make a sale.

Within the first eight months of the pandemic, sales returned to previous levels, and new leads and sales steadily increased. Furthermore, my client handled these new activities in-house, which precluded any need to use outside sales reps as travel was limited or restricted entirely; these new approaches to selling reduced the cost of business acquisition, providing a wholly new method of selling.



Old-School "Feet on the Street" Selling Is Dead

If you've been making sales predominantly due to having someone visit a customer face to face, you're in trouble. Sure, there will always be some industries in which this form of bonding and connection is still acceptable, but as baby boomers retire and the age of today's buyers becomes younger, their preferences for searching, engaging with, and buying are changing.

A recent study conducted by Marketo² found the top ways today's B2B buyers engage with a brand or company are:

1. Visiting their website
2. Email
3. Online communities
4. Chat
5. Social media
6. Mobile Device/Apps
7. Podcasts/Webinars
8. Blogs
9. Video

What's most important from this research is not how today's buyers prefer to engage but what's driving this behavior change. Of course, the pandemic itself only served to accelerate the shift in how prospects and buyers choose to engage with a company or its sales team to research and buy its products or services. But if you peel the onion, you'll notice what's lurking behind the curtain is a shift in the demographic of today's buyers.

During the past several years, my research has identified five specific characteristics of today's younger generation of buyers, all of which serve to inform prospecting, conversion, and closing strategies to sell in today's marketplace.



Buying Preferences of Today's Younger Generations

Search for new products and services via the internet. Younger generations today search for and select products and services using one of three primary methods:

1. They search using Google.
2. They ask their social networks (i.e., Facebook, Linked In, Messenger).
3. They consider products or services displayed on social networks.

The latter is only effective for those products or services a customer would expect to find in a social network. As time progresses, the list of what is acceptable versus what is not is expanding as more and more businesses shift their model to include online and virtual services for their customers.

Engage in online social groups to obtain input and referrals.

Online platforms like Reddit and Quora have made a business from becoming an online repository for questions and answers. On a smaller scale, LinkedIn groups, Facebook groups, and various online chat groups and forums offer a similar solution, providing buyers a meaningful and convenient way to obtain social input, feedback, and ideas. Sure, buyers might ask their friends for information, but today, younger generations are much more comfortable expanding their reach to a larger and predominantly online social sphere.

Let online reviews and comments guide their decision-making.

Today's generations have become accustomed to seeking input from strangers to inform their decision-making. As a result, reviewing online comments, ratings, and various other feedback online has become a significant influencer of their decisions.

Consider the impact that online platforms like GlassDoor (www.glassdoor.com), an online repository of employee ratings for companies they've worked, have on employee hiring and retention. Employees today can (and will) review a company online before they ever attend

an interview. If reviews from previous employees are wrong, they'll skip the interview (often not even giving notice of their intent).

What's most interesting about this is that today's younger generations will solicit, trust, and accept input from people who participate in a platform with no personal relationship. So, if you've been solely focusing on relationship selling, think again.

Expect a quick and simple buying experience.

If there's one thing *we've all come to expect today*, it's a simple buying experience: no lengthy contracts, no hurdles to jump through. Simple and easy is the key.

This approach to buying is an absolute expectation of today's younger generation of buyers. Why stand in the line at a traditional bank when you can do all your banking online? Why visit a car dealership to buy a car when you can make the entire purchase without ever meeting anyone? One of the reasons online buying has become so popular is that there's no need to speak with anyone. The buying experience is entirely in the hands of the buyer.

If you want to sell to a younger generation of buyers, the process had better be easy to understand and navigate. The simpler, the better. If your "process" is too lengthy or requires a complex contract for review, you're likely never to make a sale to today's younger buyers.

Keep sales activities separate from social activities.

One of our most exciting findings was the separation of social activities from buying activities. Historically, it was common to take a prospect to lunch or dinner. Over a meal, a business topic would arise, opportunities discussed, and invariably both parties would strike a deal, often before dessert. Thus, blending social and sales activities were the norm.

Today, younger generations are less inclined to mix business with pleasure. A study by Tork found that 40% of millennials don't even take a lunch break ³. More prone to shy away from combining the two.

Of course, there are other distinctions, but these five represent the most significant shifts that impact companies that have historically used face-to-face strategies to sell their wares.

Before you run off and start to update your website and build some online landing pages, hold on. I'm not suggesting you need to jump on the bandwagon of introducing hands-off online selling strategies and shoehorn them into your existing sales and business processes. *Instead, it would help if you revisited how your ideal customers or clients prefer finding and selecting your products or services today and, in the months, and years to come.*

It's time to develop an entirely new system for selling—an unstoppable sales machine of sorts that will drive more qualified leads and result in their conversion to adapt your product or service.

Stories from the Sales Floor:

A year ago, one of my clients had been selling their products through reps. They invested heavily in these relationships over the years. Although representatives had brought significant sales 10–15 years ago, they were recently bringing fewer and fewer relationships (and sales) to the table.

Wanting to help my client shift to a more practical approach, I interviewed several of their key customers and several of the sales reps who worked on their accounts. The results weren't surprising yet were decisive in understanding and navigating selling in today's marketplace. First, the demographic of their buyer was changing. The older employees

who had purchased from them (and met with sales reps and agents face to face) had or were retiring. Their replacements were considerably younger and more apt to use technology to search for and engage a company. What was the primary method these younger buyers used to search for my client's products? Google.

By investing in an updated website, incorporating various search engine optimization (SEO) strategies, and launching several online methods to connect with website visitors, like chat and WhatsApp, they could connect with these new buyers and begin recovering lost sales. In the first few weeks of launching the chat module alone, they made a half-dozen sales to new customers.

Younger generations today aren't like their predecessors. Yet, we're still using past processes to prospect, convert, and close that was proven nearly twenty years ago, rather than consistently seeking new ways to get in front of and connect with our buyers' changing needs and preferences.

Funnel False Hopes: You Can't Sell Everything Online

Just because feet-on-the-street selling is dead doesn't mean you throw everything you have into selling online. Unfortunately, this seems to be the perception of some seeking new methods to sell. A recent study by Small Business Trends identified that 62% of businesses fail using Facebook ads.⁴

I should know because I've tried it myself. Being a sales consultant has always been about building trusted relationships, yet I decided in early 2019 to begin testing sales funnels for my business. After spending thousands on running ads on various social media platforms, the results became apparent. Some products and services just can't be sold online. Often the only companies making real money selling solely online are charging you to create and update the ads.

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Since then, I've worked with multiple companies who thought building online sales funnels was the answer. Instead, they spent tens of thousands of dollars to attract unqualified leads, with a meager conversion rate and an even lower customer retention rate. Their realization is a message everyone needs to heed. Selling online can be ugly.

I've found that online sales funnels can work well depending on what you are selling, but they are not your only solution to selling. Instead, they offer a channel to sell that engages and effectively with your ideal customer or client.

For example, if you are trying to sell widgets to a manufacturer or pipe to a plumber, an online sales funnel will NOT be effective. Alternatively, if you are selling a recipe book or accessories for a mountain bike, you're likely to have much more success. On the other hand, companies like Dollar Shave Club, Shopify, and Netflix use online sales funnels, have tremendous success, and sell to retail customers.

It also bears mentioning that online sales funnels are not a new concept. They are simply a different take on direct marketing, which has been around for hundreds of years. You may have at some point received an envelope in the mail that had some odd colors or fonts, begging you to open it. When you did, there was a long sales letter with various colors, fonts, and underlines. At the end of the letter was an offer you couldn't resist. Online sales funnels are simply a modern marketing approach to direct marketing.

The lesson is quite clear. Not everything can be sold online or using an online sales funnel. However, what can be effective *is to identify the best channels to attract, engage, and convert your customers*, using a combination of both online and offline sources.

Let's look at some common examples of using channels to sell that you've likely participated in, in recent years.

Examples of Sales Channels that Incorporate Both Online and Offline Resources:

- You visit a website, enter your mailing information, and receive a free catalog.
- After seeing a retail store, you receive an email that invites you back for a special sale.
- Upon making a purchase online, you receive a discount coupon in the mail for your next order.
- You read an event ad in an online magazine, attend the event, then receive additional information by mail afterward.

When you think about it, we are participating in sales channels all the time. Those effects aren't limited to landing pages and sequenced emails but rather create an experience that connects the prospect with our brand, our promise, and our products or services.

In an Online World, Relationships Still Matter

Whether you are selling a widget, software, or life insurance, relationships still matter. People only buy from those they know, like, and trust. The key, then, whether we are selling face to face, virtually, or via the telephone, is to use sales channels that help build trust and attract prospects to us. Sending a barrage of cold emails doesn't build trust. Neither does sending an unsolicited text message or making a cold call.

What these strategies can do, however, is open the door to starting a relationship, but it can be tricky. For example, making a cold call in the wrong manner can instantly turn a prospect off. Likewise, sending an email about you and your product will instantly turn off any prospect.

When it comes to building your unstoppable sales machine, it's about creating a personalized experience for your customers. You can achieve this by using a combination

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of interactions that all serve to allow customers to become aware of our products and services and assess them from a distance before they jump right in.

An early mentor of mine once said, "There are seven billion people in the world. How many will you build a relationship with today?" Powerful. Even in my early days of selling cars, I recall thinking that my market was limited to the surrounding area's population. I believed that, based on the number of past customers, considering our local population, my selling ability was capped. There was no way I could sell enough cars to generate a salary that mimicked what similar salespeople at our sister dealerships did in big cities. I was wrong.

I recall the dealership owner telling us during a sales meeting one day that the top salesman for our brand across the country lived in a small community not far from us. The numbers he sold seemed staggering, and I was confident the story wasn't true. Maybe it wasn't, but later that month, I met a prospective customer that lived two hours away. She had a relative in the area and was out car shopping. While driving by, she stopped in, and after having some discussions and sharing information back and forth, she returned the following weekend to buy a car from me.

In most instances, the owner had told us not to spend much time with any "out-of-town" prospects because they were unlikely to buy from us. Yet, I had made the sale by ignoring that advice and focusing on building a solid relationship.

Herein lies the problem with many of the so-called online sales funnels. They don't ever suggest that a relationship is necessary. It may be that such relationships are unnecessary, but having worked in over a half-dozen industries, I've never found it to be true. My experience includes working in manufacturing, retail, not-for-profit, insurance, financial planning, banking, software, distribution, and wholesale, to name a few. In every instance, sales are tied to relationships because relationships build trust.

You might be wondering exactly how you can build a relationship if you haven't (or aren't) ever going to see your prospect. Unfortunately, there is no short answer to this question, but in my experience, there are eight areas that you must address for any buyer to want to connect and work with you if they can't at least initially get to meet you.

How to Build a Relationship from a Distance

1. Understand your buyers' current circumstances:
 1. What are their priorities?
 2. What challenges do they face?
 3. How can you helpfully add value?
2. Be knowledgeable about their unique challenge(s):
 1. What specific problems do their present difficulties for them?
 2. What are other solutions out there to solve their issues?
 3. Why aren't these other solutions effective? If they are, what's missing?
3. Be crystal clear on how your solution (product or service) can help:
 1. What would your prospect find most helpful about your answer?
 2. How does your answer differ from anything else on the market today?
 3. Why is now the right time to use/apply your solution?
4. Be credible in the marketplace:
 1. Can your buyer easily find evidence of how you've helped others?
 2. Can your buyer relate to the others you've helped?
 3. Has your product or service been helping others for a reasonable period?
5. Be transparent:
 1. Is it clear as to who is behind your company (you, your team, etc.)?
 2. Is your offer to your buyer easy to understand?
 3. Is your journey to offering your product or service clear to your customer?
6. Be accessible:
 1. Can your buyers find you easily?
 2. Can your buyers reach you easily?

3. Do you engage across multiple channels such as email, telephone, and text?
7. Be responsive:
 1. Do you respond to customer inquiries within hours, not days?
 2. Are you following up if the first attempt to reach your buyer goes unanswered?
 3. Is there someone available to answer immediate questions if your buyer needs help?
8. Deliver on your promise(s):
 1. Does your product or service do what you say it will?
 2. Do you provide the support and back up any warranty issues?
 3. Do you respond promptly to inquiries or issues?

Domino's is a longstanding and easy-to-recognize example of these relationship-building steps in practice. Regardless of whether you've heard of Domino's or not, their "delivered in 30 minutes or it's free" is valuable to their buyer, who typically wants warm pizza in a short period. They've been upholding this promise for so long that when you want good pizza delivered in under 30 minutes, Domino's is typically the first choice for many.

Alternatively, when I contact my bank for service, it typically takes at least two days for anyone to respond. Most banks are a great example of how not to build trust. There's often a perception that trust-building using the steps above isn't necessary because we all need a bank after all. My banker typically takes two days to respond to my emails, and I know him! The only reason most of us stay with our current bank is that it's too much work to leave—changing accounts, paying out a mortgage. Banks know this, so they, in my experience, place minimal effort on using any of the eight steps above to build trusting relationships from afar.

You'll notice that by addressing each of the eight points above, not only can you form a relationship before the prospect ever reaches out, but you also, in turn, build trust and

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rapport before you ever get a chance to speak. These are the foundational principles for your unstoppable sales machine, and they need to be addressed both at a macro (company) level and a micro (individual customer) level.

With these points in mind, let's dig into how we get and keep the attention of today's buyers.

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