



## Off to a flying start

Marc Hogan – March 2009.

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**Starting out in sales can be a daunting prospect, especially when you are surrounded by seasoned professionals who seem to be able to turn the most unlikely of prospects into a sale. Getting on the fast track to success often means making a conscious decision to invest time in your personal development.**

### Do your homework

You can learn a lot from colleagues and 'on the job' training, but the rookies who progress quickly are those who take the time to do some research. This often means getting on the internet, trawling through your firm's customer database and talking to colleagues to gather all the information you can on your company, your competitors and your clients.

When a buyer speaks with a salesperson, they are rarely looking to be 'sold' to; rather, they are looking for someone to guide them through the range of options available to them, so being knowledgeable about the market makes you more valuable to your prospective clients.



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Aim to know your product and your competitors' products better than anyone else. If you are fully aware of the benefits and the weaknesses in your offering, you will be better prepared for the questions the customer will ask and the objections they might have. For example, if you know that your offering is more expensive than your leading competitor's, you can prepare a response which demonstrates that your offering is, in fact, more valuable.

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But to truly communicate the benefits of a product or service, you must also know the industry and client you are selling to. Client information to look out for might include what industry they operate in, the size of their business, what products they have purchased in the past, and whether you have any suppliers or customers in common. Such research should help you to understand the 'corporate personality' and tell you what type of product is most likely to suit their needs, what language to use to appeal to their values, and what benefits to focus on to win their approval.

## **Keep a reflective journal**

Once you start interacting with clients, it is important to continually reflect on your performance so that you can easily identify areas for improvement. The best way to do this is to keep a daily record of your performance.

The type of information to record after each call might include:

- Who you called/met with;
- How long each call/meeting lasted;
- The outcome of each call/meeting;
- Agreed actions;
- Any information gleaned about the client, from budget and product preferences to what car they drive and the names of their children.

This kind of record keeping is obviously great for keeping track of your progress with an individual client, but it allows you to make an overall assessment of your performance by tracking simple metrics such as:

- How many calls it typically takes to reach the decision maker.
- How meetings it typically takes for a prospect to make a decision.
- How many meetings end with a successful/unsuccessful close.
- What kinds of people or industries you have more/less success with.

Such metrics will allow you to quickly identify where your strengths and weaknesses lie and show you where you need to focus your efforts to improve. For example, an unsuccessful pitch can be a great learning experience, so, rather than taking it personally, look back at the steps you took throughout the process, compare it with successful pitches and see what can be learned from rejection.

Record keeping is also useful in helping you to meet your targets. Usually, your manager will assign an overall target of, for example, ten sales a month, but how you achieve this is up to you, so knowing which type of client you do best with can help you to focus your efforts accordingly to reach your targets.

Ultimately, succeeding in the world of sales is not being on the phone all day, it's about knowing the job inside out, and that means doing the paperwork and showing commitment to every area of the job. If you are diligent in carrying out your research at the start of the day and your review at the end, you will stand a much better chance of developing into a confident, successful salesperson.

- *[Marc Hogan](#) is a communications skills expert and business coach.*

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