



Sales Interview Blueprint

Selling More





This guide

“Sales and marketing skills are vital for the small business owner. If you don’t generate sales you don’t have a business; its really that simple”

Simon Hale

Sales are the lifeblood of every business. Without sales, there is no revenue, growth or profit. if you are an entrepreneur running your own business or responsible for sales in a small business you need to be good at sales to succeed.

Many entrepreneurs run franchise businesses which promise sales and marketing support. Some franchises deliver on this promise but far more don't leaving the business owner to generate the necessary deals.

If you have little or no sales and marketing experience, what do you do? A lot of people rely on a series or sales hacks and hope they can generate sales that way. Sometimes this works, and some deals happen. Others rely on the services of specialists who look at specific areas of the sales process and treat them in isolation. This can also work as a better LinkedIn presence, website or lead generation campaign can only help make more sales.

There is a third way, and that is what you can start right here and now. A successful sales machine starts a long way back from the actual sale. You get a much better result if you understand your marketplace, your clients and competition. It also helps if you know why people are likely to buy from you and can differentiate yourself from everyone else.

Choosing the right marketing channels and communication will generate good quality leads, vital to the success of your sales machine.

If you rely on face to face or virtual sales interviews, there are proven processes and skills that will help you outperform and outsell your competition.

This guide is designed to help you take the third, and ultimately the most effective way forward. I hope you enjoy building your expertise and knowledge to become the salesperson your business needs.

Sales interview blueprint

“Stop selling. Start helping.”

Zig Ziglar



Which do you think is easier?

1. Helping your client to buy something they want
2. Selling them the product you want to sell?

Most people will pick the first option, but for years sales technique was based on the second. We had companies large and small developing expertise in product sales skills. This is where the image of the archetypal fast-talking American salesman came from. When people say they don't want to be too “salesy”, this is often what they want to avoid.

Happily, this is the last reference we will make to our fast talking relic. This guide is based on a consultative sales approach where the keys to success are:

1. Being yourself
2. Establishing rapport and getting permission to ask questions
3. Understanding your client's needs in as much detail as possible
4. Presenting your solution in the context of your client's needs
5. Helping your client to make a positive decision in your favour

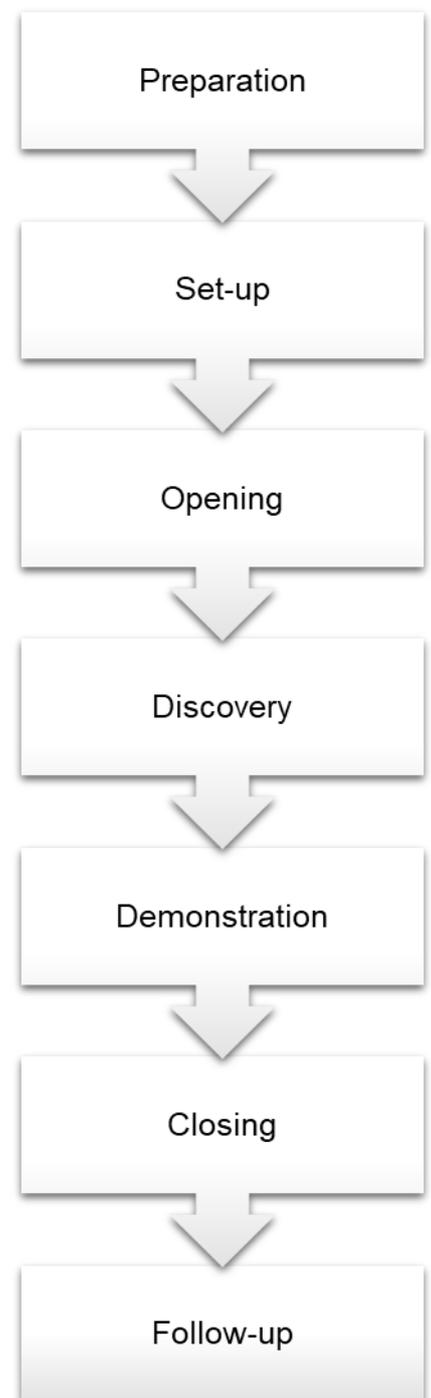
Successful sales interviews rely on process, skills and mindset deployed in an optimal way. We are going to concentrate on getting the process right in this guide and laying the basic foundations for the skills needed.

The process starts before the interview with preparation. The sales interview itself has 5 process steps; Set-up, opening, discovery, demonstration and closing. The last step in the process is to follow up.

The skills foundations we will lay are

1. The questions that will discover your client's needs.
2. How your solution satisfies these needs.
3. Closing techniques

Interview process





Preparation

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

Benjamin Franklin

The objectives of the preparation stage are to;

1. Ensure you are as prepared as possible for your meeting
2. Make sure that you and your client share an understanding of the meeting specifics
3. Check just before the meeting that it is going ahead as planned

Research into your client, their likely needs, your likely competition, your client's industry all helps you tailor your approach. Useful information sources include social media sites Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Company and personal websites are also useful to build a picture of your client.

Make sure you prepare custom content like presentations, case studies and presenters well in advance leaving you plenty of time to practise with them.

Check your sales kit which should include everything you need for face to face sales meetings. It should include business cards, collateral, pens, notebooks, presenters, PowerPoints, laptop and any other items required. Meeting details should be confirmed in a clear, concise email once they are agreed and a check made just before the meeting date that it is going ahead as planned.

Preparation

Meeting details

Client:

Date/time:

Location:

Attendees:

Purpose of the meeting:

Agenda:

Coaching tips

You have invested time, money and effort to get your client this far.

The meeting details form above is designed to help you collate the information you need to arrange the meeting and confirm with your client.

Opening

“You never get a second chance to make a first impression”

Will Rogers



Opening effectively is important as you don't get a second chance to make a first impression. Your objectives are;

- To confirm the meeting specifics
- To start building credibility and trust
- To get the client's agreement to ask questions

It may seem redundant to confirm the meeting specifics, but arrangements can change quickly. What you need to avoid is a change in available time which leaves you with insufficient time to conduct an effective sales interview. In interviews involving several decision makers, you want to ensure they are all going to take part.

Credibility and trust will help you make your sale. Introductions offer the opportunity to start the process. Your introduction should include experience relevant to your client and, if possible examples of successful engagement with similar clients. Keep it fairly general and don't blow your own trumpet too specifically or be too detailed in focus areas until you have a clear understanding of your client's needs.

The consultative sales approach requires you to discover your client's needs and then offer a solution tailored to meet them. Questions are required for this approach to work, so you need to get your client's agreement to ask them. If clients understand why you are asking questions and the benefit they will enjoy as a result of their full and frank answers, they are more likely to agree.

Discovery

“A discovery is said to be an accident meeting a prepared mind. “

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi



Research indicates that the more time you spend in discovery and the more needs you are able to uncover, the more likely you are to close your sale. It makes good sense as the consultative sales approach relies on tailoring your solution as precisely as possible to your client's needs.

Your objectives are;

- To discover your client's needs
- The specifics of those needs.
- The effects those needs have on your client and their business.

Take a friendly, unchallenging approach more like a concerned doctor and totally unlike a prosecuting barrister. Remember you are helping your client to a solution that addresses their needs.

It helps if you have an idea of your client's needs before the sales interview and, in most cases, you will. If you are an accountant and your client has agreed to a sales interview, it's fairly likely they will be interested in one of the services you provide. If your business is based on image consultancy, it's likely to be a need you can address. Here are a few suggestions for opening questions

- What would you like to talk about today?
- What is your greatest challenge/ opportunity?
- What keeps you awake at 4 in the morning?
- If you could change anything, what would you change?

Clearly if you have a detailed agenda that identifies the needs you can be far more specific from the outset.

Taking the process forward, you establish specifics with questions like;

- Who is involved?
- What are you doing right now?
- When does this happen?
- How often does this happen?

As the client answers, follow a logical questioning process and confirm your understanding back occasionally.

Understanding the needs and specifics of those needs is actually enough information to support your demonstration so you can, if you like, proceed to the next stage. However, if you feel comfortable asking your client what effect this need is having on them and their business, you have powerful insight into the value they are likely to enjoy from your solution.



Discovery

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

Marcel Proust

You are also prompting them to recall the sheer horror of their current position. Its dynamite, but be very careful how you do it and don't attempt it if you don't feel you have enough rapport and trust at this stage. If you feel it is right to discover the effects

- Be empathetic
- Soften your attitude
- Express concern if the effect is horrible.

The type of question that will help you open up questioning about effects is;

- What does this mean to you?
- How does this effect your business?



Demonstration

If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time – a tremendous whack.” Winston Churchill

Now is your opportunity to demonstrate how your solution meets your client's needs. Keep in mind; you are offering your client a solution, not a product. It's an important distinction if you think product you will tend to try to sell the product. This probably includes a load of shiny features you love and revere but might mean nothing to your client. Sell these, and you are likely to raise a whole lot of objections about suitability and price.

Your objective is to

- Demonstrate how your solution meets your client's needs
- Increase your understanding of the client's needs
- increase your understanding of your client's likes and dislikes

Focus on your client's needs and demonstrate your solution in context with them. The fit will look compelling if you are able to do this and you are far less likely to get objections as you close your sale.

As you do your preparation for your sales interview, remember that different personality types respond to different types of demonstration materials. Try to cater to a broad spectrum of preferences;

Some like a broad brush approach, some like a lot of detail.

Some are visually oriented, and like pictures and graphics, some are textually oriented and like verbiage

Presentation aids should be adaptable to your demonstration environment. For example;

PowerPoint is ubiquitous, and death by PowerPoint is a frequent and torturous experience. I believe it is about to be outlawed for similar reasons as waterboarding. Use PowerPoint properly and effectively and it one of the most powerful demonstration tools for groups both small and large. It can also be used for demonstrations to individuals if you have the right hardware. This guide is not the place for a PowerPoint course but here are a few pointers. A PowerPoint presentation should have ten slides, last no more than twenty minutes, and contain no font smaller than thirty points. Keep the flow very simple, needs, how your solution addresses them, options going forward.

Presentation folders are great for demonstrations to individuals or very small groups. You can stack them with all sorts of useful content, printouts of PowerPoint slides, user lists, client stories, in fact, anything you need to support your demonstration. They are well suited to meetings in public places where it may be inconvenient to whip your laptop out. If you decide to build a presenter take your rate of demonstration development into account. If you believe continuous improvement is the thing for you, and I heartily recommend you do, you should pick a presentation folder with ring binder. It makes it easier to add pages and move them around.



Follow-up

“Every sale has five obstacles: no need, no money, no hurry, no desire, no trust.”

Zig Ziglar

The closing phase of the sales interview process is the last in the face to face section of your process. Your objective is clear and simple;

To help your client say “yes” to your solution

It is for some, the most challenging part of the interview, one they would rather not do, in some cases one that doesn't get done. This is a shame because you are unlikely to seal the deal if you don't close.

There is no reason to fear closing. If you have prepared well, made sure your venue is suited to your purpose, opened effectively, discovered your client's needs, their effect and extent, demonstrated how your solution meets the needs in a convincing way; why won't the client want to say yes? After all, you are helping them buy something they want.

Closing normally follows demonstration but can, in some cases, come in earlier stages of the process. If your client starts giving you buying signals, close right away; don't feel you need to run through the entire process if the client decides they want to buy your solution earlier.

Buying signals are statements or questions that assume ownership, usage or seek clarification of your solution's specification or capabilities. Typical examples are “does it come in blue?”, “where will I put it?”, “When can we start?” When you hear a buying signal, no matter where you are in your sales process move to close your sale.

If you have stepped through your process and come to the end of your demonstration and your client has not given you any buying signals, ask for the order. Here are a few suggestions on how you might do this;

Straight question; Is this something you want to do now? Does this feel right for you?

The optional close offers your client several ways to progress and, in my view, ideally has three choices, small, medium and large, allowing your client to pick the most suitable.

You may encounter objections from your client as you endeavour to close your sale. It's less likely if you have demonstrated your solution in the context of your client's needs but still possible. Objections are most commonly price, time or functionally based. Try to establish if the objection is a real one, a stall or a bargaining strategy. If they are real, they must be addressed to the client's satisfaction. The most common stall is “I need time to think”, and a good way to probe this is to ask “What will you know by xxxx time that you don't know now?”. Bargaining strategies clearly require your bargaining skills to take the sale forward.

I hope this has given you a few ideas to use as you complete your blueprint. If you want to develop your skills further give me a call and we can work out the best approach for you.

Selling More



Selling More is about business success. Selling More is about thriving and growing in these challenging times. Demand in most sectors is on the floor, competition is everywhere, and sales opportunities are few, far between and different compared to 2019. Selling More is about adapting, upskilling and making the most of each and every opportunity by;

- Attracting people to your business
- Choosing winners
- Nurturing people's interest
- Closing more deals in the new normal
- Making time to sell more



Simon Hale
simon@simonrhale.com
www.simonrhale.com
0777 131 4658