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# TRENDS



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## SPOTLIGHT YOUR POINT OF DIFFERENCE

### Special to SMEI by Paul Vitale

From hamburgers to Hummers; from ice cream to iPods, a need will always exist for consumers to be educated and assisted by those who make their living selling products or services. With the proliferation of salespeople and selling styles in the business sector today, what can be that one point of difference in your sales routine that will help you achieve favorable results? Follow-through!

Without any doubt, the best way to distinguish yourself from your competition while building long-lasting relationships is to follow through completely with your existing and potential clients—not just every now and then, but all the time. As elementary as it might sound, in many cases the vast majority of sales professionals have not perfected this habit.

We've all been on both sides of the fence. Someone wants to introduce you to a great product. Every reason is shared why you should buy right then and there. However, you're hesitant and so you are assured that's "not a problem," and promised a call back. Even though you choose not to make the purchase on the spot, you are still interested, perhaps feeling an even greater desire after walking away empty-handed. Days pass—then a week, and two more. The follow-up you were promised never transpired. Did that impact your decision to buy? Well, naturally it did. Not only did it influence your impression of the salesperson, it most likely affected your perception of the product as

well. And the far-reaching effect? Not only was a sale lost, the potential for a relationship and referrals spawned from that mutual association were, too.

This scenario is nothing new. Odds are we all have given our word at some point and then for whatever reason dropped the ball. We are only human, right? Correct, but you and I control how many times the ball slips through our hands. I can't think of too many things clients appreciate more than experiencing the results delivered by a sales professional keeping a promise.

It doesn't have to be cumbersome. Properly employed, various methods of follow-through can become second nature and an integral part of your routine. Any type of correspondence—whether handwritten, electronic or verbal—sets a tempo for the recipient. The timing of its delivery is no different. When a potential customer requests information about your product or service, forwarding the materials in a timely manner greatly increases your chance of success. It is no secret that it costs less to do business with a satisfied client than to constantly be prospecting for new ones. With this in mind, the motivation for being prompt and consistent is evident.

It is easy to assume that once the materials have been sent, the prospect will take over from there. In some cases this may be true, yet more times than not, persisting in your follow-through is what closes

the sale. Placing courtesy phone calls, sending follow-up e-mails, interacting through social media and dropping handwritten notes, along with other simple actions, help create a positive tempo between you and the existing or potential customer.

Let's look at it another way. Would you invite an acquaintance on a date and at the end of the evening—assuming you "hit it off"—propose marriage and expect to walk down the aisle with no further effort? Taking it one step further, if the wedding did occur at the end of such a scenario, would you then expect to have no further reason to nurture or develop the bond? Somehow I doubt it! Rather, after that first rendezvous you would most likely encourage the relationship through subsequent telephone calls, dates, greeting cards, mementos, etc. In other words, companionship follow-through. Then, once the bond strengthened and the marriage occurred, you would continue nurturing the union to help it grow.

Now, I'm not suggesting that interacting with a customer should ever reach the same level as wedded bliss; however, this illustration shows the importance of establishing and maintaining rapport and trust between two individuals with a common goal. In the case of your client—fulfilling a need with a product or service and then perpetuating that relationship with effective follow-through practices; whether you've already

made the sale or the customer is still in the inquiring stages.

Simply put, "If you say you're going to do it...then do it!" This statement has been drilled into the minds of salespeople since the beginning of time. Nevertheless, overextended schedules, everyday distractions and one meeting right after the next make such a basic idea quite difficult to enact. But really, if a client is indecisive and needs a bit more time, don't you owe it to yourself to make a follow-up call and land the sale? Of course you do! And if they've already made the purchase? All the more reason to continue the relationship...the hardest part has already been done!

You can perfect your follow-through by instilling a few quick and easy, but highly effective practices. Though it may seem basic and outdated, a handwritten note can set you apart, especially in this tech-savvy world. Granted, the abundance of social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook, coupled with the instant delivery email affords us, can make things such as follow-up messages easier; but that doesn't necessarily mean that you should depend solely on their capabilities. Not only is a personal note polite, it also demonstrates that you value the recipient enough to go the extra mile and expense of putting a pen to paper. It only takes a few minutes to jot down a short paragraph, yet it can open paths for new relationships and opportunities.

Have you ever wondered how to reconnect with a client you haven't spoken to in a while? A birthday or holiday card can be the highlight of anyone's day, while reminding the recipient that you're standing by ready to assist. Stay away from the obvious and set yourself apart by

choosing a holiday that others may overlook, such as St. Patrick's Day, Memorial Day or Labor Day. Be inventive! If you can't find a card for the holiday you have chosen, you might want to invest in having one printed. Your investment will be a timeless reminder of your follow-through.

Another way to leave a major impression and demonstrate you are sincerely interested in your customer is to clip feature stories and photographs from magazines and newspapers about your client's business or civic involvement and send them along with a note. This nice surprise will

remain friendly, familiar and personal with your patrons. It may also be the reminder they needed to consider doing business with you!

One final note: if you have clients who prefer to keep in touch electronically, see to it that you join their favorite networking websites and issue periodic messages.

Over the years, sales and marketing research have indicated that it takes nine impressions to make an initial sale and six impressions yearly to maintain top-of-mind awareness. Putting a nonintrusive system in place that

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make a lasting impact, particularly if the article is worthy of being matted and framed. If so, splurge at your local frame store and send along the finished product.

While you're at it, share a favorite book! Choose a book that holds a special meaning to you. Send copies to clients as a follow-up gift for their patronage. Not only is this a nice gesture, it can also prompt future dialogue that might lead to additional business. Don't forget to write a brief inscription inside the front cover.

Throughout your sales routine, be certain to create and work your all-important list of existing and potential customers. Picking up the telephone and making a two-minute call is a great way to

makes it possible to reach out regularly to existing and potential customers will differentiate you from your competitors.

So, always remember: From a simple note card to a personal phone call, your respectful follow-through can become that one point of difference that shines the spotlight on you, helping you achieve favorable results!

*© Vital Communications, Inc. Paul Vitale, founder of Vital Communications, Inc., is a professional speaker and author based in Little Rock, Arkansas. He travels the globe presenting seminars and keynote presentations to various organizations while contributing content to regional and national publications. For additional information, visit [paulvitale.com](http://paulvitale.com) or call 501-663-1454.*