

Sales Stories

Some time back, I contacted a bunch of experienced, successful FLCW's and asked them what "sales" (and by extension, "marketing") meant to them. What's interesting is that none of their responses fall into the typical negative stereotypes about sales. I included three of the stories below in the book, and the rest are here.

Sales As Staying in Touch

Lisa Sparks
Ft. Myers, Florida

I send out an e-newsletter each month (see Chapter Eight for more detail on Lisa's email marketing campaign), and what a difference it's made. It generates at least a client per month. Sales, to me, is more about keeping in touch – even with people who don't seem like strong prospects.

When first starting out, I had a meeting with a prospect who was bent on keeping the conversation social, and I wrote him off as less than serious. But, I kept him on my email list. A few months later he referred someone to me, putting \$1,500 in my pocket, then hired me himself for another \$1,500 (and more to come). All because I kept in touch. I've found that the people you least expect to come through will reward your persistence.

Relationship building isn't about heavy sales pressure. It's just about staying in the game and presenting a strong and credible image to your potential clients.

Sales as Being Aware, Creative and True to Your Nature

Heather M. Allard
hmallard1@cox.net
Providence, Rhode Island

Selling for me simply means always having your eyes and ears OPEN. It means doing homework. Getting creative. Being prepared. Valuing what you have to sell. Seeing infinite sales possibilities.

I live in a city where contacts are king and people do business with people they know. I knew I'd have to get creative and make use of every past experience I had. I used the local Yellow Pages, my college alumni directory, my high school's Web site and my local *Book of Lists* to get a feel for business owners in my area. I contacted several people

– the mayor, a local philanthropist, a Web designer my husband knew, the director of an artist’s organization, and the head of the animal rescue league where we adopted our dog.

I made sure I contacted these people in a way that would “speak” to them. I emailed the Web designer, I personally visited the animal rescue league, and wrote letters to the others. I crafted my approach with specific projects or suggestions in mind. And I always had my “port-faux-lio” handy (created from thin air before I had any real jobs) to show some writing samples. From those initial five contacts, I got four jobs. Each one turned into several more, as well as some very useful networking.

The great thing about commercial writing is that you can gear your business, niche and marketing plan to your personality and to the speed you’re comfortable with. If you’re more of a creative introvert, there’s plenty of business out there in non-profits, online newsletters, and graphic design firms. You can conduct your marketing from the comfort of your own shell...er, home, via e-mail, letters and phone calls.

If you’re more of an extrovert, there’s plenty of business with big corporations, politicians and entertainers. You can shop your high-profile self around at conventions, entrepreneur organizations and among the general public. There’s business EVERYWHERE, and for every type of personality.

Almost every job I’ve ever had – from peddling hotdogs at the beach during the summer to being an account coordinator for a billion dollar cosmetics company – has involved selling, and being a FLCW is by far the easiest form of sales there is. We’re not bashing people over the head with a briefcase full of B.S. We’re filling a need that exists, selling a service that will only enhance others’ businesses.

Sales as a “Disqualifying” Numbers Game

Tom Myer
www.myerman.com
Austin, Texas

Two general comments about the sales process:

- 1) Sales is a numbers game, and one with some pretty strategic pieces:
 - Consistency (doing it every day)
 - Quality (reaching the right people)
 - Disinterest (being passionate about what you do, but not caring about the outcomes so much that you’re crushed by rejection)

- 2) To increase your effectiveness, it’s in your best interest to disqualify as many suspects/prospects as you can. I used to let folks string me along (or I would pursue)

regardless of what I knew about their needs, deadlines, budgets, and other key factors. I'd go days chasing back and forth, asking questions, preparing a proposal, and then get a dramatic response (bring out the smelling salts, etc.) when they saw my price tag.

Now I qualify my prospects in the first meeting (or by phone, preferably) because I don't have time to waste by chasing tire-kickers or those who don't have the right budget, deadline or project for me. Those who find my prices too high go somewhere else. Fine. I have plenty of customers who love me for my "process," pay my rate and come back for more. I'm left with all "perfect clients" and the messy ones go away (ideally). This is not just beneficial in terms of time saved, but also yields enhanced peace of mind and an increased number of billable hours.

Sales as Regular Impressions

Jim Meadows
www.jimfreelance.com
Kansas City, Missouri

Sales means PERSISTENCE. Once I've done the fun work of cold calling and amassed a database of interested prospects, I put that list to work. I consistently and persistently keep in touch with those contacts. About two or three times a year, more if my time permits, I simply run a full mail merge of everyone on the list onto a one page "in-your-face" reminder of who I am and what I do, often receiving return e-mails and calls within hours or days from those who need my services. *Out of sight, out of mind* is so very true. I've frequently had clients say, "I'm glad you sent this reminder. I've got this project on the burner and I need your help."

At a recent networking meeting for freelancers and business people, the discussion topic was marketing. To my delight, the host speaker said, *And just to show you one real live example of how effective this technique is*, [holding up my recent mailing], *here's what Jim Meadows sent me last month!* He then passed it around the room for everyone to examine.

For my main prospect and client database, I use *Microsoft® Access*. Beyond the obvious fields such as name, company, phone, etc., I created numerous fields that will be helpful in metrics, tracking, searching, follow-up and marketing, such as: "Date of last meeting," "Date of last phone call," "Amount of last invoice," "Agency or End-user?" and "Notes/Special interests."

Then, using *Microsoft Word*, I simply create a mail merge letter that taps into the *Access* database. Because of the numerous fields I created in the database, it's pretty easy to do a "shotgun" mailing to everyone. Or, by performing various queries on the mail merge, I can target specific groups within the main database to receive the mailing. Normally I do

a hard copy mail, but some prospects and clients specifically prefer fax or e-mail, and I try to accommodate them when feasible.

Sales as E-Networking & Building on Jobs

Andrea Harris

www.minerva-inc.com

Stow, Massachusetts (Boston area)

I get project leads delivered right to my e-mail box, thanks to an e-mail discussion list aimed at women who work in technology-related fields. A couple of months after joining the list, I saw a note authored by someone I had worked with seven years earlier in a large company. Now successfully on her own, she was answering a question about consulting that another participant had asked the group. I wrote to her to reconnect, and ended up getting hired for several thousand dollars worth of work. A referral from her led to second steady client.

Another lead from the discussion list was more obvious: a participant submitted a request for freelance writers. I ended up writing the media kit for a major technology news provider, and they have already asked me to do some additional projects. I make it a point to participate in the discussion list at least every couple of weeks to get my name and e-mail signature noticed. It's a free and painless way to connect with hundreds of business people in my area.

I've also piggybacked off work I've done for a client. After getting some of my clients' materials accepted for publication in a local business paper, I approached the editor about submitting my own article. She readily accepted, and now my article and contact information will be seen by tens of thousands of potential clients. Had I not approached her first with my clients' high-profile work, she may never have noticed me.

Sales As Raising Your Value in the Marketplace

Michele Lashley

www.karacomcreative.com

Raleigh, North Carolina

When I started my writing business (after 15 years in marketing communications and advertising), one of the first things I did was contact a local university about the possibility of teaching an advertising course. It wasn't a marketing ploy, because I certainly didn't expect to generate any business from such an endeavor. Instead, I thought it might be fun to share some of my real life experiences with up-and-coming marketing

communications folks. Two wonderful surprises have come from this journey into academia. First, I absolutely love working with the students in my classes. They're excited, eager to learn and full of wonderful ideas and energy.

Secondly, because I'm constantly preparing lectures, keeping up on current advertising news and following integrated marketing trends, I've developed a knowledge base of information I can use in pitches to potential clients and in the day-to-day interaction with current clients. All in all, it increases my value to them because I'm able to provide more than just copywriting services. Now, I'm able to help them look at their overall marketing picture and work with them in developing a plan that will help them accomplish their goals.

Sales as Persistence and Suggestion

Michelle Zavala

www.studioz.ws

Colorado Springs, Colorado

I met with a new company about eight months ago and kept in touch regularly. It was going through transitions but I knew it had the potential to be a significant account if I was patient enough. The company is a subcontractor for a government agency but its management team wanted to move into the commercial market. I knew they were going to need lots of new collateral for their new audience. My persistence finally paid off because when they decided to move, they **MOVED!** We started out with an introductory ad, then their Web site content.

While I was sitting there, I created about 6 to 8 new projects for myself off the top of my head and they bit – **HARD!** Sure, they have some general advertising to do, but during our meeting, I mentioned a number of other ways to get their message out: direct mail, e-mail blasts, trade show displays, Web site updates, internal PR, an educational campaign to the target market, etc. Now they're really excited about moving forward and so am I!

Sales as Seizing Opportunities and Shifting Perspective

Casey Hibbard

www.compelling-cases.com

Boulder, Colorado

Growing up as the introverted child of two sales pros, I was convinced the “sales gene” had skipped a generation. I wanted nothing to do with it. I would pursue the nobler profession of writing. Yet after five years as a FLCW, I’m proud to boast that I too am a sales pro. Though it took jumping some mental hurdles, I’ve found the things that work for me. More than anything, it was a shift in perspective: I realized that there are people out there who need what I have to offer. I try to recognize and seize opportunities when they arise by using a variety of strategies:

- While doing a Web site rewrite for a professional speaker, I noticed her list of clients included some of my top targets. I politely asked her for a couple of contact names – and ended up landing a software company that has given me thousands of dollars of work over the past two years.

In that same vein, I make a point to learn where current client contacts have worked previously, and then ask if they still have contacts there. And I always stay in touch with client contacts when they move on to another company, and naturally grow my business in the process.

- Building on the power of face-to-face marketing, I attend events where I might meet decision makers in my target group. Often, sharing casual conversation with someone sitting beside me at lunch has been the start of a solid client relationship. Similarly, I contribute articles to publications I know my prospects read.
- I do my homework by reading every newspaper, magazine or trade publication that covers my target audience. If I learn a company is growing, has just released a new product or has received funding, I know chances are good they will need help. When I call and mention the article, they’re flattered that I took the time to learn about their company. In another case, I read in the paper that a local advertising agency had just won a prestigious award. A simple handwritten note of congratulations prompted the owner to call me with work.
- In one of my bolder acts, I contacted a company that had posted an ad seeking a full-time writer. I sent an e-mail to the contact, letting her know it might be more affordable to outsource. She agreed and hired me instead.

Sales As Being a Team Member

Paul Glickstein
paulglick@mindspring.com
Atlanta, Georgia

I have a client – a marketing/design firm – that I’ve now worked with for more than a decade. For the first few years, the firm’s principals considered me to be a contract service provider and not much more. But that perception changed immediately and irrevocably one Christmas Eve.

The firm had shut down for the holidays and the principals were traveling to distant states to spend time with relatives. One of their clients here called a meeting on the morning of December 24. Without hesitation, I volunteered to attend the meeting on their behalf, take notes and prepare a summary prior to their return. You’d have thought I’d hung the moon. My transformation from service provider to team member was immediate, and it’s remained that way ever since.

The “sales message” here: It’s certainly worth pushing the boundaries of roles and expectations with clients. Copy is only part of what we offer; service and support are no less critical. And the payoff can be tremendous.

Sales as Honesty

Chris DiNatale
www.dinataledesign.com
Marietta, Georgia

PB: The graphic designer I’ve been working with for ten years (my book cover designer) told me this great story. Design is close enough to writing to make the tale applicable.

Chris had just gotten in the door of a huge fast-food company and wanted to make a great first impression on her initial design job for them. Unfortunately, she was using a new printer (recommended by a print broker) who was two hours away, making it impossible for her to do her standard “press check” – reviewing a sample at the printer to make sure the job was executed flawlessly. When she received the shipment of printed materials, she took one look and gasped. The printer had reversed her instructions: The parts of the printed pieces that were supposed to be glossy were now matte, and vice versa.

It was now Thursday, the client needed the finished product by Monday and the printer couldn’t get it redone in time. Chris called a local Atlanta printer with whom she had a good, long-term relationship. While he agreed to print the job for just over cost, she’d still have to eat a huge chunk of change. But, in her mind, that was the cost of doing business if she wanted to work with this firm again.

Even with the second printer, the deadline was going to be tight, so Chris decided to call her client to let her know the deal. She explained the whole mess, what she'd set up as the contingency plan, and the possibility of a slightly delayed final delivery. When she was done, the client said, *Before you go through all that, why don't you bring in what you have and let us take a look at it? Maybe we can use it.*

In she went with flawed product in hand. Her client and client's boss flipped over it, the boss calling it "gorgeous." Bottom line, they used the piece as is. Here's the clincher. Her client's reaction? *Knowing that you'd unhesitatingly go to all this trouble for such a little mistake gives me a really good feeling about working with you. I know you'll do whatever it takes to get it done and done right.* And then she promptly set up a time to get Chris back in for some additional projects – all because she was thorough and honest, and laid it on the line. Honesty sells.

Sales as Being a Valuable Resource to Clients

Nancy Knauf
Cincinnati, Ohio

PB: Nancy is a dear friend of mine from Atlanta (now living in Cincinnati) currently working for an ad agency in strategic planning. She made a killer suggestion to me recently for raising your value in your clients' eyes. The Web site of the American Marketing Association (www.marketingpower.com), in addition to being a wonderfully rich resource by itself, allows you to receive daily and customizable news feeds via email on a variety of subjects and industries (also check out <http://news.yahoo.com/rss> and <http://www.google.com/alerts>). Let's say you write for a mortgage firm, a non-profit, and companies in the aviation and chemical industries. Just gear your daily profile toward those arenas and articles on those subjects show up in your inbox.

Nancy gave me an example of one client, a bank, who was looking for ideas for marketing themselves to college students. She added banking to her profile and one morning got a very cool article about some innovative things that a bank in New Zealand was doing that was nicely analogous to her client's situation. She forwarded it to her client with a quick, *Thought you might find this interesting.* As she put it, *It's nice to be able to show up in front of your client for a better reason than just to call and ask, 'Got any work for me?' It's things like this that transform you – in their eyes – from just another vendor to a true strategic partner.*

She also points to another overarching benefit: *Using the AMA site (and others) feeds your own mind with current ideas and information, so when a client has a problem, your brain will know where to look for solutions – ideally from many different angles.*

Visit the site and then look to the right side of the screen for a link to create your own profile. Also, as of early April 2004, Google added “Personalized Web Search” and “Web Alerts” to allow searchers to specify exactly what they’re looking for and then get focused results based on those particular interests. That includes search results tailored to one’s interests as well as e-mailing information on any given topic.

Sales as Distinguishing Yourself

PB: As I see it, “sales” is actions we’re taking, things we’re *doing*, not words we’re saying, not some precise perfect turn of phrase. And forging alliances with graphic designers and other middleman clients by distinguishing yourself in their eyes as being good, reliable and easy to work with is definitely “sales” in my book. And these alliances put you in the position to land in some pretty high-profile circles. If they like you, you piggyback on their marketing efforts and are in place when they want to bring you in on a project they’re doing for one of their marquis clients or when they simply steer you to one of their clients who’s in the market for a writer. It happened that way for me with BellSouth, Mercedes-Benz, UPS, Cingular Wireless, MCI, DuPont and many others.
