



Book

How To Sell When Nobody's Buying

(And How to Sell Even More When They Are)

Dave Lakhani

Wiley, 2009

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How to sell effectively during a recession; believe it or not, people do buy during economic slumps.

Recommendation

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and, when it comes to selling during an economic downturn, the survival of your firm may depend on taking some radical, assertive action. Speaker, author and trainer Dave Lakhani contends that old-time sales techniques are no longer appropriate. He recommends alternative, innovative selling approaches, including some gutsy – though perhaps clichéd – ploys. Alas, the book is sometimes banal (“The best time to sell more is when people are buying”) and very self-referential, and customers may perceive a few of its sales tactics as overly pushy. Nevertheless, *getAbstract* finds that Lakhani provides interesting recommendations and numerous valuable web resources for salespeople who want to establish or embellish their personal brands, connect with prospects and operate more efficiently. These pointers make the book a worthwhile addition to any sales professional’s library.

In this summary, you will learn

- Why conventional sales methods do not work during a recession
- How to energize your sales
- How to create a personal brand with online tools
- How to use social media to connect with prospects

Take-Aways

- An economic cycle has four phases: “expansion, prosperity, contraction” and “recession.”
- Successful boom-time sales tactics will not work during a recession.
- When times are tough, weak salespeople leave the field. This means increased sales opportunities for industrious, creative sellers.
- Identify the people who are spending money on what you sell, and figure out how to reach them.
- Apply “fearsome focus” to all your sales activities.
- Establish a website and include your “professional bio, testimonials, client list” and “blog.” Also insert a “Contact Me link.”

- Offer webinars and teleseminars to build your credibility and showcase your expertise.
- Constantly remind prospects that you are out there and available. Develop a campaign that methodically, continually “drips” your sales message on prospects.
- To sell to a crowd, focus your pitch on the influential “consensus creator.”
- Selling during a recession is not easy, so “even if you are tired, make one additional call on a prospect today.”

Summary

“One thing every professional salesperson can be sure of is that throughout their careers, many things will change; there will be exceptionally good times, very average times and some really tough times.”

“Tough times present real opportunity for forward-thinking sales teams.”

“Economies and industries change; that’s not your fault. But responding to the change profitably is your responsibility.”

Not Selling? Better Change Your Approach

An economic cycle has four phases: “expansion, prosperity, contraction” and “recession.” Selling during growth and boom phases is easy. Everyone jumps aboard the sales train and enjoys the party. But selling during contractions and recessions can be a struggle. Conventional sales techniques that worked well during the good times will not succeed in a recession. Thus, many salespeople who continue to use their tried-and-tested sales methods may believe that “nobody’s buying” and decide to quit the field. However, economic downturns offer “entrepreneurial salespeople” a golden opportunity. Industrious sellers can fill the sales vacuum other vendors leave behind. These survivors must ask themselves simply, “What else is there that we could be doing that everyone else is not doing?” Perform some “high-value, high-impact actions” to jump-start your sales. Follow this five-day plan to gain momentum:

- **Day one** – Contact 25 inactive clients. Get them to work with you again. If they have grievances with your firm, assign someone to resolve them. Phone 10 active clients. Offer to sell them a product or service upgrade. Contact a noncompetitor and swap leads. Don’t leave the office without making all your “client follow-up and prospect calls.”
- **Day two** – Call 10 people who could potentially give you a referral. Greet them in a friendly way and use this script: “I’m calling because it is a tough time in our industry, and I wanted to know who I could refer to you right now that would help your business grow. I talk to a lot of people every day and I want to be able to send you some good referrals.” Then, after listening to their responses, politely ask for a referral in return. Follow up with any people whose names you receive.
- **Day three** – Set up three boxes of a dozen doughnuts each. Gift wrap them. Take them to three different prospects. Ask that each prospect personally accept delivery. When he or she is in front of you, say: “I’ve been trying to reach you and haven’t had any luck...so I thought I’d take the sweet approach.” Then ask for a telephone appointment.
- **Day four** – Learn all that you can about your “top 25 prospects.” List ways you can help each one, and think of novel techniques for getting in touch.
- **Day five** – Contact five customers who are pleased with you and your firm. Discuss how else you can be of service. Plan to attend a couple of upcoming networking events.

Exploiting Internet Tools to Garner Sales

Once you have followed the five-day plan and re-energized yourself, you need to rethink your attitude. You must adapt your sales strategy to the changes in your industry and the economy. Don’t ask, “What can I sell to people who have money to buy today?” Instead, ask, “How do I find the people who have a need and a capacity for buying the product I have to sell?” Practice “fearsome focus” to attain

your goals. This involves using the “45/15 formula”: 45 minutes for intense concentration and 15 minutes for ancillary tasks. Condition your colleagues to respect your need to focus. Don't let them interfere in any way.

Now set yourself up online. Purchase a domain name, preferably yourname.com, if possible. A website gives you credibility. Keep it simple. Include your web address on your business cards and in your emails. Incorporate these items into your website:

“There is always a crowd of people in any economy who will find the money to buy a product or service that makes their lives easier, their riches more sure or their job secure.”

“Twentieth-century selling techniques are dead, but salespeople are trying to ignore its rotting corpse in boardrooms and business lunches around the world every hour of every day.”

“You don't have to work harder. You've got to work harder at working smarter.” (Scott Marker, author and salesperson)

“When people say no, they are often covering

- **“Professional bio”** – Use this document to tell people who you are. Lend a personal touch by providing information about your hobbies and your family.
- **“Testimonials”** – Add a page called “What My Clients Say” and link to it. Fill it with glowing quotes from your customers. Publish video testimonials. Shoot them yourself and use free video-editing software to polish them. Upload your videos to your website and to YouTube.
- **“Client list”** – Name all the firms you have sold to in the past on this page.
- **“Contact Me link”** – Include your contact information so that customers can get in touch with you. Your email address should have the format yourname@yourname.com. This prevents people and companies from using “spam robots” to collect your email address in order to send you junk mail.
- **“Blog”** – Consider this your “online diary.” Communicate about subjects your customers will find interesting, including how your products or services can help them. In the headlines of your blog posts, use keywords that your prospects will likely enter in search boxes. That enables them to find your posts. Plan to write at least three entries every week for the next three months.

Your website is just one way to showcase your skills. Teleseminars also help you demonstrate your expertise. Various online services facilitate these conferences. For example, Freeconferencecall is a “conference bridge” that allows you to hold a teleseminar with at least 96 people on the line. Another way to draw attention to your firm is to develop bylined articles on important industry topics. Post them online at Ezine, and send them to trade journals and their blogs. Creating white papers is also a good approach to gaining exposure.

Use the internet to create online presentations and webinars. Develop a strong pitch outlining “your most powerful proposition.” Then break it down into PowerPoint slides. Include a personal photo, as well as a picture of the product. Upload your presentation to YouTube and provide prospects with the link so they can watch it. LandBankNation employs this approach very effectively. Use Sliderocket to “automate your PowerPoint presentations online” and Ustream to create live videos at no cost. Email is an excellent communication tool for staying in touch with prospects and clients. To set up email promotions, consider using the AWeber site.

Connect with Buyers

Where should your sales focus be during a recession? You will find the answer by asking yourself this question: “Who is still spending money on what I sell, and how do I connect with them?” Use social media to reach prospects. Follow this plan, courtesy of Dr. Rachna Jain, an expert in social marketing:

- Decide what social media resources will help you and how you will measure results.
- Develop an ideal client “DPT profile.” This concerns demographics (age, income, and so on), psychographics (motivational traits) and technographics (the degree to which your prospects will “be involved in the social media space”). When you understand your DPT profile, you will know where to look for clients in “the social media sphere.”

another objection that they are not going to share. But when you offer them a different option at a different price or with different terms, they will often say yes."

"You still need to go to trade shows, mixers, Chamber of Commerce meetings, and the like, but you need a different strategy. You've probably rightly identified that decision makers often don't show up at those events – but influencers do."

"If you are not currently fully exploiting today's technology, you are leaving money and sales on the table every day."

"Technology explodes territories and opportunities by putting your presentation in front of the client immediately."

- Find your ideal clients online with search engines.
- Use Google Analytics to "track" your blog.
- Ask clients to explain "the problems for which you sold them solutions." Employing their exact terminology, use Google Alerts to set up notifications for keyword phrases. Several sites, such as Serph and Keotag, help you establish RSS feeds for your keywords. Create profiles on social media sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Begin "following people" on Twitter and posting your own tweets.
- Demonstrate your expertise by responding to questions at Askville.
- Place ads for the products or services you sell on Craigslist or Backpage.

Can You Tweet, Tweet, Tweet?

Twitter is a particularly useful tool for salespeople. Give it a try. Enter some "industry jargon" in its search tool. You will get pertinent results. Twitpic enables you to send cellphone pictures over Twitter, and Nearbytweets helps you locate other Twitter users near you. If you input industry keywords and phrases, Monitter will display relevant online conversations in real time. Participate in the chats that you find most promising.

Develop a "Drip Campaign"

Constantly remind prospects that you are out there and available. Do so through a drip campaign by "systematically and consistently dripping some sales message" on your prospects until they are ready to buy. Stretch it out over 12 to 14 months. Here is a 12-step example of how such a campaign works:

1. Phone the potential client to introduce yourself. Afterward, have the Sendaball website deliver a "big red ball" with a personal message from you. This will grab the prospect's attention. Follow up with another phone call.
2. Send a media kit to the prospect. Include copies of your articles, transcripts of your speeches, and so on. Gift wrap the package so the recipient will view it as valuable.
3. Mail a promotional DVD that features instructional materials on how to use your product or service.
4. Send a postcard with a friendly reminder to contact you.
5. Post the prospect a white paper you have developed on some industry topic.
6. Send a "video email" stating that you look forward to meeting with the prospect.
7. Use Postcardbuilder to create a nice card for the prospect. Include his or her picture, if you can.
8. Forward testimonials about you from three respected customers.
9. Ensure that the prospect receives a "handwritten birthday card" from you.
10. Send another DVD in which you present on an important industry topic to a large, enthusiastic audience.
11. Fax the prospect a humorous note that encourages him or her to get in touch.
12. If none of the above works, send a fake obituary with this message: "After a long and courageous battle with lack of connection syndrome, [your name] gave up the fight...Send your condolences by calling [your phone number]."

"Breaking the Trance"

Many people are stuck in trances provoked either by "their own beliefs and prejudices, or by the media." To sell to them, pull them out of their stupor. Acknowledge their beliefs, and then supplement them with concepts they will be able to accept readily. Link your ideas to theirs. Incite your prospects' curiosity

“At the end of the day, being creative is about really thinking through how you might engage the attention of a certain person long enough to get him to say yes to engaging with you.”

“The only thing keeping you from going out and trying one more time is you.”

about your products or services. “Reset” their trances to reflect favorably on your own commercial offerings. To do so, use a “responsive narrative” that matches your prospects’ aims and goals. For example, “As I was listening to you talk, it occurred to me that for you to achieve X, a certain series of things would have to be in place...When clients successfully implement our product, they experience XYZ. I believe that when you have that experience, you’d be complete as well.” When the prospect decides to buy, plan to “up-sell” him or her. Offer something extra for “only a small additional fee.” Thus, the buyer gets more value at just a slightly higher cost, and you get a more profitable sale.

“Selling the Room”

Presenting to a room filled with people is always tough. If you don’t win them over early, you’re dead. So how do you employ “mass persuasion”? Find the influential “consensus creator” in the room by asking probing questions that will reveal his or her identity – for example, “Who here has been responsible for gathering the ideas of the group and bringing everything together to date?” Once you have ascertained who the consensus creator is, work to achieve buy-in from him or her. This person will, in turn, garner everyone else’s support. Get confirmation that your solution meets the consensus creator’s terms. Stand next to this person when you make your presentation. Use testimonials to acquire further acceptance. Embed a “structured call to action” in your presentation. This can include “discounts, bonuses for early action or other incentives to buy.” Follow up with these prospects. Often they are not in a position to make an immediate decision.

Selling in a recession is a challenge. Therefore, you must develop your own “sales turnaround plan.” Select the individual tips and techniques that will work best for you, and then put them to work quickly. In sales, as in everything else, you must always be ready to invest yourself to get ahead. So even if you are tired, make one additional call on a prospect today. Remember: “There is no better cure for a slump than a sale.” Get out there and earn it.

About the Author

Dave Lakhani, a sales trainer, entrepreneur and speaker, is president of a public relations and marketing firm.

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