Top 10 Sales Process Improvements You Need To Make Today To Close Deals Tomorrow

The Difference Between Sales Success And Sales Failure Is Your Process

We recently polled 20 of our newest clients to ask them why they chose Square 2.

Expecting to hear our Diamond-level status, experience with HubSpot, team background and client portfolio as reasons, instead we learned that 75% of them selected us because of our sales process and the people they met during the sales process.

Interesting. If this holds true for your business (and I'm thinking it does), then the best use of your time is to upgrade your process immediately to provide a better and even more remarkable inbound sales experience for your prospects.

Here are 10 sales process improvements and upgrades you should make today to start helping you close more deals tomorrow.

1. Send New Prospects Something

We send every new prospect a jar of marshmallow fluff with a message: "This is the last fluff you'll get from us." We're the no-fluff agency. We tell you what we think and we're looking for clients who appreciate our bold and direct style. Along with the jar of fluff there's also an NDA, pre-signed by us so they're comfortable talking to us on the first call. Prospects get this from us as our first introduction before we've had even a single call, and it sets the tone for their experience with us.

Sending prospects something that aligns with your story, your messaging, your strategy and the "why" behind your business gets everyone looking at you differently than all of your competition, and it sets the tone for what it's going to be like to work with you.

2. Be A Little Picky

Let's be honest: We want what we can't have. So being a little standoffish during your sales cycle isn't always bad. Telling prospects that you're qualifying them as much as they're qualifying you puts you in partner status and removes you from vendor status. No one wants to be a vendor. You don't want to be a vendor. Vendors get squeezed on pricing, terms and delivery. Partners get treated like equals, and you want to establish your business as a partner early and often.

Once you let the prospects know that you're not sure if they're a good fit for you, you'll have their attention. They'll want to work with you. They'll want to follow your process and they'll be looking at you as a partner trying to educate, advise and help them, and not as a vendor trying to sell them something.

3. Set Clear Expectations Up Front On Everything

Remember, your goal is to make them feel safe. People are more relaxed when they know what to expect. Make sure you explain exactly what's going to happen and when. Break down your sales methodology into each step and explain why you do it like this. Explain that it's in their best interest to work with you like this. Prospects who follow along are likely to be great customers. Prospects who want to tell you what process they want to follow are likely to be horrible customers. Consider this when deciding whether to follow along or lead.

4. Make Communication Bullet-Proof

You're being judged every time you send an email to your prospects. Make sure they're perfect with no typos, no grammatical mistakes and no long, run-on sentences. The communication must be clear, concise and to the point. This is why you should consider creating email templates for all of your sales emails. Inventory them in your CRM (you have a CRM, right?) and make sure everyone is using the same approved emails to talk with prospects. Yes, they can be personalized and customized to be in context to your conversations, but at least reps aren't writing them from scratch every day.

5. Build In Experiences That Create Emotional Bonds

Your prospects are making their purchase decisions emotionally, so you need to bond with the prospect emotionally. I'm not talking about light banter before a call or asking about their weekend. I'm talking about strategically including sessions that get them emotionally connected to you, your company and your products.

As an example, asking questions is a wonderful technique to get the prospect talking about their favorite topics — them, their company, their issues and their pains. Just like at a cocktail party, who do you like better: the person who asks about you or the person who talks about themselves all night? The better you are at asking them smart, insightful questions, the more they'll like you.

More importantly, the more information you'll have about them to create the perfect set of recommendations. They're actually helping you create those recommendations by telling you their deepest, darkest secrets.

6. Seed The Process With Education

Depending on your sales cycle, you might be working with and interacting with these people for at least a week or two, and more likely for a few months. Long sales cycles are a particularly good application for inbound marketing techniques like these.

This is the perfect opportunity to be sending regular articles, blogs, whitepapers, e-books, infographics and slide decks that support your ongoing conversations. After each conversation make sure you follow up with content in context to their issues or concerns. It works great when marketing sources or creates this content so you don't have to go find it, but either way it should be housed in your CRM so it's easy to get, easy to send and easy to track their interactions with the content.

7. Co-Create The Recommendations

You need to involve the prospects in the solution and recommendation development process. If you spring your recommendations on the prospect, is that going to make them feel safe or more anxious? The latter, obviously. But by including them in the process and talking through options during your recommendations phase, they'll get exactly what they want and feel part of the process. What you suggest will match their specs perfectly. How can they argue about price or what's included when they participated in that selection process?

Now you've increased your chance of getting the deal and you've eliminated the need for a bunch of back-and-forth late in the game.

8. Remove As Much Legal As Possible

I know you need some legal to protect the company, but sending a new potential client a 10-page legal contract and asking them to sign it is not going to make them feel safe. It's going to require them to engage a lawyer or send the contract to legal for review. You know lawyers love to add value by changing terms that simply don't need to be changed. This typically adds weeks to your sales cycle and introduces a ton of unnecessary friction to the process.

Instead, consider outlining the business terms in English and ditching any legalese, or at least limiting the legal jargon as much as possible. For example, in our agreements (not contracts but agreements), we outline what we'll do and how we'll get paid. That's about it. No need for a legal review.

9. Use Advocacy At The Right Point

If we're being honest with each other, then you know your prospects don't believe everything you say no matter how good you are at saying it. They want to hear from people like them who have worked with you and had successful relationships. You should be prepared to share these stories, but how and when is up to you.

Instead of using traditional reference checks, which take time for people to connect and could potentially annoy your current customers, try being proactive with a reference reel video. Right before your prospects ask for references, proactively provide the link to your reference reel with the same people you'd provide as references talking about what it's like to work with your company.

Better yet, get one of your customers to proactively send an email to your prospect talking about how great it is to work with you and how they would be crazy to pick any other partner. How powerful would that unsolicited email be early in the process?

10. Start Tracking Key Metrics

Sales is a science and science means numbers, data and quantitative ways to measure performance. Your big numbers are easy: revenue, new customers and maybe even close rates. But you have other numbers that are just as important. For example, what percentage of marketing-qualified leads are actually sales-qualified leads? This measures the quality of the leads marketing is generating.

What percentage of the sales-qualified leads are sales opportunities? This measures the sales team's ability to move prospects into consideration stages. What percentage of sales opportunities move to the proposal or agreement stage? What percentage of your proposals actually close? Did you know this number should be around 90%? You shouldn't be giving proposals until you've agreed on almost all of the terms and the details around your solution.

While close rate is one of the easier numbers to measure, what about sales cycle? You need to know exactly how long it's taking from first visit to your website all the way to signed paperwork. Then you need to make sure that number is decreasing month over month.

A lot of people think messing around with their sales process, sales team, sales tools and sales tech is a high-risk project. They're wrong. By making subtle changes like the ones we're recommending here, you can make a big impact on your revenue numbers without taking on big risk.

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