

Sales and Marketing – the Art of Selling Fridges to Eskimos

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Many business owners have told me that they are not sales people or they don't know how to market their product, or their designs or services. My answer is always the same – business owners are passionate about what they do and know every minute detail about their product or design, so when they talk about it they are always passionate, enthusiastic and knowledgeable, so who better to sell it!

Turning someone who runs their own business into a great sales person and marketer is usually pretty easy – there are a number of principles to get your head around, but the basics, especially the belief in the product, are already there.

First of all it's worth understanding the difference between 'Sales' and 'Marketing' so you can switch effortlessly between the two.

'Sales' is all about talking to potential buyers and getting them to place an order.

'Marketing' is all about getting as many potential buyers to know that you exist and to know what you have to offer and why they should be talking to you – and it's about establishing an image that makes the people you should be selling to realise that they should be buying from you. It is also about understanding what your customers want and how you can demonstrate that you can give it to them.

So marketing tends to come before sales. It also tends to be the more creative part of the process. You get to sort out your Brand and what your Brand stands for. You get to do photo-shoots and create look-books. You design a logo and work out a strap-line. You set up a website. You do lots of PR. You go to fashion shows and events and meet lots of new people. And it's all very glamorous.

It can also be quite expensive (although it doesn't necessarily have to be). So it is important to get it right. Getting it right involves careful planning, understanding what you are trying to achieve, and understanding where and who you are aiming at. Most of the things you have to think about come under four headings, all of which conveniently begin with the letter 'P'.

Product – what are you selling? Is it what your customers want? Why do they want it?

Place – where and to whom are you selling?

Price – how much are they willing to pay?

Promotion – how do you get your message across?

Most marketing activity fits under these headings. There are other possible headings that also begin with 'P' that can be added to this list, but these are the basic four.

As designers, of course, most of your time is spent working on the 'Product'. You will probably also spend a lot of time on the 'Promotion' – photo-shoots, shows, PR etc. To get the promotion right you will be thinking about the image you want to portray, the message you want to get across, the audience you are aiming for, the things that make you and your product special (your **Unique Selling Points or 'USP's'**). You will be choosing models carefully to suit your product and your customers. You will be working out how best to showcase your designs.

While you are having so much fun with the product and the promotion, though, don't neglect the 'Place' and the 'Price' – if you get those wrong you will be wasting a lot of time and effort.

As well as working out who is likely to buy your products and where they shop for them, you also need to decide which outlets you are going to target and how you are going to target them. Having targeted your marketing towards these customers and outlets you can now switch into sales mode.

The sales process starts with your targeting – who is going to place an order with you and why. If you are selling to retail (or persuading an agent to take you on) you then need to make initial contact, set up a meeting, make your sales pitch, negotiate the price and quantity, and close the deal.

At each stage there are a few skills and techniques that help make it easier and more likely to succeed. These can be learnt and, with a bit of practice, anyone who is passionate about their product can be a super sales person. Many of these skills can also be used if you are selling direct to the public, of course.

You will also need to do your homework before the meeting to make sure your pitch is right. And you will need to work out what questions to ask the buyer so you can adjust your pitch to suit what they want to know.

A lot of the hard work that went into your marketing starts to pay off in the sales process. If your PR has been good it will be easier to get appointments because the buyer may have seen it. Your look-book will be one of the first things a buyer will want to see during a meeting. You will know what to emphasise when you are talking to a buyer because you have worked out your USPs. And, of course, you will know your pricing and costing when it comes to negotiating.

If you want to learn more about selling and negotiating skills (including a bit of practice), or if you want to take a more in-depth look at marketing, Fashion Enter run two workshops on these subjects as part of the 'Be Business Ready' series. Details can be found on the Fashion Capital website (www.fashioncapital.co.uk) or on the Events page of www.nigelrust.co.uk.