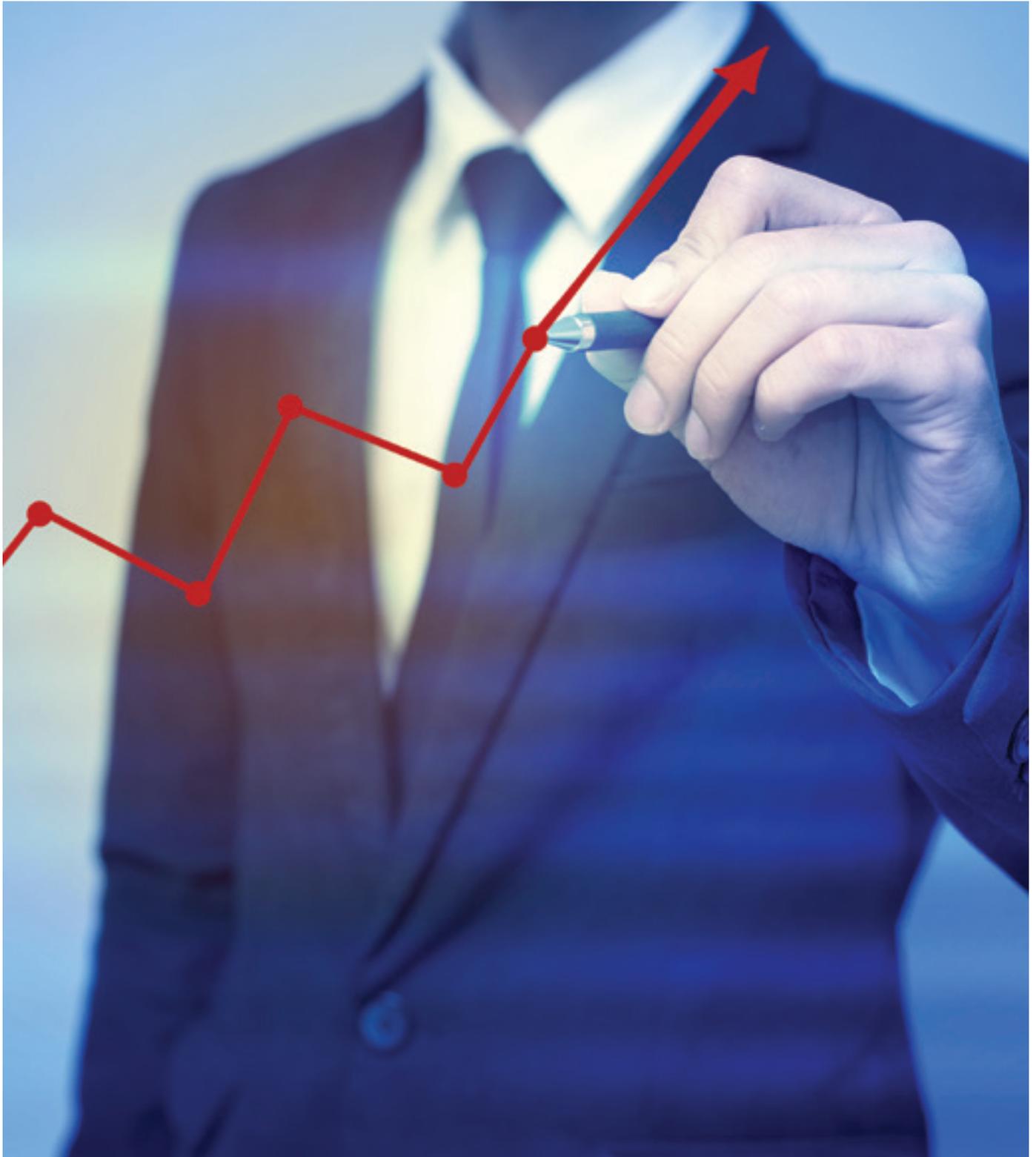


Sales **strategy**

DAVE HOWELL **EXPLAINS** HOW TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE ONE FOR YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES



Why does one product or service sell better than another? It's a question many small business owners ask themselves as they develop new sales strategies.

The components of an effective sales strategy are manifold, but they all have a common thread - they understand the product or service and the requirements of their target consumer.

ASK QUESTIONS

Nelson Sivalingam, founder of Wonderush, which offers a lifestyle subscription service that allows subscribers to take part in an unlimited number of activities, classes and experiences for a flat fee, says: "Ask questions. That's the most important thing to do when you're trying to sell a new product. Use the sales opportunity to understand your customers' needs and behaviours, especially as your product development process is based on assumptions."

Martin Lucas, partner at media company Cultural Gravity, advises: "Your sales strategy needs to represent who you are, what you stand for, your purpose. How you deliver it is about picking the channels that make sense for where your buyers spend their time and how they think when on those channels. Make your sales interactions personalised and relevant to the potential buyer."

In order to develop a winning sales strategy, you need to understand a number of key components of the sales journey. Begin by asking detailed questions about your product or service. A SWOT analysis - detailing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats - is a great way to gain the insight your business needs into how strong your sales proposition is, based on the product or service you are selling.

Coupled with an in-depth understanding of your product or service is also the context into which your sales will be placed. What are your goals and objectives? They can be much more than simply making a profit, as your business could also use the product or service to gain market share or as the basis for improved customer service.

And don't forget to monitor your key performance indicators, as these are vital to track the success of your sales strategy and how this impacts on your wider business.

It's also vital to define your market. Here segmentation has proven across many market sectors to deliver high sales volumes. Analyse the different groups of customers you could sell to. Market niches can often become a business' most lucrative sales channels.

Your sales strategy should be an ongoing process. Develop mechanisms to gather feedback at every customer touchpoint. This data is vital to enable your business to refine your services or products and the sales channels used.

Never make assumptions about your customers. Assess what their motivations are through data and evidence gathering. This will give your sales strategy a sound basis to build from.

It can be seductive to compete only on price. In a commodity market, this may be the only guiding factor for sales. But within other markets, price is just one factor to consider and often not the most important to consumers.

KNOW YOUR MARKET

David Langdown, sales and marketing director at Focus7 International, a marketing specialist, says it's critical for businesses to know their product and market.

"Be prepared to try something new, put your personality in and play to your strengths"

He adds: "Be honest with yourself about what you're offering and if it's very similar to what's already out there, you will need a significant point of differential to achieve any traction.

"Established competitors will have the benefit of economies of scale and customer recognition. You might be able to beat them on price, but may be doing so at an unsustainable margin. The better route is to be fresh and different. Always add value and focus on your goal. Be prepared to try something new, put your personality in and play to your strengths."

Ultimately, a good sales strategy will bring increased revenue to your enterprise, but it also showcases the value of your company. Successful sales can also breed positive brand advocacy and differentiates your business from others in its sector. **MM**

PAUL TURTON, SALES AND SERVICE DIRECTOR AT CONFERENCE CALL COMPANY POWWOWNOW

What advice would you give to small businesses that need to develop a sales strategy for a new product or service?

Be crystal clear on what your value proposition is and what separates you in the marketplace. Once you have this absolute clarity, have your sales staff practice, refine and perfect this pitch over and over again through role play in the team. This should be in the individual's style, but should resonate with the company's brand values and tone of voice. Individuality is good, as no one likes to buy from a characterless metronome.

Is the sales strategy different for goods and services?

In my opinion, no - it shouldn't matter what you're selling. The critical success factor remains how well you get under the skin of your prospect and understand their needs. Avoid falling into the common trap that many ordinary sales people do, namely delivering dull, feature-rich pitches that will bore the pants off everyone, bar the most patient of potential prospects. Sell the benefits instead.

How should a business choose the right communications channels to use?

This will inevitably depend upon lots of factors, including budget, the type of marketplace you're operating in and the niches/vertical markets you intend to target.

That said, modern day selling is about playing its full part within the wider marketing mix. However, at the small and medium-sized enterprise level or even business-to-consumer, it's unlikely that sales will be the dominant channel, as other marketing-led channels such as the web and social media have greater coverage, reach and return on investment for smaller customers.

Build a winning formula for lead generation and account acquisition. Remember, acquiring customers is hard, but once you have customers on board, their growth and development is much easier.



In many markets, price is just one factor to consider