REACH YOUR SALES GOALS
20 TIPS FOR HITTING THE MARK

Are You Ready to Sell in China?
How to Sell Like Trump
20 Sales Contest Ideas
3 Ways AI is Changing Sales

Spotlight:
SalezShark Helping Sell in the Cloud
Publisher's Letter

Editor's Report

COVER STORY

20 SALES BEST PRACTICES TO HELP YOUR COMPANY REACH ITS GOALS

An effective sales strategy should be a priority of every business driven by a culture of sales. Put bluntly, the right sales practices will help a company achieve its goals and thrive. The trick is knowing what the best sales practices are and then applying them to your day-to-day business operations.

SalezShark Helps Businesses With Sales and Marketing in the Cloud

The cloud can be a powerful tool in many different areas of business. But it can be especially helpful when it comes to sales and marketing.

Is Your Small Business Ready to Sell in China?

China is the next big frontier for small businesses, according to a Keynote from Jack Ma, founder and chairman of Alibaba, at Gateway ‘17 at Detroit’s Cobo Center in June.
How to Sell Like Trump
The great thing about politics is the sales and marketing lessons we can learn watching the candidates.

The Best Lead Generation Techniques You’re Not Using… Yet!
When it comes to increasing leads, you must employ the right techniques.

Poor Functioning Websites Costing Small Business Sales
Seventy percent of today’s small online B2B businesses say they have lost a deal because potential customers had trouble ordering on their websites.

How to Avoid These Common CRM Mistakes
We live in the age of the customer, where businesses are built on the relationships they have with their shoppers.

20 Sales Contest Ideas Guaranteed to Motivate Your Team
In order to make more sales, you need to find a way to really motivate your team.

3 Ways Artificial Intelligence is Changing Sales
In every industry and in nearly every department, technology is and should be central to performance and achievement capacity.

5 Signs Your Sales Call Will Fail
Making sales calls is one of the inescapable responsibilities of being a business owner.

The Secrets to Retaining Customers for Future Sales
You’ve closed the sale and delivered on your products or services, and you might think your work is done, but that’s not the case at all.

How to Identify a Bad Sales Lead
Sales people waste a lot of time on bad leads that will never buy from their company.

Best 15 Tips for Increasing Sales of Your Content Marketing Service
You’ve gained your first couple of clients by word of mouth, creating content for their blogs and social media channels.
Every department is important, but if I had to name one area that can make or break your business, it would be Sales.

Our cover story outlines best practices for your sales team to follow. Even if you’re ecstatic with your sales team’s performance, there’s always something new to be learned.

Then take a stroll around the globe with us to explore the opportunity to sell goods into China. Earlier this summer, I attended the Gateway ’17 conference in Detroit, along with our top news reporter Annie Pilon. The conference was hosted by Alibaba Group and featured a keynote by its world-famous founder Jack Ma.

Did you know the growing Chinese middle class numbers in the hundreds of millions? At the conference we learned which North American products are most in demand by Chinese consumers and we share that with you. We also cover tips for how to get started exporting to China – without costly mistakes.

Contests are a way for your sales team to get motivated. We’ve got a big list of 20 sales contest ideas to try.

We also bring you a perspective on how artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the future of sales.

Whether you love our President, or not, it’s hard to argue with his business success. Bring some of his moxie and selling power to your company by perusing the advice on how to sell like Trump.

Are you able to spot a bad lead so you don’t waste time on it? We’ve got tips to show you how. Also check out the advice from Infusionsoft founder Clate Mask on the mistakes to avoid when using CRM software.

Don’t miss the great articles on lead generation techniques and customer retention techniques. There’s all that – and much more in this Sales edition!

Wishing you much success,

Anita Campbell
CEO and Publisher
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P.S. Please subscribe (free) so you never miss future editions. Go to http://smallbiztrends.com/magazine.
Small Business Trends News Report

Want More Sales? Think China!

If you’re looking for more sales (and what small business isn’t?) finding a market for your products and services in China is one possibility. The recent Gateway ‘17 event in Detroit showed U.S. small businesses how. And there were even some helpful hints about what products are popular and how to market them.

Alibaba Will Lead the Way

Once just a source for Amazon sellers seeking cheap merchandise from China, Alibaba is undergoing a metamorphosis. With its ecommerce platform Tmall, Alibaba plans to help American small businesses sell in the other direction. Another Alibaba company, Taobao Global US Merchants Network, will further aid U.S small businesses seeking to connect with China’s growing consumer base.

But Don’t Forget Selling Is a Social Activity

As in social platforms like Snapchat. The mobile app has introduced a new self-serve ad manager that lets your business buy Snapchat’s video Snap Ads. It’s a way for you to increase your sales to a growing mobile customer base. Of course, the question is whether Snapchat’s largely teenage user base contains your ideal customers.

And Don’t Be Afraid to Change Up Your Product or Service

Just look at Nabisco, who’s leading brand Oreo screams sweet indulgence. But in a health conscious, weight watching world, is this really the path to growing sales? Survey says – Nope! Enter the company’s new Vea brand. It includes new crackers and bars with healthier ingredients. Think quinoa and sweet potatoes. Oreo isn’t going anywhere, but sometimes, when looking for more sales, your product line just has to change.

Meanwhile Keep An Eye on New Trends Like Online to Offline

For years, the trend in sales - especially retail - was that everything was heading to the web. Beep beep, back the truck up! Consider Indochino, a company once known for selling made-to-order suits online. The brand is now opening showrooms. And it is not alone in the online to offline trend. Other businesses are also seeing the limitations of the digital selling revolution.

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An effective sales strategy should be a priority of every business driven by a culture of sales. Put bluntly, the right sales practices will help a company achieve its goals and thrive. The trick is knowing what the best sales practices are and then applying them to your day-to-day business operations.

Fortunately, help is at hand with the following 20 sales best practices that will help your company reach its goals.

**Set Sales Targets High**

Setting sales targets at easily reachable and attainable levels is not conducive with nurturing an ambitious sales environment. Set sales targets high and give sales teams all the encouragement and support needed to achieve them.

**Carefully Plan Quarterly, Monthly, Weekly – Even Daily Schedule**

Plan for the bigger picture. Planning daily sales schedules will give everyone involved a clear understanding about what is expected. However, schedules shouldn’t be confined to the day or even week ahead. Plan for the bigger picture by creating schedules for the forthcoming month or even quarter.
Start Every Call with an Objective in Mind

Ensure sales teams have an objective in mind when they begin every call. Knowing what you want to achieve when you make the call will put you in a much better position to accomplish your objective.

Be a Good Listener

Sales isn’t just about you doing the talking and your prospective customer doing the listening. When carrying out a sales pitch be sure to listen to the potential customer. Take stock of what they say and what their own objectives are. Then aim to funnel their objectives into the sale to help achieve your own targets and goals.

Don’t Be Afraid to Ask Challenging Questions

Instead of opting for feeble questions that don’t require customers to think, probe into the mind of the customer by asking testing questions. The top performing sales teams aren’t afraid to dig deep and make their prospective customer think.

Know When to Move On

The same rules apply to sales practices as they do with networking follow-ups. Be respectful of people’s time and ‘define and refine’ who is worth your time. Determine who is worth pitching too and know when it’s time to step away and move on.

Make Prioritization a Priority

Without sufficient prioritization, it is difficult to be productive and achieve sales targets and wider company goals. At the end of each day, sit down and prioritize the activities for the next day. This way, less time and effort is wasted on unimportant issues.

Regularly Evaluate Progress

Evaluations are a vital component of working environments driven by sales. Conducting regular evaluations of a sales force will mean sales managers and teams can recognize gaps and weaknesses and make the required improvements.

The trick is knowing what the best sales practices are and then applying them to your day-to-day business operations.

Clarifying Issues

Don’t be afraid to ask a potential customer what they mean if you are unsure about an issue they have raised. Top performing sales people always ask for clarification so they can fully understand the prospects’ queries, concerns and objectives.

Adapt Sales Presentations If Necessary

You may have a sales presentation meticulously planned. Be prepared to make some changes or adaptations to the presentation if the prospect’s objectives or situation has changed.

Be Respectful and Mindful

A cornerstone of every successful business is respect and humility. Think about how your
sales techniques will paint your company as a whole. Always show customers the respect and humility you would expect to receive.

Don’t Forget to HEAR

When involved in sales pitches, always remember the HEAR model. With HEAR, you practice Humility, Engagement, Authenticity and Responding whenever possible.

Be Prepared for Objections

Not all sales presentations and pitches run smoothly. Anticipate quips and objectives will rear their head and plan your response to such grievances well in advance.

Use Social Media to Learn More About Customers

Part of your sales preparation could be using social media to learn more about your customers. Take a look at what your customers and prospective customers like the most of Facebook. Check the most frequent hashtags they use on Twitter and which posts are getting the most engagement. Apply such findings to sales pitches to help reach out to customers more effectively and ultimately achieve sales goals.

Don’t Set Unachievable Goals

It might be essential to set high targets and goals, but making them unachievable will simply put sales teams off. Always set high but realistic goals, as unachievable targets can be more discouraging instead of encouraging.

Align Personal and Professional Goals

Don’t be afraid to align your personal and professional aims. The more personally involved with goals you are, the more likely it will be to achieve them and help the company reach its goals.

Always Focus on the Prospect

In a sales presentation or pitch, always put your focus on the potential client or customer. It can be easy to focus the pitch on the product or the service. A more effective sales practice is to funnel the sales pitch so it focuses on the prospect and how the product or service will benefit them. This way, the prospect is less likely to turn the product or service down.

The top performing sales teams aren’t afraid to make their prospective customer think.

Use Repeat Engagement

Returning customers are leading revenue generators. An essential sales practice for generating revenue and reaching business goals is to actively re-engage with existing customers. ‘Check-in’ with customers via email, telephone or other communication methods, to see how they are getting on with a service or product and if they require anything else.
At the end of each day, sit down and prioritize the activities for the next day.

**Always Communicate with the Decision-Maker**

Don’t waste time communicating or pitching to people who are not in a position to make decisions. Always strive to connect and sell to the decision-maker who is able to close the deal.

**Read Sales Bibles**

There’s a myriad of literature related to sales mastery available. Take advantage of such books and publications to help improve sales practices and reach your own business’s goals.

For example, reading Jeffrey Gitomer’s Sales Bible: The Ultimate Sales Resource could be an invaluable investment of time to help sales teams improve their performance and meet individual, team and business goals.

Follow these 20 tips and you’ll be in a superior position to create a thriving sales environment and achieve your business goals.

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APPLY
The cloud can be a powerful tool in many different areas of business. But it can be especially helpful when it comes to sales and marketing. SalezShark is one company that offers a cloud platform that’s made to help businesses manage their sales and marketing efforts.

Read more about the company and what it offers for business clients in this week’s Small Business Spotlight.

What the Business Does

Offers sales and marketing cloud services for businesses.

Anjali Bisht, manager of marketing for SalezShark told Small Business Trends, “SalezShark is a cloud computing company headquartered in Virginia that offers Sales and marketing cloud services in its arsenal.”

Business Niche

Offering a flexible platform.

Bisht says, “The secret sauce to keep SalezShark going and give a competitive advantage is the flexibility of the platform. You can customize it all as per your need and requirement and accomplish your tasks quickly which would otherwise take a long time using the legacy CRMs.”
How the Business Got Started
From a desire to help businesses.
Bisht says, “It all started from setting ourselves a goal to build easy-to-use yet powerful software that can help businesses identify, capture, nurture, and follow-up the leads they can close.”

Biggest Risk
Entering a crowded market.
Bisht explains, “Three years ago when the market was fully flooded with industry experts like Salesforce, Zoho, Microsoft, when there was no room for new players to come in and change the game, we too had a vision of building CRM software. All other bells and whistles were nice but building a software product in an already cluttered market wasn’t risk-free or easy.”

Lesson Learned
Extra options can add value.
Bisht says, “If given a chance to do it all over again we would make an even stronger collaborative architecture to offer more added values to existing and potential customers for we believe, there is always a scope for betterment.”

How They’d Spend an Extra $100,000
Expanding the team.
Bisht explains, “Funds will, of course, be crucial for a transformative vision of CRM software’s future to change the economy of the industry as a whole. Starting from strengthening our position in the local market first, we would put the funds for the expansion of regional teams and offices all across the country.”

Favorite Quote
“Do it. Try it. Fix it.” By Sam Walton

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China is the next big frontier for small businesses, according to a Keynote from Jack Ma, founder and chairman of Alibaba, at Gateway ‘17 at Detroit’s Cobo Center in June.

When the internet was booming in the mid ‘90’s, Ma did a search for “beer and China” and found no results. That’s when he first realized there was a gap in the market — eCommerce products for Chinese consumers.

After a series of failures, including rejections from colleges, being turned down for a job as a police officer and even being the only one out of 24 applicants to be turned down for a job at KFC, Ma decided that he was destined to go into business for himself. So he turned to that idea of creating an eCommerce solution to serve Chinese customers.

Even then, there were a lot of doubters. China didn’t have the credit card services or logistics that made eCommerce a good fit in other markets. But Ma really believed that it was something Chinese consumers wanted and that if he started right away, he and his team could make it happen eventually.

“If we do not succeed, someone else will,” he said.
So he built a team, attempted to gain some startup capital, and eventually started with about $50,000.

There were plenty of failures along the way. But those failures turned into lessons Ma has been able to share with other business owners. One of the most important lessons, which specifically relates to businesses looking to break into new markets like China, is to really understand the needs of your customers above all else.

“Investors may not like us. But if our customers like us, we can survive,” Ma said.

So for the businesses looking to explore opportunities within the growing Chinese market, capturing customer interest can make the difference between success and failure, Ma explained. You might have a great product that people in the U.S. love, but that doesn’t mean it’s going to automatically be a hit in China. But you may also just need to find the right partner or make a small tweak to your offering that can open up a whole new world of possibilities for your small business.

There are plenty of products, from sneakers to baby food and even live lobsters, that consumers want to spend their disposable income on.

Business Opportunities in China

And there’s plenty of opportunity and demand. According to Ma, the Chinese middle class is currently at about 300 million people. And there are plenty of products, ranging from sneakers to baby food and even live lobsters, that consumers want to spend their disposable income on when given the opportunity.

Overall, Ma says that it’s important for businesses to be open to new possibilities, especially in the age of the internet. And he thinks small businesses are going to be at the forefront of changes in China and around the world over the next 30 years.

“The world is shifting from standardization to personalization,” he said.

So the companies that provide products created for a specific market are those likely to succeed. And small businesses are poised to do just that.

What Chinese Consumers Want Most

With a middle class of 300 million that’s growing annually, there certainly are plenty of opportunities for selling products to Chinese consumers. But some products are more in demand than others.

To help small businesses attempting to enter that market determine which is which, online seller Alibaba held its Gateway ‘17 conference in Detroit this week. There, experts and business owners discussed the growing opportunities for businesses to sell a variety products to Chinese consumers — especially via Alibaba operated online marketplace Tmall.

When Small Business Trends attended the Gateway’17, we learned about the 20 types of products that are especially popular in China right now.

Clothing

Fashion is one of the biggest product categories for Chinese consumers looking to buy imported products, according to Amee Chande, managing director of global strategy and operations for Alibaba Group. Chinese
consumers, especially young people, like the styles they can get from U.S. brands, along with the quality of garments.

**Shoes**

For similar reasons, shoes are also popular import products in China. Stadium Goods is one business that has realized success by selling shoes there. The company has found that some of its collectable sneakers that can’t be found in Chinese stores are especially popular.

**Jewelry**

Jewelry is another popular category due to the quality and style of import goods. Jewelry.com is a large U.S. brand that has been able to increase its profits dramatically by selling on Tmall in China.

**Makeup**

According to Chande, beauty is another one of the most popular category for Chinese shoppers, especially those using Tmall. And makeup is a major product within that niche.

**Skincare**

Skincare products like moisturizer and sunscreen are also popular with Chinese consumers. Especially if you offer products made with natural ingredients, you could have a good chance of appealing to health conscious Chinese consumers.

**Beauty Accessories**

Also in the beauty niche, accessories like makeup brushes are popular in China. Real Techniques is one U.S. brand that has found a lot of success by selling its products on Tmall in China.

**Vitamins**

Chinese consumers are also becoming increasingly health conscious, according to Chande. So health products like vitamins and supplements are getting more and more popular on platforms like Tmall.

**Fresh Produce**

If you have the resources to ship to China quickly, you can also appeal to Chinese customers by selling fresh produce like fruits and vegetables.

**Small businesses are going to be at the forefront of changes in China and around the world over the next 30 years.**

**Seafood**

There’s also a growing demand for U.S. seafood in China, both because of the increasing health concerns over local Chinese seafood and because the U.S. has access to some types of seafood that can’t be found in China.

**Packaged Healthy Foods**

But you can also appeal to Chinese consumers with health foods that are a bit easier to ship. Think packaged food items that include healthy ingredients like dried fruit and whole grains.

**Trendy Snacks**

Chinese consumers, especially young people, are also interested in food trends. (Think foods like kale chips and superfoods.) Sometimes Chinese consumers can’t get these trendy food items from local Chinese sellers.
Juice

Juice is also a popular product among health conscious consumers in China. And some types of fruit juice, like cranberry juice, have just recently been introduced into the Chinese market. Ocean Spray is one brand that has ushered in that growing trend in China.

Companies that provide products created for a specific market are those likely to succeed. And small businesses are poised to do just that.

Wine

In addition, wineries and small wine brands can appeal to Chinese consumers as import brands. Especially for brands that operate in desirable regions like Napa Valley, selling in China can lead to plenty of growth opportunities.

Baby Food

“Mom and baby” is another one of the most popular product categories among Chinese shoppers, according to Chande. And baby food is a huge product within that niche. Gerber, for example, has found a lot of success by expanding its offerings into the Chinese market and introducing healthy food for the growing number of babies in China.

Breastfeeding Products

Moms also want to make sure they have the best possible products when it comes to taking care of their new babies. So companies that provide breastfeeding accessories and similar products can appeal to new parents looking to get the very best products for their growing families.

Maternity Wear

Though clothing of any type is popular in China, maternity clothing can be especially popular due to the growing number of families in China.

Baby Accessories

In addition, other baby accessories like bottles, rattles and play sets can also appeal to those family oriented consumers who are willing to pay a premium to get the best possible products for their kids.

Natural Cleaning Products

Chinese consumers also regularly purchase everyday products like cleaning goods online. So U.S. businesses could potentially sell cleaning products, especially those with natural ingredients to appeal to families and health conscious consumers.

Sporting Goods

Sporting goods and athletic gear are also popular. This category can range from outdoor gear to equipment for specific sports or workout activities.

Gadgets

And also, technology is a huge market in China. Consumers can obviously get tons of different gadgets from all kinds of sources. But if your company has a unique offering that isn’t everywhere in China already, it could certainly appeal to that customer base.

Annie Pilon
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The great thing about politics is the sales and marketing lessons we can learn watching the candidates.

Why did Donald Trump do so well in the polls and with voters? He’s talking off the cuff. He’s not scripted. He’s saying what comes into his head. And he’s saying it in a very passionate way to a specific constituency. It’s not necessarily the substance since, realistically, Trump doesn’t have much substance to what he says. He’s not saying HOW he’s going to do certain things.

It’s because he spoke to people’s hearts and emotions. His message resonated on an emotional level with voters.

Barack Obama had the same impact when he talked about hope and change. People wish for a better world; they want to believe that things can be better and more just.

Trump has a clear view of who his audience is and he speaks directly to them in an authentic way.

You develop trust from other people when you are authentic and you speak clearly and plainly.
What’s he’s saying is – I will get it done, trust me. And because of his history, because of how he’s saying it, because he’s tapping into the things people are worried about, the things that they want solved, they are saying to themselves – okay, I’ll trust you. I’ll trust you because you are genuine, because you are authentic. He is totally different from the ‘establishment’ candidates who speak for sound clips and from prompters.

People feel like Trump is one of them, even though he isn’t, because of the way he is communicating.

How can we use what we see these two candidates doing in our businesses, in our sales effort, and use it to sell better?

They say people buy because of pain, either to avoid it or stop it. So, if you think about sales and marketing in that way, we can say people part with money when they believe that what they are going to buy is going to help them solve a problem. It’s going to either make them money or save them money.

You believe passionately in the solution you bring.

It’s going to solve some sort of problem they are having, it’s going to make their life better, or their business better.

There are three key elements of what Trump is doing that impacts his ability to tap into the ‘pain’ of his market. Those three things have the same relevance to sales and marketing. They are:

• Authenticity
• Trust
• Clear, simple communication

These three things work together. You develop trust from other people when you are authentic and you speak clearly and plainly.

People part with money when they believe that what they are going to buy is going to help them solve a problem.

The more complicated your communication is, the less people trust what you are saying. It feels like you are trying to convince them.

You are overselling. When you are authentic, when you are honestly and passionately sharing with someone the solution you bring and it solves the problem they are having, you are going to gain their trust. Remember, you are only speaking to the problem you solve. You aren’t trying to fit your product or service into everyone’s world.

Prospects are more likely to want to work with you, to buy what you have to sell because what they are hearing is that you passionately believe you have a solution for them. And you aren’t trying to force it down their throat.

Just like Trump, you state your position clearly. You say it to the right audience – the audience that is experiencing the problem your product or service solves. You believe passionately in the solution you bring.

And it is that passionate authenticity that will resonate with the prospects who should, and will, become clients.
When it comes to increasing leads, you must employ the right techniques. But what are the best sales techniques to use to meet your goal? A new report by sales acceleration software provider InsideSales highlights sales techniques you’re probably not using today — yet.

Read more about the company and what it offers for business clients in this week’s Small Business Spotlight.

**Best Strategies for Lead Generation**

Data shows company websites (83 percent) are clearly the most widely adopted strategy for lead generation. They are followed by email marketing (74 percent) and LinkedIn (69 percent).

Interestingly, blogs (8 percent) and LinkedIn (7 percent) have seen the biggest increases in adoption since 2013.
Inside Sales Has Gained Momentum

More sales and marketing leaders (13 percent) say they are willing to try inside sales more than any other method this year.

What’s more, 93 percent of sales and marketing leaders who currently use inside sales say they plan to continue using it.

Underutilized Techniques You Might Want to Consider

It’s worth noting that some sales techniques are proving to be effective, despite not being used widely by most businesses. Take small executive events and partner relationships, for instance.

The InsideSales report found both executive events (79 percent) and partner relationships (77 percent) effective but less-adopted.

LinkedIn, on the other hand, was found to be well adopted although leaders didn’t believe it was effective at creating brand awareness.

Time to Take Another Look at LinkedIn?

It’s evident that businesses are focusing a lot of their energies on LinkedIn. But is it really helping businesses achieve their goals?

The InsideSales report shows LinkedIn has not been effective at generating pipeline compared to other methods. As a small business owner, you might want to take a fresh look at your LinkedIn strategy to improve leads.

Utah-based InsideSales.com surveyed 678 sales and marketing leaders for this study. To gather data, InsideSales.com sought this group’s opinion on key issues regarding marketing tactics, brand management, lead generation, pipeline creation and marketing challenges.

Shubhomita Bose
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Employees Vacation Tracking

Employee Vacation Tracking Template
Track vacation, sick leave, and personal leave accrual. A great tool for HR personnel.

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Ignite Your Travels With Wholesale Travel Discounts
Ignite Your Travels With Wholesale Travel Discounts. Save Up To 70% On Your Travel.
Seventy percent of today’s small online B2B businesses say they have lost a deal because potential customers had trouble ordering on their websites. And more specifically 35 percent blame their site’s inability to support promotional discounts or promotions.

The results are highlights of CloudCraze’s 2017 B2B Digital Commerce Imperative study. CloudCraze, a B2B/B2C cross-channel eCommerce solution native on Salesforce, surveyed nearly 200 IT and marketing professionals with an online presence about the challenges and opportunities they face serving customers across channels.

The company wanted to learn how brands that have already made the move online can drive greater sales through digital.

In general, CloudCraze’s study noted that a gap has emerged between the commerce expectations of B2B buyers and what brands are able to provide.
“Many [B2B businesses] struggle to meet the complex needs of their buyers due to a reliance on inflexible, outdated commerce systems,” wrote CloudCraze in its report. As a result, 31 percent say they’ve missed out on at least $2 million in sales.

Many struggle to meet the complex needs of their buyers due to a reliance on inflexible, outdated commerce systems.

Another notable finding was that business buyers’ expectations center around convenience. This is not entirely surprising. Most B2B customers demand mobile access to their commerce platform (55 percent), convenient payment processes (52 percent) and advanced payment features (50 percent).

But the study also unearthed some interesting data about B2C companies as well in its surveying.

When asked what would solve their customers’ pain points, B2C businesses said payment management was the first priority, with 26 percent ranking it highest on their list. Omnichannel account engagement came in second at 24 percent and storefront management third at 23 percent.


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We live in the age of the customer, where businesses are built on the relationships they have with their shoppers. Customer relationship management (commonly referred to as “CRM”) is foundational to a small business’s customer experience strategy. It serves as the building blocks for winning over, helping and creating repeat customers. Today, small businesses have access to CRM technology that allows them to connect with their customers in a way that wasn’t possible a few years ago.

However, a CRM tool is only as good as its implementation, and for first-time CRM projects, there are potential pitfalls along the way. The following are the mistakes that can sabotage your CRM, and guidance on how to avoid them.

**Lack of Ownership**

Without having someone explicitly own the project, you are likely to see a diffusion of responsibility effect. This is a phenomenon when people are less inclined to take responsibility for action when others are
present. There should always be someone in charge. Ideally, someone who understands the sales and servicing process so they can map those processes to the tool.

Ignoring the End User

Poor end-user adoption is the quickest way to have your CRM investment turn into a liability. Lots of systems have many shiny, fancy features but if the system isn’t straightforward and easy to use — guess what — it’s not going to get used. If the system doesn’t make the sales team better at their jobs, they are not going to use it.

Dirty Data

If you put dirty data into your CRM (meaning inaccurate or incomplete information), your end user is going to get dirty data out of it. No one wants dirty data. If your sales folks can’t trust the system, they’ll quickly go back to whatever they were using before, and your brand new CRM tool will collect dust.

A CRM tool is only as good as its implementation.

Inadequate Training

It’s important to build good process and habits from the start of the project. Salespeople are busy and might not want to spend their time on training, but it’s crucial for the long-term health of the system. Otherwise, the tool becomes less useful which in turn leads to less use.

If the system isn’t straightforward and easy to use — guess what — it’s not going to get used.

Bad Reinforcement of Rules

When sales managers bypass the system and go directly to their team for updates, they send a signal that it’s okay to cut corners. This is not okay. If this happens, employees who take the time to keep their CRM information up to date will feel like they are wasting their time and, eventually, they will stop updating it.

At the end of the day, as with any business: your people are your greatest asset. If you’re not regularly and correctly explaining the value of a CRM to your team, then they will lose interest. The more people communicate about the benefits of a CRM, the more they will explore it and the more they will reap its rewards. They will inevitably wonder how they ever went to work without a CRM solution in place. Go forth, avoid these pitfalls and take CRM by the horns.

Following Others

When most businesses look to implement CRM software, they ask colleagues and partners about what they use. Just because a colleague is in love with their CRM doesn’t mean it will work the same for your business. Each business has unique customers and processes, and it is important to conduct research to find the one which will be the right fit for the whole business and not just one person.
In order to make more sales, you need to find a way to really motivate your team. If you don’t have a huge budget to work with, that might seem difficult or even impossible to do. But there are some low budget ways you can motivate your team and incentivize great work.

Contests and other fun incentives can be a great way to bring your team together and get more done. Here are 20 different sales contest ideas you can use to do just that.

**Salesperson of the Month**

Having an employee or salesperson of the month is a pretty straightforward way of rewarding great work on an ongoing basis.

You simply present a designated award to the top salesperson or another employee who meets a certain set of objectives throughout each month.

To get started, you’ll simply need to choose a starting month, outline a specific prize and then alert your employees. Prizes can range from time off to money or even something more creative.
Raffle Prizes

If you want to make sure that all of your employees have a chance to receive awards while still getting recognized for their work throughout the month, you can set up a raffle type system.

Each salesperson or employee can obtain raffle tickets for every sale or specific objective that they reach throughout the month. Then at the end of the month or quarter, you can have a drawing to award a large prize or a few smaller prizes. This ensures that the people who do the best work have a great chance of receiving awards, while still ensuring that every small achievement receives recognition.

Winner’s Choice

Coming up with prizes can be one of the most difficult parts of running a sales contest. But there is a way to make it a bit easier. Just let the winners decide.

To do this, just pledge to give an award to the person who makes the most sales each month or quarter, then outline a selection of potential awards. The winner can then decide what they want to win, or even choose a potential prize for the next month’s winner if you want to make it more interesting.

Win a Favor From the Boss

Or you can even offer a more personalized prize for the person who makes the most sales. Let them win a favor from you!

Set up a specific timeline for the contest. Then at the end, the winner or winners can choose a favor from you as their prize. Maybe they want you to wash their car. Maybe they want to pick your brain over lunch one day. Leave it up to them — within reason, of course.

Boss for a Day

Or you could set up a sales contest where the winner actually gets to take your place for a day.

At the end of each month or quarter, the person with the most sales or points will get to run things their way for a day. Let them run a meeting, choose where to take the team for lunch and even set up shop in your corner office.

Team-Wide Goals

If you want to start a sales contest that doesn’t pit each of your team members against one another, you can instead ask them to work together to reach certain objectives.

To do this, set a team goal like a dollar amount for total sales or a number of products sold. Then keep track of your progress throughout the month and have your team members encourage each other to work toward that goal.

Daily Prizes

Not every contest has to go on for a long period of time to be effective. Instead, you can have smaller daily contests that give more people a chance to win.

For this, you’ll need some ideas for smaller prizes to offer your team, like gift cards or free snack items in the break room. Then give those prizes to the people who make the most sales each day.

Sales Madness

A la March Madness, you can set up a bracket style contest that creates friendly competitions between your salespeople throughout the month.
This one can take a bit more planning. You’ll need to create a bracket that includes all of your sales staff. Then at the end of each day or week, whoever has the most sales in each individual competition will move onto the next round. At the end of the month or quarter, depending on the size of your team, you should have a final round and an eventual winner.

Conversion Contest

When you get a list of new leads, you can start a new contest where each salesperson has the same opportunity to win no matter what their sales history looks like.

For this type of contest, you’ll need to distribute the leads evenly throughout your team so everyone has an equal opportunity. Then the person who converts the most sales within that group wins a prize.

Top This

You can also set up a sales contest where your team is awarded for making the largest individual sale, rather than the most sales overall.

This would be fairly similar logistically to other contests, but would just encourage your team to try and upsell or sell multiple items to individual customers. At the end of each month or quarter, award a prize to the person who has made the largest individual sale. You can even keep track of who’s in the lead throughout the month so that the rest of the team knows the number to beat.

Floating Prizes

You can also offer prizes or awards that go from person to person as the winner changes. This type of contest can award the largest sale throughout the month or even go from person to person at the end of each month.

To do this, you just need to identify a prize that your team members can enjoy even if they don’t get to keep it permanently. It could be a simple desk decoration or even a privilege — like the ability to choose meeting snacks. Then ensure that the prize goes from person to person when someone breaks the monthly sales record.

Team Scavenger Hunt

Each member of your sales staff likely has his or her own specialty. So you can set up a scavenger hunt style contest where your staff works in teams — pooling their various skill sets — to complete various tasks.

For instance, you can set up a set of objectives like a sale that’s over a certain dollar amount, a sale to a brand new customer or a sale of a certain amount of different products. Then split your staff into teams and challenge them to complete every objective on the list.

Fantasy Sales Team

Think fantasy sports leagues here. This type of contest is intended to create an environment where all of your staff supports and encourages one another.
**MOTIVATING YOUR TEAM**

In a draft-style format, your sales people form teams. Then each “player” is awarded points for sales or other objectives reached. And the person whose team gets the most points at the end of the month or quarter wins.

**Slump Buster Contest**

Contests can be a great way to spur more activity from your sales team when times are slow. What you can do during those slow times is challenge your team to contact old or existing customers to try to sell repeat or upgraded products.

To do this, you’ll need a start and end date and an objective for your team to reach. This can be the most sales, the highest volume or even the largest single transaction. Then challenge your team to reach out to their existing contacts and see who comes out on top.

**“Most Wanted” Clients**

Within your industry, there are probably a few big players who you’d love to have as clients. And you can even make this goal into a contest.

Outline a few “most wanted” clients and divide them up among your team so each member knows who should reach out to whom. Then reward whoever is able to make the biggest sale.

**Visualizing Progress Contests**

Sometimes, contests are most effective when your team is able to actually see the progress they’re making right in front of them. So you can create a visual to put up in your office to keep track of how close your team or individual salespeople are getting to their goals.

You can make it a team competition, where you set a numerical goal for your whole sales team for the month. Then all of your reps can encourage each other and update the chart or graph visualization every time they make a new sale. Or you can have a chart that depicts how many sales each individual has made throughout the month so you can keep a friendly competition going.

**Trade Show Objectives**

If your business does any selling at trade shows or events, that can be a great opportunity for you to foster some healthy competition amongst members of your team. So you can start a day or weeklong competition where you award the person who makes the most sales just during the event.

All you need to do is alert your event staff of the competition and then create a way for them to easily track their sales during the event. At the end, offer a simple prize to the winner.

**Customer’s Choice**

Not every sales competition has to be just about the volume of sales made. Instead, you can create a contest where you encourage better customer service by offering an award to the person with the best customer reviews.

For this type of contest, you need to make sure that you have a way to survey your customers after they’ve completed purchases, or just periodically. Then you can present awards to the sales reps who get the highest marks from their clients or customers.

**Surprise Prizes**

Sometimes, sales contests are less about the actual prize and more about simply
recognizing your employees. And you can also add a little bit of fun into the mix by making each prize a surprise.

To do this, you’ll need to collect some small prizes like gift cards or tiny trinkets. Then place them in small gift boxes or bags. And outline some objectives that your staff must reach in order to get a prize. Then when someone achieves one of those objectives, they can choose a box or bag without knowing what’s inside, and it’s a fun surprise for them and your whole staff.

Sales Bingo

You can also reward those little everyday tasks your team completes by creating a bingo-like game. This type of game can help you encourage your team to do all of the little things, since every box they can check off gives them a better chance of winning a prize.

For this type of game, you’ll need to create bingo cards that include different types of sales or tasks in each of the squares. One could be a sale of a certain amount. One could be getting a brand new account, and so on. Then have each of your reps keep track of their accomplishments, and then award them when they fill in a whole row or card.

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Technology is the great equalizer. In every industry and in nearly every department, technology is and should be central to performance and achievement capacity. Of course, the frontiers of technology constantly change.

The assembly line modernized the means of production in the early 1900s, the telephone revolutionized communication, computers changed nearly everything in the 1980s, and today the frontier of technology is big data and artificial intelligence (A.I.).

Much has been made of those two trends in the last year. Every company under the sun has made bold claims about how much data they can capture and utilize. Then there were the data purists who said data had to be cleared of noise and be converted into smart data. The rules of good data have even been turned into an alliteration: Volume, Velocity, Variety, Veracity, and Value. On top of data came A.I., the much heralded “next wave” of technological progress.

A.I. captures a unique place in the public consciousness because we have been told both to fear it and to hope for it to save us

3 Ways Artificial Intelligence is Changing Sales
from the tedium of work. But for all of the talk about what A.I. can do, very little has been made of what it is doing right now. There are many hundreds of products out there that purport to leverage A.I. for various tasks, but few of them live up to the future world that we read about in the news.

But there is one specific department where A.I. is operating to its futuristic potential by accomplishing one simple goal: leveling the playing field. That department is sales and the products that are available leverage A.I. to become prescriptive sales tools.

These are three ways that Prescriptive Sales is changing the industry:

For all of the talk about what A.I. can do, very little has been made of what it is doing right now.

Two is Better Than One

Prescriptive Sales tools function like a regular customer relationship management (CRM) platform except that it is tracking and analyzing millions of events and identifying areas for improvement. Uzi Shmilovici, a thought leader in Prescriptive Sales technology and the CEO of Base CRM, says this technology gives sales professionals data-driven feedback for constant improvement.

“Artificial intelligence programs can scan through millions of events to find patterns and correlations that we just would not notice on a day to day basis,” explains Shmilovici. “So it might notice a correlation between sending a specific pitch deck to prospective clients before calling them results in better conversions. Or it might notice that sending a weekly follow up email can yield results up to 8 weeks after initial contact. These are small practices that a sales professional might miss but that can increase performance over time.”

The effect is to give sales professionals a second brain, one that crunches numbers and identifies patterns without needing any assistance. This has the potential to make every salesperson in the office a top performer, not just those with the best instincts. In that way, A.I. is leveling the playing field.
“The impact of A.I. on sales today is significant enough to qualify as a top-tier competitive advantage.”

The Art of Scaling

Growing a company is a chess match. There are a million strategies at play, but at the end of the day, cash is king, and you do not want to find yourself without it. But how do you grow your sales without hiring sales personnel? One way is to sell more with the team you have, and that is the future of Prescriptive Sales.

There is a litany of statistics available about how badly the average sales office performs. By any metric, there is room for growth. One study found that 63% of sales professionals fail to meet their personal quotas. So when we talk about there being room for growth without hiring new personnel, that is the space we are talking about.

Prescriptive Sales is designed to make it easier for salespeople to exceed their quotas. When a whole sales office uses the platform, the A.I. analyzes performance across individual experiences, meaning the program takes notes on how the top performing individuals work and shares it with the rest of the team. That cross-pollination of best practices makes up for numerous shortcomings in talent.

Don Schuerman, CTO of Pegasystems writes, “Using AI to correlate data and uncover trends is great, but data is made valuable only when you can take action on it.”

The effect is to give sales professionals a second brain.

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this leap forward. Today’s CRM platforms are broadly flat, meaning they describe what is and what is likely to be, but not what can be. In that way, today’s CRM platforms are Descriptive rather than Prescriptive.

Transitioning to Prescriptive Sales technology opens up new worlds of business opportunities. Suddenly executives are not handcuffed to best, middle, and worst case projections for annual revenue; instead they can paint a path toward concrete results and understand what it will take to achieve them.

That shift in thinking will have impacts on management and business strategy beyond what we can speculate about here. Of course, the best executives have always looked at what can be and worked toward that end, but now they have incredibly powerful tools at their disposal to get there.

“The impact of A.I. on sales today is significant enough to qualify as a top-tier competitive advantage,” asserts Shmilovici. “Every CRM company is actively working to release their own Prescriptive Sales platform for that reason. This is the wave of the future.” By combining Prescriptive Sales technology with a talented sales force, companies will be able to achieve growth at a much quicker pace. This technology could potentially become the future of sales and marketing.
Making sales calls is one of the inescapable responsibilities of being a business owner. No matter what you sell or how big your company is or how much success you’ve enjoyed, as the business owner, you still need to stay actively engaged with the art of selling and finding new business for your company.

Unfortunately, many business owners are falling short in the role of salesperson. Many business owners don’t want to make sales calls, or think that they shouldn’t have to pick up the phone, or are going about sales calls the wrong way.

Here are a few telltale signs that your next sales call will fail:

### You’re Too Nervous

Sales calls require confidence. But if you’re sounding anxious and stumbling over your words, you’re going to make your prospect uncomfortable, and they will be less likely to trust you. Rehearse your sales pitch in advance. Practice recording yourself while holding the phone. Get your sales pitch down
to the point where it feels comfortable and easy to remember; then you’ll be more likely to deliver it with ease and aplomb.

**You’re Too Eager**

The flipside of a nervous cold call is just as bad — being overly eager. If you’re too eager to get the prospect to agree to a sale or agree to a follow-up meeting, you will make the prospect feel pressured and mistrustful. If the prospect feels like you’re trying to pressure them, they will be skeptical of what you’re selling, and might even hang up. So try not to be too eager. Remember: this sales call is not the end-all, be-all of your sales effort, it is just the start of the process. You don’t have to close the deal on the first call, you just need to see if the prospect is interested, and try to get them to agree to a second call, a meeting, a demo, or whatever the next step of your sales process might be.

**You Don’t Know Who You’re Talking To**

Are you sure that you’re talking to the right person at the company that you’re calling? If not, don’t just launch into your sales script — ask questions to make sure you’re talking to the right decision maker that you actually wanted to reach. Sometimes getting the right person on the phone is a more complex and difficult process than ultimately making the sales call.

**You Haven’t Done Your Research**

B2B sales is all about doing your research and finding prospects that are the right fit for what you sell. Just like the old saying, “measure twice, cut once,” you need to spend a lot more time doing research into your prospects and their organizations before you pick up the phone to call. Make sure this company is really in the right industry, make sure your solution is a good fit, make sure that you’re aligned with each other. Better research leads to better sales calls; without doing your homework, you’re flying blind.

Picking up the phone to make a cold call to a new prospective customer for the first time is not “fun” for most people; it can be frustrating or nerve-wracking. But if you believe in your business, and you want your business to succeed, you need to find a way to keep making sales calls and keep getting better at it by avoiding the four sales call mistakes above.

Many business owners are falling short in the role of salesperson.

**You Don’t Know Why You’re Calling**

Every sales call needs to have a specific goal in mind. You need to know why you’re calling and what you’re trying to accomplish. For example, are you asking them to sign up for a product demo? Are you asking them to agree to receive some sales literature for their review? Your sales process should be well organized with several stages to work through; know which stage you’re on and understand the goals for each sales call before you pick up the phone.

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Al Davidson
Contributor
You’ve closed the sale and delivered on your products or services, and you might think your work is done, but that’s not the case at all. If you want to spend less time and money in the future making sales, you’ve still got some work to do.

Repeat customers are your ticket to continually boosting revenue without putting in a ton of work. In fact, increasing customer retention rates by just 5 percent can increase your profits 25 to 95 percent.

Where Most Companies Fail

Despite the numbers for customer retention being in every business’ favor, many companies drop the ball as soon as that initial sale is made. Customers, even if they’re happy with the product or service, have no reason to continue the relationship with a brand if that brand doesn’t make an effort to nurture that relationship.

Many companies drop the ball as soon as that initial sale is made.
Most small businesses don’t realize how incredibly simple it is to remain relevant to those customers: a simple post-sale email marketing campaign can keep the brand at the forefront of a customer’s mind. When she’s ready to buy, she’ll be more likely to do so if she’s got a special offer in her inbox.

Another way companies fail to connect with customers is by neglecting to ask for feedback. Sending a simple survey after a purchase can help your brand understand how well (or not) you met customers’ expectations. If you failed in that aspect, you have the opportunity to remedy the situation, make the customer happy and inspire loyalty to your brand. If you don’t bother, she has no sense that you care about her at all, and she’ll be happy to go to the competition.

Repeat customers are your ticket to continually boosting revenue without putting in a ton of work.

**How to Retain Customers with Long-Term Relationships**

The simplest solution here is to just care about your customers. Make sure you’ve lived up to your brand promises by talking to your customers and inquiring how you could do better in the future.

Beyond that, you need to stay relevant. Gear your blog content, your emails, and the interactions you have with customers to capture their attention and make them feel like they couldn’t do without you.

Remember that marketing to someone who has purchased from you in the past isn’t the same as marketing to a new customer. You’ll get better results if you speak to that “audience of one” and make her feel like you acknowledge her as a customer and look forward to serving her in the future. Make recommendations for products that complement what she’s already bought from you. Call her personally to see how she likes her purchase. Make her feel like a person and not a sale.

With just a little bit of upfront effort to bridge the gap from the first sale to subsequent ones, you’ll set up a relationship with a customer that will last for years. Just keep her needs and interests at the core of all you do, and she’ll become a brand ambassador for you.
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Sales people waste a lot of time on bad leads that will never buy from their company. They are sometimes referred to as tire kickers or “Lookie Lou’s” since they are glad to talk about buying, but in reality, they never end up purchase anything.

Unfortunately, sales team spend an inordinate amount of time not qualifying these bad leads since they get caught up with the quantity of their prospects, not their quality. This results in missing sales goals. To maximize their sale goals, teams need to only call on prospects that have a high likelihood of buying.

Here are surefire ways to spot them before they waste too much valuable selling time:

**Start by Googling**

Do background research on the prospect. Google their name and company if appropriate. Determine if they fit the target demographic of your typical customer.

**Make a Phone Call**

Before setting up a meeting, ask the prospects some key questions by phone.
In their view, what is their problem (that your solution addresses)? Get very specific since people only act when they are trying to solve a real pain.

What does it cost them if they don’t solve the problem? (i.e., if they wait, what is the cost to them?) This helps justify the expense of any new solution.

What is their budget for solving it? If their budget is too low, it does not make any sense to continue the discussion.

For example, if the solution costs $10,000 and the budget is $7,000 this is still within the range and is worth continuing. If their budget is $10 and your solution costs $5,000, then the conversation should stop there with these type of bad leads.

To maximize their sale goals, teams need to only call on prospects that have a high likelihood of buying.

At the Actual Sales Call

Have a very specific further set of questions for the in person meeting.

How do they think your solution will help them (solve their pain)? What exactly do they think your product will do for them and is this a realistic result from your point of view.

What have they tried before? This is critical since you want to know what solutions they have implemented previously and apparently failed. This tells you the level of spending and commitment they have for solving the solution. It also may give an indication if you can really help them.

Have a very specific further set of questions for the in person meeting.

Who else are they considering? Know who the competition is. If they are considering other vendors (or doing it inside their company), this may show how serious they are or is this just a bad lead.

Where is the budget coming from to make the purchase (and who can authorize it)? This helps identify whether you are actually talking to the decision maker who can buy your product. It becomes part of a series of bad leads if you are selling to someone that can’t authorize or influence the sale.

Always do more listening than talking. Don’t be afraid of a “no” from any of the bad leads or answers that do not move the sale along. The positive outcome about a “no”, is that you can now find other leads that may buy and not waste time with those that actually never will.

Barry Moltz (Nextiva)
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You’ve gained your first couple of clients by word of mouth, creating content for their blogs and social media channels. But now you’re ready for more jobs in your brand new content marketing business. Your business is to help drive traffic and sales to other people’s products or services. But how do get more sales for your own?

Gail Gardner is a Small Business Marketing Specialist and CEO of GrowMap.com. The company shares proven strategies for growing businesses through blogs, link building and other methods.

Small Business Trends spoke with her recently about ways to increase the sales in your content marketing business.

**Build a Website**

Having your own website is an important way to get the word out. It gives people a focal point where they can see links to works with your byline. Look at them as your electronic business card.
Set a Minimum Pay Rate

You need to draw a line in the financial sand when it comes to the amounts you’ll work for. Writing well is a creative process and needs to be compensated as such.

“Quality content is accurate. Accuracy takes time,” Gardner says.

“Get to know people who can introduce and recommend you.”

Collaborate with Other Writers

Writing for a living is full of financial peaks and valleys. You can smooth those bumps in the feast or famine cycle by networking with other writers. Sharing work means more for everyone. While Gardner suggests this Blogger Mastermind Skype group, she also suggests a more individual approach.

“Get to know people who can introduce and recommend you.”

Look for a Small Business Site to Publish On

There’s a caveat here. You’ll want to find a site that will pay for at least one post a week. Remember to keep things simple. Negotiate a rate for the one piece and managing comments only.

Optimize Your LinkedIn Profile

Getting out in front of business types and other writers on this site that’s designed for both is a win-win. Here’s some great tips to make this online resume stand out.

Get a Byline on the Bigger Sites

Nothing helps your currency as a content marketer like authorship on major sites. A byline in the Huffington Post or Forbes will provide you with the kind of content creds that will fill your inbox with work.

Frequently Check the Job Boards

This is really important when you’re starting out and trying to build up a client list, Gardner says. There’s a tab on LinkedIn that will direct you to loads of opportunities. Don’t forget to bookmark some of the more traditional standbys like ProBlogger too.

Have Multiple Clients

Gardner also talks about how dangerous it can be to focus all your efforts looking for one cash cow customer as your single revenue stream.

“I know a freelancer that’s always trying to get that one big client but those can run hot and cold.”

Juggling several clients can be challenging. However, something as simple as a paper day planner or online calendar or app can make all the difference.

Work on Your Proofreading Skills

Mixing old and new tools work great. Gardner suggests that there really is no substitute for reading the text out loud. On the other hand, online helpers like Grammarly catch the big stuff but you want to be careful not to take every suggestion.

Stay in Touch with Clients

If you haven’t heard from them in a bit, a little
nudge is all they might need to order more content from you. Emails are good, but if you have the time, a phone call adds a nice personal touch.

Start Small

It would be great if your content marketing service started paying six figures, but that’s typically not where anyone begins. Gardner explains how to cut your teeth in the business.

“The cheapest clients are usually the toughest to work with while the good clients are typically fine with paying decent prices,” she says. “When you first get started, you’ll have to take these low paying, difficult ones first.”

Don’t Be Rushed

There’s no need to let clients take advantage by insisting everything is a rush job. If a project needs to be done quickly, you should charge a premium of 10% to 20% to cover any rescheduling.

“Normal turnaround time should be about ten days — not hours,” Gardner says. “The best writers are busy. They can’t drop everything all the time and write instantly.”

Take Little Breaks

The tendency is to work until a project is finished and then move on to the next. However, to do the kind of work that will increase your client list, you need to take little breaks. These little reboots should come once an hour. They can be as simple as stretching and taking a minute or two to walk around.

Don’t Count Your Chickens

If you want to grow your business, never count on work until you have it and get paid. Gardner also suggests you charge at least 50 percent in advance. She also says some writers charge 100 percent before they start hitting the keys.

“The cheapest clients are usually the toughest to work with while the good clients are typically fine with paying decent prices. When you first get started, you’ll have to take these low paying, difficult ones first.”

Play to Your Strengths

Writers all have strengths and weaknesses. Gardner explains how to play to your strengths with one simple example.

“If you are meticulous, accurate, and slower, focus on white papers, case studies, copywriting, book writing or editing.”
I’m a big superhero fan. Probably more Marvel than DC, but I’m not that picky. If someone has some sort of weird power and wears a mask or cape, I’m there.

So one day I was reading and came across the term ‘team building exercise’ and this cartoon occurred to me. And you’d think that with my love of comics that this would be super fun to draw, right? Wrong.

The thing is I’m a stickler for accuracy, so I had to look up all the characters, decide which version of which costume I was going to use, research the background, and render them in such a way that I could hold my head up high.

Mostly I think I’m OK with this (especially Batman looking grumpy and not wanting to play along), but it’s a good reminder that sometimes drawing something you love isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

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