

12 Strategies to Get Customers to Buy Your Product

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Many entrepreneurs struggle to get their products into customers' hands. Yet, their survival and profitability hinge on convincing customers to buy their products. Compared to large companies, entrepreneurs often lack the substantial financial resources needed to embark on significant advertising or marketing campaigns or to hire specialized marketing talent to help with product launches. They also need help adapting to changing market trends and knowing where to focus their efforts.

Entrepreneurs often make the mistake of focusing extensively on product features to convince customers to buy their products. While having superior product features is crucial, it is essential to understand that customers buy products not for their features but for the benefits these features provide to resolve their issues (Futrell, 2005). When entrepreneurs focus too much on the product's features, customers can easily become overwhelmed by them and find it hard to relate to and translate what the product can do for them.

To understand how customers make purchase decisions, let us think of a car-buying situation. Potential customers may be very impressed by the horsepower, fuel efficiency, torque, etc. of the car. Still, their interest is in how the car will make their commute comfortable, be a good fit for their family, and provide a smooth driving experience. As another example, consider purchasing managers looking for inventory management software. They may be impressed by the features of the software, such as real-time stock tracking, automated reordering, barcode scanning, etc. However, their objectives and buying decisions are based on how the software eliminates stockouts, reduces costly errors, saves time, and decreases labor costs. So, an entrepreneur who focuses too much on the features rather than how they will help the customer may lose out to a competitor who spends time describing the benefits that are helpful to a customer's operations.

After spending most of my career in sales and now, as a

marketing professor teaching sales strategies, there are several important tactics that I recommend to entrepreneurs struggling to gain sales and effectively introduce new products. While many of the tactics are particularly effective in selling to businesses (B2B), I offer both consumer and business applications as examples. The advice listed below is based on my real-life business-to-business selling experience before entering the academic world, information from trade publications, and academic research. By following this advice, entrepreneurs can increase their sales and the success of new product introduction.

1. Identify businesses that can use or sell your product.

Find the companies in your area with operations where your product can be used or sold (Futrell, 2005). To illustrate this, consider an entrepreneur in a tourist destination who wants to introduce a unique souvenir tied to the destination. The first step would be to develop a list of boutiques, gift shops, B&Bs, craft fairs, restaurants, and hotels in the area that cater to tourists. The aim would be to identify businesses where tourists visit that have the ability to sell goods. This list should be a starting point for targeting marketing activities.

2. Target Customer Segments

Once you have your list, sort it based on business potential. Focus on customer groups or retailers with the most significant potential. Gather information about these potential buyers, including their business type, revenues, owners, decision-makers, and reputation in the marketplace. They are your audience, and understanding them is crucial for effective communication and tailored messaging for selling.

3. Identify Decision Makers

Entrepreneurs must map the buying organization and identify decision-makers to avoid misdirecting and



wasting efforts. This may require talking to people within the business to determine how buying decisions are made and who influences them. Be careful relying too much on individual titles in the firm as titles can often be misleading. Instead, identify and focus on individuals who influence purchasing decisions.

4. Identify Buying Centers

Entrepreneurs who supply complex component parts or supply/install systems should be aware of the presence of Buying Centers (Cabanelas et al., 2023) in the businesses they may be targeting. In procurement processes for expensive and intricate systems, businesses establish a group of functional experts who collectively evaluate and decide on purchases. For businesses that have a Buying Center, recognizing and engaging with this group is critical to your success.

For example, if a university is looking to replace its air conditioning system, individuals representing users (faculty/students/employees), the Finance Department, and the Facilities Engineer may be asked to join the Purchasing Manager to form the Buying Center. This group will evaluate the proposals to identify the one that best meets the technical specifications and budgetary limits and also assures trouble-free operations, reduces maintenance needs, and has acceptable contractual terms and conditions. The Buying Center is entrusted with ranking the proposals and recommending the best proposal to purchase. Therefore, in order to be considered, an entrepreneur must connect with the Buying Center and submit a proposal that aligns with their specified requirements.

5. Conduct a Competitive Analysis

Before creating your sales message, it is important to understand how your product compares to those of competitors. Identify how customers are currently addressing their needs and which products they use for the applications you have identified. Make a list of the products currently used (your competitors) and gather as much information as possible about them, including price, features, amount used, and purchasing cycle (Johnston and Marshall, 2013). It is also important to identify any issues or problems the customer might have had using the product. These concerns can include price, supply reliability, dependability, availability, billing issues, delivery problems, etc. These issues or problems create opportunities for the supplier to position as a solutions provider. For example, if the issue is with

the reliability of supply due to logistics, highlight your advantage as a local supplier and your record as a reliable supplier during supply disruptions that paralyzed businesses.

6. Create Comparison Tables

Develop side-by-side comparison tables showcasing your product's advantages and benefits compared to competitors' products. Recruit a friend or an unbiased third party to get an honest assessment. Once developed and verified, present this information to the customer, show how your product differs from competitors' offerings, and, more importantly, how it can help buyers increase their revenue or decrease costs (Chung, 2021).

7. Focus on Customer Benefits

Recognize that customers purchase products not for their features but for the benefits those features bring. Business buyers' interest revolves around three points: revenue increase, cost decrease, or preventing or minimizing potential threats to the business (Bursk, 2006). To get buyer's attention, structure the benefits of your product around these points and look for ways that your product can create value for the customer (Senn, 2022). Highlight how the features address your customers' specific needs and help their business (Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011).

For example, the Buying Center evaluating the new air conditioning system will look for technical and operational details. While it is critical to meet the technical and operational specifications, the focus of the sales pitch should be on employee comfort, trouble-free operation, minimizing trouble calls, lower operating costs, staying under budget, and installation schedule -- and not onerous terms and conditions.

8. Highlight Points of Difference

Compare your product's features and benefits with those of competitors to identify points of differentiation. The differentiations should be unique features that the competitive product does not have. For example, it could be an advanced MRI system for a hospital that lowers costs and increases patient throughput. The proposal for supplying this advanced MRI system may also include free training for system operators and free maintenance for the first two years. The supplier could also bring in some intangible benefits by pointing out the indirect benefit of helping the local economy, supporting

minority groups, contributing to the restoration of a historical monument, using local labor, etc. The supplier can mention that the firm employs local labor and provides high school graduates with opportunities for vocational training. In conversations with the buyer, they can casually remark that employees of the firm coach the local Little Leagues on weekends.

9. Articulate Your Value Proposition

Use the list of your product's benefits and points of difference to develop talking points that articulate its superior advantages over competitor products. The focus should be on helping the customer to make sense of the unique benefits and feel comfortable making the purchase decision (Cespedes, 2021). The entrepreneur can highlight the advantages of proximity by stating, "As a local provider with 24/7 service, we can guarantee minimal downtime for your business." Or, referring to the unique service plan, "Our customized maintenance plans are guaranteed to extend the lifespan of your HVAC equipment."

10. Offer to be a second/alternate source

Entrepreneurs often encounter situations where the potential customer already has a supplier. Businesses are generally reluctant to switch suppliers if they are happy with the current supplier. However, they recognize the need for an alternate source in emergencies and want to avoid overreliance on one source. Leverage this to your advantage. One way to get entry to a business is to ask the customer to entrust you with a small portion of the supply and keep you as an alternate supply source.

11. Develop Multiple-Level Contacts

The buyer and the user are often two different people, especially in business-to-business selling situations (Bonoma, 2006). It is very important to get to know personnel in different areas within the firm and communicate with them to learn about their business, how the product is being used, their experience with the product, and your eagerness to respond to their needs. These contacts may be individuals who operate or use your product, people in accounting, billing, and purchasing groups.

12. Offer Exceptional Service

Research shows that customers value a supplier's

reliability, responsiveness, and willingness to help without being asked (Cohen et al., 2006). Do not wait for the customers to call you. Be prepared to go the extra mile with follow-up visits, fast response to requests, and provision of relevant industry developments to the buyers and users who are busy running their operations (Boles, 2000; Mulki and Jaramillo, 2011).

By following these steps, entrepreneurs can effectively communicate their products' value proposition to potential customers and improve their chances of success in the market. Remember what the industry experts say: 'Buyers buy for their reasons, not for your reasons.'

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