

7 Excuses Salespeople Make For Not Achieving Targetsand how to manage a better result!

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Introduction

Let's face it.....selling isn't always easy, and sometimes it can be downright difficult for salespeople.

If you're an independent salesperson who is pretty much running your own show, then you'll know that sometimes it's tempting to let a few excuses distract you away from the focus of just getting on with it. If you're a sales manager, then you'll know that sometimes salespeople, either intentionally or unintentionally get distracted by excuses that they may perceive to be the real cause of their underperformance.

Our research has revealed that the following are 7 of the more typical excuses that salespeople make for not achieving sales targets:

1. We're not price competitive
2. I can't differentiate from the competitor's product or service
3. It's the economy – people just aren't buying at the moment
4. My territory is different so don't expect me to perform like the other reps
5. I don't have time to complete sales reports or update the CRM system
6. I'm not getting enough leads



7. I'm just waiting for my pipeline to come in – there are some big deals just around the corner

In this SalesCoachCentral Sounding Board Report, we'll cover each of these excuses and provide tips on what can be done to remedy the situation – whether it is a real excuse, or a perceived excuse.



1. We're not price competitive

Most if not all salespeople understand that being the cheapest will not always guarantee a sale, and yet as an excuse, price competitiveness is often the first one out of the drawer. Price is of course important and when the client perceives that the price difference between two competitive products or services far outweighs any perceived differences in the value, features or benefits, it would just make sense that the client would buy the cheaper of the two.

However, in most (not all) sales situations, the price difference between competitive products and services is usually not that significant.

What this means is that salespeople need to be able to stack up the value of their product or service as it applies to each individual customer's specific situation.

Is it really about price, or are there other reasons clients won't buy?

Here's a great question to ask yourself, and even to ask your potential clients..... "If the price of your product or service was exactly the same as that of your competitor(s), what would cause a prospective client to buy your product over the competitor's?"

If your answer is nothing – you're either not trying hard enough to come up with an answer, or you really are in trouble. People buy things everyday, knowing that they can probably buy them cheaper if they waited for a sale, negotiated harder, shopped around more and a host of other reasons. But despite knowing this, they still buy.

Why? It all has to do with a more dominant deciding value than price alone.

The key here for salespeople is to help get the prospective clients to focus on all of the reasons – other than price - that would cause them to want to buy your product or service. There's no silver bullet here. If the price difference really is that significant that you can't compete, unless there's an obvious 'value' difference (quality, features or benefits that far outweigh the significant price difference), why wouldn't the client buy the cheapest?

The questions for salespeople and their sales managers are "how well are you trying to discover the other dominant deciding values of clients (other than price) and how well are you articulating and focusing clients on that value?"

2. It's the economy – people just aren't buying at the moment



In any industry there are peak times when business just seems to roll in, and other times when it might seem like nobody is buying. The reality is, the expertise and effectiveness of any salesperson is demonstrated most strongly when times are tough, not just when times are good.

People don't buy your products and services. They buy what your products and services do for them. Your products and services either solve a problem situation that the client wants to fix, or allow the client to experience something better or different to that which they are currently experiencing.

Asking these questions.... "What problems do my target market have that I can help them overcome?" and "What can't my target market currently experience that I can help them experience through my products and services?"

Your answers will create a checklist of problems you can solve and situations clients can experience.

In times when money is tight for whatever reason, regardless of the industry your working in, what salespeople need to be able to do is to help clients discover the **value-gap** between not making a buying decision and making a buying decision.

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Through value-discovery questions, salespeople need to be able to help clients discover reasons to solve their problems or change their current situation....and these reasons must have a positive gain that far outweighs any financial strain that the client might currently perceive and be experiencing.

It's probably fair to say that in most personal and company purchasing situations that 'money is tight'. When salespeople hear the catch cry "It's not in the current budget" or "we haven't budgeted for this", rather than just accept it, get the client focused on problem resolution, and comparative spending (try to discover what clients are currently spending money on, or have allocated budget for that is not as important as potentially fixing the problem that the client is currently experiencing that your products and services could achieve....given a reallocation of that budget).



3. My territory is different so don't expect me to perform like the other sales representatives



I've heard salespeople in some cities make comments like "It's O.K. for the big city reps – they've got more clients....." or "all of the decision making is done in the big cities". I've also heard this apply between rural and city reps.

Our research however, also shows that regardless of big city, in the smaller cities, regions or rural territories, you can still find highly successful sales representatives. These salespeople don't use their territory as an excuse – they use it as an opportunity to shine out above their competitors (and even internal sales team colleagues). Their focus becomes on proactive and passive sales and marketing strategies that give them the highest likelihood of achieving the best results they can, given the geographic and logistical limitations of their territory.

Sales managers certainly do need to factor in geographical and logistical differences into budgets and activity expectations. However, it is still incumbent of salespeople, regardless of the territory within which they operate, to be able to demonstrate the implementation of focused sales and marketing activities that put them in the best opportunity to achieve the highest possible sales results.

Sales managers need to be observing, encouraging, reinforcing and coaching the potential of their salespeople in the field. Sales results can't get managed through reports.....they get managed through on going coaching and consequence management. Sales management is not an office job, it's a people development job.



For salespeople who basically set their own budgets and territories, this type of excuse simply means considering some possible alternative actions. The first is to change the territory or budget. The second is to work smarter and more focused with their sales and marketing activities within the existing territory. The third is to do a mix of both.



Before you write this discussion off, explain how you can have two reps in the same sort of territory, same products, same skills, and yet one sells rings around the other.

Sure, sometimes the territory might not be all that the salesperson would hope for, however, blaming the territory for inaction is not a productive choice.

4. I don't have time to complete sales reports or update the Customer Relationships Management (CRM) system



Here's another one of those 'self leadership' type questions. If every salesperson was to adopt an "It's my own business" attitude to their sales administration, do you think that they'd find the time to do the important administrative work that helps keep the promises that companies make to their clients?"

I'm confident that your answer would be the same as mine....."Of course!"

CRM systems (client relationship management) can be as simple as index cards that are written on during and after a client meeting and referred to before the next client meeting. CRM systems can be all encompassing computer based intra-net programs and include the necessity of every sales representative and service delivery personnel entering information about every point of current and intended contact with each client.

Now, you may not agree (or want to agree) with the following, however, if salespeople aren't completing sales reports or updating CRM systems, it's usually the fault of their sales manager, and indicates a lack of consequence management. It could of course be that the salespeople lack the skills to enter the information accurately and appropriately.

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If this is the case, then training can fix the competency gap. However, without the consequence management from sales managers, salespeople will tend to avoid the sales reports and CRM updating.

Without purpose, reason or consequence to get certain things done, we as human beings will find other seemingly more important things to do.....and we'll tend to leave what we perceive to be less important to get done on a rainy day. The problem is that the chances are if we leave things to chance, chances are we'll just leave it.

Having the structured approach of reviewing a client's details before a meeting, and updating the outcomes of the meeting straight after each meeting is not difficult.....then why is "I don't have time to complete sales reports or update the CRM system" one of the major excuses reported in our research?

The answer is a combination of purpose, reason, consequence, and training.

5. I'm not getting enough leads



This type of excuse rings loudly of a victim mentality. We get the business we deserve. We get the leads we deserve. We get the referrals we deserve.

Now this might sound a little harsh to some, however, when you really think about it....it's true.

If we're not getting the leads or referrals that we need to be able to achieve the sales targets that have been set, then either we make up excuses, or we do something to change the situation. Certainly, if we're not getting the leads and referrals that we deserve, continuing to do the same things probably won't change the result in our favour.

Salespeople and their sales managers need to consider what it is that causes people to provide leads to salespeople for new business.

Whether it's expected to receive leads and referrals from existing clients, internal colleagues or referral networks, the key question is "what are you doing to earn the leads and referrals that you're after?"

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The foundation platform for earning leads and referrals is to deliver outstanding levels of sales and service to existing clients. Many salespeople and their companies have data bases – they don't have client bases.

In other words, they've won the sale, but don't really know their clients.

Knowing your clients is about continually looking for ways.....after the sale.....to validate, thank, reward and reinforce the client for their buying decision.





6. I'm just waiting for my pipeline to come in – there are some big deals just around the corner

Having been in this situation in the early stage of my sales and consulting career, I know only too well that sometimes as salespeople, we get caught up in the wave of surfing our pipeline in hope of the next big deal that if and when we win it, we will not only meet sales targets, but blow them out of the water.

The reality is though that focused sales and marketing activities, being completed on a regular basis is the key to long term sales success.

Big deals just around the corner are not excuses to not have a diary filled with appointments with prospective and existing client meetings. In most sales roles, the big deals are bonuses. They're wonderful when they're won, but in the main, they're rare.

It's true that it often is just as hard to win a big ticket sale than it is to win more average ticket sales.

The key to managing this excuse is focused sales and marketing activity.

Networking, creating personal brand recognition in your target market, qualifying, gaining appointments with prospective buyers, building rapport, discovering needs, demonstrating value, overcoming obstacles or objections, confirming sales and staying in touch with existing clients for repeat and referral business.....this is focused sales marketing activity.

Quality sales and marketing activity creates full diaries in a salesperson's life and full diaries of effectively meeting with prospects and clients, creates long term sales success.

A key question to ask here is.....

Are the meetings you're having with prospective and existing clients sales calls or just meetings?

There is a big difference to an unstructured meeting with an existing or prospective client to one that has an objective, a process, and an aim to create reciprocal long term value.

*Are the meetings you're
having with prospective and
existing clients 'sales
calls' or just 'meetings'?*



7. I'm not sure why the prospects won't commit

"I'm working hard, doing all the sales and marketing activities, I'm seeing the decision makers.....but I just can't seem to win the sale!"

This is where a sales process becomes so important. To be able to discover the reason why some prospects won't commit, every salesperson and their manager, need to be able to review where the salesperson is up to in the selling-buying process.

Here is a checklist of sales process questions to help you discover why the prospect won't commit:

1. Have you qualified the prospect as a potential preferred client?
2. Are you seeing the decision maker, an influencer or someone else?
3. Have you built rapport – how do you know, and to what level of trust do you now have with the prospect?
4. Have you asked questions to discover a need, want or problem that you can solve? What questions did you ask and what were their responses? What are the needs, wants of problems that the prospect has admitted to you that they have and that they want to have them solved?
5. Have you helped the prospect prioritise their needs? What are their priorities?

6. Have you shown value through presenting your products and services in ways that has individually demonstrated to the prospect how your products and services will meet each specific need, want or problem that the prospect wants solved? What were the key value propositions that created 'value-matches' to the prospects needs?
7. Did you ask feedback and opinion questions about what you were presenting? What did you ask? What responses did you get from the client?
8. Did you either the 'checkpoint' question to gauge whether you'd been able to truly show and match value? (The checkpoint question is "Other than what we've covered so far, is there anything else we need to cover before we do business?" or something similar).
9. Did you confirm the sale by either asking for their buying decision or did you make a recommendation of what the next appropriate steps are that will enable the prospect to start to receive the value they seek?

The Checkpoint Question

“Other than what we’ve covered so far, is there anything else we need to cover before we do business?”

If you use the checklist above, you will probably discover that the reason a prospect hasn't committed is because one of the steps has not been completed, or you are bogged down in one of the steps and there's something that still needs to be resolved.

When you feel that you're in a stalemate and you're just not sure why the prospect won't commit, despite reviewing the sales process, you may want to ask the prospect the following:

"I'm a little confused about where we're up to in your buying decision.....I'm confident I've understood what you're looking for, and that I've demonstrated how we can achieve that for you. This is good for you and will achieve what you're after.....My question is, what haven't I covered or what do I need to do to get your business?"

This is a 'draw a line in the sand' question. It's assertive, and it signals to the client that you're ready for them to buy and that you believe that this is what they're after, and that you want them to be comfortable and confident to make a wise buying decision.

The 'draw a line in the sand' question is a question of last resort, when despite your best efforts of appropriately completing each of the steps in a value-focused sales process, you still can't for the life of you work out what's holding the prospect back from making a buying decision.

Having said that, usually you will find that through stepping back through the selling-buying process, you will discover a reason.

Summary

Each of these 7 excuses salespeople make for not achieving targets are quite often not excuses at all, because in the minds of the salesperson these 'excuses' are realities.

The intent of this SalesCoachCentral Sounding Board Report is to help salespeople and sales managers better understand how to manage the best results out of every day issues that confront salespeople.

I trust that you've gained value from this report and as always, I welcome any comments or feedback that you might have on this or any other future topic that can help you and other sales professionals sell more comfortably, confidently, consistently and commercially.

Until next time.....my very best to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Penglase".

David Penglase

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About the Author:



David Penglase is widely recognised as Australia's leading expert on the ethics of selling. He is a dynamic, entertaining and content rich sales coach, conference keynote speaker, and sales workshop facilitator.

His clients range from financial institutions, pharmaceutical sales, surgical equipment, recruitment, professional services, retail, engineering, technology and materials management to name a few.

Since 1994 David (along with his wife Liz who is the Director of Client Service) has provided corporate conference keynote presentations and breakout workshops, seminars, products and on-line sales coaching resources that assist sales people and sales managers in their pursuit of achieving more profitable sales, developing stronger client relationships and repeat and referral business.

David is accredited as one of the top registered professional speakers worldwide and has been awarded by his peers with the designation of Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) which is the only recognised standard of the International Federation for Professional Speakers.

Supporting over two decades of experience in the fields of organisation and people development, David has a degree in business and human resource development. He holds an MBA, and a Masters Degree in Professional Ethics.

His commitment to creating long term and successful changes in the skills, knowledge, attributes, attitudes and activities of salespeople resulted in the development of SalesCoachCentral.com.



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SalesCoachCentral[®].com is a next generation web based sales development resource center designed for sales managers and salespeople to have 24/7 access to a range of on line courses, podcasts, multi-media tips, audio books, onscreen demonstrations and the incredibly effective sales problem solving center.

If you're not already a member, you're welcome to visit this exciting next generation community website designed for professional salespeople and sales managers at <http://www.salescoachcentral.com> where you can experience the vast content and value to be gained through a complimentary and no obligation trial period.

David lives in the bay side suburb of Sans Souci in Sydney Australia with his wife Liz, their teenage sons Matthew and Anthony, and their Groodle dog Buddy.

Sell more confidently, comfortably, consistently and commercially.

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