



Sales “Pitch” or Process?

By Aaron Crowley

Sales are the fuel for the fire of a fabrication business. Without them, or without enough of them, the results are well... obvious. How then is it, that something so absolutely critical, can seem like it's outside any body's ability to control?

A business owner can control machines, command respect, and direct employees. But the one thing a business owner cannot do is force a customer to buy his product. This can leave the most competent stone shop owner feeling helpless and frustrated when sales start to slip.

Building a proactive approach to selling is typically not taught out in the shop or on the job site. The result from this unfortunate fact is that many fabricators spin their wheels by spending their money on expensive and ineffective advertising in an attempt to gain some semblance of control over their sales. This leaves many to believe that sales are simply out of their control and that they are at the mercy of the economy or competition.

The solution to this dilemma is to understand that while sales are difficult to “control”, they can in fact be managed. Additionally, it is important to realize that sales is more than just the act of “selling” or using a catchy sales pitch, in the same way that cutting out a slab is more than just “cutting”. It involves a methodical approach with incremental steps that must be taken in a particular order.

For example: to cut a slab, the sawyer first cleans the slab so it can be inspected for blemishes, next the templates are laid out so the blemishes are avoided and the joint color matches, and finally, the slab is actually cut.

Similarly, there are purposeful and logical actions that can be taken to increase the likelihood of selling more effectively. Those incremental steps are what define a successful sales system.

A successful sales system is made up of three components: they are identifying the primary customer, creating and communicating the message, and following up relentlessly.

Identifying the primary customer:

In any market place there exists a broad range of potential customers, who want a granite slab counter top. There are million dollar home builders, track home

developers, remodeling contractors and homeowners. Each of these “segments” of the market will have particular needs and priorities that are unique to how they want their granite slab counters provided. It is necessary to rank the customers needs in the order of importance they place on quality, price, convenience, and customer service.

For example, an upscale home owner's number one concern, or need, may be convenience, followed by quality, and then customer service.

In the same way that every customer has unique requirements for their particular situation, every fabrication shop has unique strengths because of the particular skills and talents of the staff managing and doing the work.

One shop may be predisposed to doing higher volume, low price work that would suit a condo or town home developer whose needs are price first, convenience second, and quality last.

Other shops will be geared to doing low volume, ultra high quality work desired by a million dollar custom home builder, where price is no object as long as the quality and craftsmanship is unparalleled.

At this point, with the individual needs of the market place identified and a clear understanding of the company's ability to meet them, it should be obvious to the fabricator what segment of the market they should be targeting. That target market becomes their “primary customer” and it should become their mission in life to serve that customer better than any other company in town.

Creating and communicating the message:

Once the primary customer is selected, the message of how the company is able to cater to them must be developed. This message must quickly and clearly communicate that the company not only understands the needs of their primary customer better than anyone else but is more capable of meeting that need than anyone else.

From the recording on the voice mail to the wording on the web site, the message must be consistent and clear. And nowhere is this principle more important than for the people who actually speak with the customer.

Whether it is the receptionist, estimator, or salesman, it is essential that *anyone* who regularly talks with potential customers is aware of how the company uniquely meets the customer's needs and is able to communicate it quickly and effectively.

A very efficient way to do this is to write a short script that is posted by the phone and used by EVERY person who speaks to prospective customers. The script starts with the all important question, “Have you heard what makes us unique?” Unless the customer has spoken to someone else in the organization who has

asked them this question, they will likely be intrigued and quite interested in finding out. When they express interest in knowing, pre-prepared answers are given. The answer(s) should be the specific approach or unique abilities that the company possesses that meet the particular needs of the primary customer.

The short script posted by every phone for the upscale homeowner might read as follows:

“By the way, have you heard what makes our company unique?”

The answers:

1. We template over your existing counters, leaving you with a functioning kitchen while we produce your counters. (convenience)
2. We have an incredibly skilled staff, capable of producing a very high level of quality craftsmanship. (quality)
3. We place a premium on providing a superb level of personalized attention. (customer service)

For the primary customer, this will be music to his ears, and may decide then and there to buy his counters. If not, then the final step in the process becomes extremely important.

Following up systematically:

This final step in the sales system is a system in and of itself. It is the icing on the cake of the process and it is so effective it can actually stand alone and increase sales.

Because customers almost always have questions after they receive the initial quote for their counters, a very positive impression will be made when they receive a phone call within days of receiving their quote with the purpose of answering them.

There two most important elements of following up systematically are establishing who is going to follow up and when, and asking another very important question.

One person must be assigned the task of contacting every primary customer with in a certain number of days after the initial quote was provided. Finish by organizing the quotes by in such a way, that it is clear, every day or every week which customers are ready to be contacted.

For example, all the quotes produced from Monday to Friday could be compiled at the end of the week and clipped together by the estimator. The estimator could then date the bundle and assign the date the customers should be called.

If it is established that the following Wednesday is the follow up date, then it is labeled and given to the person assigned to make the calls.

Making the call is easy at this point as the person has only to ask the customer if they have any questions while being ready and able to answer them. Most often this will provide additional opportunities to reinforce the strengths of the company, increasing the confidence of the customer.

If there is a “pitch” in this process, it is given at this point in the follow up. It takes the form of a simple nonthreatening question, and absolutely cannot be neglected. It is what is commonly referred to as asking for the sale.

This is the easiest way to ask for it, “Well, would you like me to reserve you a date on our schedule?” If the customer isn’t willing to commit to moving forward, it should be noted, and placed in a stack to be followed up on the following week.

In the same way that a machine can malfunction and employees can be erratic, a sales system will not be 100% successful, in closing every sale. But by methodically developing and relentlessly executing one, the fire of future sales will burn brightly into the future.