

## Getting to know your customers can bring you more business

The main challenge facing senior salespeople is how to effectively grow sales. How can you win new customers and how can you sell more to your existing customers? Knowing what your customers want is a good starting point.

The business world is divided into three groups\* – strangers (people we are yet to do business with), friends (prospects – those that know of us) and lovers (our customers), and it is our lovers that we should pay the most attention to. These are the people we should be talking with to find out why they like us, how we could improve, and to discover any new ways we could help them.

\*Robert Craven, The Directors' Centre Ltd.



### Where do you get your best ideas?

A client recently told us that he gets his best product development ideas when he's with his customers. Seeing how they use the technology his company provides really helps him to see how he could better service their needs and what other products and solutions might be useful.

Unfortunately in today's business world there is not always the time or opportunity to spend as much time with each customer as we might like, and even when we do, are we asking the right questions?

Questions asked at the end of a project will tend to focus on what you have done right and where you could improve. The answers can be extremely interesting, but it should not end there. To get the full business benefits you need to include questions that uncover information which can be fed back into planning. Often a business transaction starts at one end of a list and finishes at the other; research, first contact, negotiation, agreement and delivery. Many businesses will then move on to the next deal, but by asking the right questions when you evaluate the project you can gain valuable information to take you forward. Using this evaluation in the correct way allows you to close the loop and begin the cycle again in a better place, having learnt from your previous dealings. It also enables you to offer the customer an even more effective solution, and secure more business.

### Look after existing customers

We are all constantly improving our products and our business and one of the best ways of doing this is by learning what our customers think of us. In the last year over 50% of our business at Solutions for Sales has come from existing customers. This makes it very clear how important it is to take care of your lovers.

Seeking and acting upon customer feedback is key to retaining customers and growing business. If the customer felt that after the initial purchase they were left to fend for themselves, then there is an opportunity for ongoing professional services support. If they report that the new billing system you think is so marvellous created major problems with their existing payment system, then you have the opportunity to improve the interface in a way that will help this and perhaps many other customers.



### Improve your processes, not just your products

We have been seeking client feedback for some time and are using the information we have gained to help us improve our Sales Guides, our workshop process and all the other sales enablement materials we create for our clients. As a result of the insights from our surveys we were able to identify our strengths and use these to better meet client requirements. For example, our survey results had highlighted that respondents felt the workshop process was beneficial in itself, not just for gathering information. This gave us an idea of how to meet a client need that we had been hearing about but had not been able to address. Several clients expressed

the desire for us to go a step further with their sales materials and develop training events that embed selling knowledge in salespeople's consciousness. This led us to create the Sales Development Workshop, which uses the workshop process not to extract information, but as an interactive method of teaching this information to sales teams.

### Do it online

We use online surveys, which we have found to be non-intrusive and simple to complete. The online format creates a neutral and objective platform for our clients' feedback, allowing them to be completely frank, whilst the survey structure keeps the dialogue focused. Most people are accustomed to online forms, and a well designed survey takes no more than 10 minutes to complete. We achieve response rates above 50%, which makes online surveys a very cost-effective way of learning about our clients.

### Three-fold benefit

Being more informed about your customers' requirements delivers three-fold benefits. Not only does it allow you to develop your products in line with their needs. It also proves there is market demand, which will help you secure the product development resources within your company. In addition you can provide the results you gather to your customers to help with their own evaluation and business improvement. Of course you can never find out everything and there will always be some unknowns, but online surveys offer a great way to get closer to customers, and if you never ask then you will never know!

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This article was written by Amy Willis of Solutions for Sales. For information about Solutions for Sales and further useful resources visit [www.solutionsforsales.com](http://www.solutionsforsales.com) or call +44 (0)1702 586742.

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