

Are you pushing or pulling? Overcome sales resistance.

“For us, our most important stakeholder is not our stockholders, it is our customers. We're in business to serve the needs and desires of our core customer base.”

John Mackey – Founder and CEO of Whole Foods Market

The Push Sales Process (forced)

In the push approach one promotes their product (or service) to get a particular response that provides the opportunity for a sales presentation. During the presentation, one details the **features** of their product and tells the customer the price and payment terms. They are then asked to purchase.

Usually the prospect will have some resistance or hesitation about going ahead (objections). Then comes a negotiation phase where one tries to overcome objections and "close" the sale. The prospect either says yes to the product after a bit of a battle, or tries to get a price reduction to the point where the business won't make a profit, or they say "they need to think about it." (The majority of objections, in all industries are either time or money based). Rarely do they actually say, "No thanks."

The “push” process is thus:

promote product > presentation > proposal > overcome objections > close sale

A number of factors make this model (which is fairly rudimentary) pretty ineffective now:

1. Today's market (ie: consumers) is more knowledgeable and there is greater choice than in the past. There is an inbuilt resistance because the customer will want to research other options before accepting your proposal.
2. We suffer from information overload (we live in a time poor, information rich society). It is estimated that on average we receive approximately 3,000 marketing messages daily (in the US it's estimated to be even more). With so much coming at us, consumers have thick filters up, making it much harder to get your message through.
3. The "push" approach creates resistance. When one pushes in sales, (action creates reaction) the reaction is resistance.
4. This resistance is even greater because people are more suspicious of sales people these days. The consequence of unethical advertising and sales practices of the past is that the market is now very wary of what advertisers and sales people say.
5. The push approach is **product focused**. So identify the problem they have, and then provide them something they need to fix the need or desire.

Salespeople who push the product make hard work of selling, great sales people listen, find (or create) the need and provide the answer.

The Pull Sales Process (attraction)

In this process, there is very little need to "sell.". In the pull approach, the focus is on the **customer** rather than the product. This approach recognises that no one is interested in someone's product until they have **identified a need**. The main focus of marketing is to first highlight and identify needs (and create desires), rather than just inform about products. ("Features only tell.")

Most of the sales conversation in the “pull” approach is about the customer and their circumstances. The role as a sales person is to identify the prospects needs, before one presents the solution. One also views the customer as a **long term client** of one's business, rather than a sales prospect who may buy today and never come back.

There are a number of clear steps in this model which eliminate much of the resistance that the push approach suffers from. The “pull” process looks like this:

Lead generation and promotion, identifying prospects with need (PQL – pre-qualified leads) > build credibility > fact finding > proposal > clarification > agreement > open ongoing relationship.

“Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution. If you don't have any problems, you don't get any seeds.”

Norman Vincent Peale - Author of “the Power of Positive thinking”

1. Rather than marketing to everyone, target it: concentrate promotional marketing on the people who are most likely to buy - those who need your product/services. It is far more effective to break the sales process down into two distinct steps, lead generation and lead conversion. The first aim in lead generation is to eliminate **non-qualified buyers** (the push model tries to sell to everybody - expensive, ineffective and wasteful) and find prospects with a need. (Remember the 80/20 principle?)
2. Lead generation (promotion, referrals, trade shows, etc) - particularly for business to business sales - needs to educate the prospect about the **benefits** of the product/service and show **how** the product solves the problem or meets the need/desire. This approach means that prospects can find out more about a possible solution with very low commitment. This breaks down resistance. A free sample or trial will help, as will free information about your solution. The valuable information you provide will also build credibility and help establish trust.
3. After attracting **qualified leads**, one can concentrate on converting them into customers. The fact finding aspect is the critical element of this process. Don't sell just yet though - more fact finding is required: probing the prospect's circumstances to find out the extent of their problem. Because the focus is on the prospect (as opposed to your product) at this point, there is very little resistance. The customer feels **genuine care** that you will find them the best solution. This attention to the customer also builds credibility and trust [key brand values]. They don't feel like they are "being sold".
4. When the exact nature of the problem is identified, the sales person, who is now regarded as a knowledgeable adviser, is able to make a proposal about the best solution to the customer's problem. If you have done your marketing well, the solution will be your product.
5. Rather than objections, if the customer has any hesitation at this point, it is normally just in the area of needing clarification of something to do with the product/service. These queries are not difficult to answer. You don't need to learn the tricks and techniques used in the push model to overcome objections. All you need to do is restate the details and benefits relating to the query and check that the customer understands what that means.
6. With the attraction approach you don't need 50 different closing techniques to trick the customer into saying yes. All you need do is to check that your customer agrees that the solution you have proposed is acceptable and ask them how they want to pay. Simple.

The "pull" process is not on selling, or closing sales; the focus is on acquiring customers and opening a relationship that provides ongoing mutual benefits to both parties. This recognises that a customer has a long term value to your business, both through the initial sale and from additional sales to that customer as well as from the referrals that satisfied customers provide.

"Our business is about technology, yes. But it's also about operations and customer relationships."

Michael Dell - founder of Dell Corporation

Which process does your business use?

If you are struggling, finding the market is resistant, review your sales process and assess which model you're using.

Forcing something always gets a pretty negative reaction. The attraction approach makes life easier for customers and **sales people**, because it is a partnership approach rather than a confrontational approach. Sales resistance is minimised, you spend more time working with interested, motivated buyers than difficult customers and you enjoy a far greater degree of satisfaction and success.

Provide the help, don't sell the product.

Your level of success is only limited by yourself.

Best wishes, Vaughan

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