

An illustration showing a fan of tickets on the left, a large stack of green banknotes in the center, and several stacks of red coins on the right. The tickets are dark blue with white text. The top ticket is clearly visible, showing 'Your Ticket To Sales Success!' in large, stylized letters. Above this text, it says 'Sect 1 Row Seat 12'. Below the main text, there are five dollar signs '\$ \$ \$ \$ \$'. At the bottom of the ticket, there is a list of items with bullet points: '• Prop', '• Spo', '• Pri', and '• Ph'. The background is a simple light blue gradient.

Lori Miller, Steve Shaad,
Debbie Burch & Roy Turner

An Events Unlimited Publication
A Division of Rich Products Corporation

Sales Success in Sports Marketing



A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO SALES SUCCESS IN THE SPORTS INDUSTRY

**Lori Miller, Steve Shaad,
Debbie Burch & Roy Turner**

**An Events Unlimited Publication
A Division of Rich Products Corporation**

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FOREWARD

The evolution and development of sales promotion as it relates to sport and entertainment marketing has been influenced by some significant individuals including P.T. Barnum, C.C. Pyle, Tex Ricard, Albert Spalding, and Bill Veeck. In terms of their modern day legacies, arguments could be made for Mike Veeck, Pat Williams, Mark McCormack, Jon Spoelstra, Madonna, Don King and perhaps Dennis Rodman. In any case, these individuals had a belief in themselves and the product(s) they were promoting and selling. In many cases these individuals were self-trained, while in one unique case, Bill Veeck was the mentor for both his son Mike and also for Pat Williams.

While the success of these individuals might give credence to the axiom that “salespersons are born, not made,” the untold success of those not mentioned, the countless sales personnel who have worked at the minor and major league levels, is a more than effective counter-argument. It is much easier to train a quality sales force than to wait for that one uniquely gifted individual to come along. Since the entry point to a career in sport for many people is via the sales force, it is time for sport management programs and business schools to provide effective course work. To do this effectively, there must be cooperative venture between the professionals who actually train people to sell based upon their own organizational demands and situations, and the academics who need to provide their students with cases and real life scenarios to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills.

Thankfully, this book is the type of collaborative effort between academics and practitioners that enables that combination of training, learning and analyzing to take place. The practitioners involved in the authorship of this book have a combined fifty plus years of sales and marketing experience in professional and collegiate sport. One of these practitioners, Steve Shaad, is one of the most respected leaders in professional sport, having trained hundreds of sales personnel during the course of his career. Combining in the preparation of this book with the three practitioners is Dr. Lori Miller, a gifted academic who not only has published significant and insightful works throughout her career, but also is an exceptional teacher who prepares her students to compete and excel in the arena of sport management and marketing. As someone who has been both an academic and a practitioner, I greatly appreciate this integrated and comprehensive effort.

This book should serve as a primary text for academics teaching courses in sport promotion and sales and a complementary addition to the practitioner’s book shelf to accompany classic sales/promotional works such as Mark McCormack’s *On Selling*, Joe Vitale’s *There’s A Customer Born Every Minute* and Jon Spoelstra’s *Ice to the Eskimos*. It’s a welcome addition to all of us who teach and work with young people as it provides information about sales in a way that clarifies the demands and the process and shows what it takes to be successful.

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PREFACE

The world is captivated by sports. Newspapers devote an entire section to the coverage of sports events. Radio and television newscasts carve out significant segments of their precious time to keep us abreast of what's happening in the world of sports. In the meantime, stories on other businesses are sometimes buried in the news, if covered at all. Whether you agree or disagree with the attention our society devotes to sports, our fascination with this area of our lives seems to be permanently ingrained into our culture.

Sports practitioners discover early in their careers that the sale of tickets, sponsorships and media time are crucial to the financial success of their sports organization. This financial success quite often translates into success on the field. The organization that draws the most fans, attracts the most sponsors and negotiates the best radio and television coverage is often the organization deemed most successful in its field.

Considering the fascination we have with sports and the importance sales has in the success of sports organizations, it is amazing how little literature and formal education is devoted to creating success in the field of sports-related sales. Walk into any library or bookstore and review the titles of books written on sales in general. Chances are there will be dozens, if not hundreds, of books written to help the sales work force be more successful. Now ask for the listing of books written specifically on sales of sports inventory. Outside of sections of sports marketing texts devoted to the sales process, chances are you'll find little on the specific subject.

For years, sports practitioners have debated on this subject, filled with no small amount of grumbling and complaining that college graduates in sports fields weren't prepared to handle one of the most basic functions of the sport organization's front office. University professors typically responded in frustration themselves, commenting that texts aren't available on the subject.

Surveys of sport organizations revealed there was no consistent resource for training the sales staff. Most organizations simply handed the newcomer a rate card and a list of accounts and pushed them out the door.

By chance, four individuals with related interests and common goals happened to engage in just such a conversation. One was the head of a sport administration program with a keen interest in producing graduates who would be highly attractive to the marketplace upon graduation. Her students had told her of their frustrations with being handed sales duties with little training. Another was the head of a minor league baseball team who had hired six to eight college graduates a year in an apprenticeship program and was frustrated at the time and effort it took to teach them sales before they could begin helping the organization. Yet another was a highly successful professional soccer coach and general manager who had learned sales the hard way and was searching for a better way to develop a sales force for his

sport that so desperately needed revenue. The fourth was a former pro sports sales executive who was selling in the entertainment field and was unimpressed with the materials, resources, seminars and speakers available in either sports sales or the related field of entertainment.

The university professor made the challenge to the grumbling professionals, “If you feel so strongly that universities should teach students sales in sports marketing, why don’t we write a book on it so we’ll have a text to use?”

Hundreds of hours later, after countless interviews and after reviewing dozens of resources, *Sales Success in Sport Marketing* is completed. It is designed to bridge the gap between the philosophy of sales in sports and the practice of selling sport inventory. We hope it serves as an excellent resource for academics who want to include practical sales training in classes on sports marketing. Furthermore, we’ve written it with the practitioner in mind, to be used as the teaching guide for in-house sales training programs. If this book helps lessen the frustration college graduates and newcomers to sport organizations feel when they learn that sales will be a significant part of their duties, we’ve achieved our goal.

We welcome your comments and suggestions for improvements for possible updates to this publication. May you and your students achieve success in sales without the frustrating break-in period that so many before them have suffered.

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Fun, comfortable environment
 Guarantee product quality, satisfaction if appropriate
 Hire prudently
 Isolate a highly agitated customer
 Justify benefits
 Keep customer service efforts in front of the fan or client
 Listen intently to the complaining customer
 Mission statement
 Network
 Objectives should incorporate customer service expectations
 Partner with fans, clients
 Quickly respond to customer complaints.
 Reward customer service efforts
 Service, service, service
 Target the “right” customers
 Understand objectives
 Value customer complaints
 Wear professional attire
 Exercise patience
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 Zero defect customer service quality

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A variety of sales philosophies have been advocated by experts in sales (Cargill, 1996; Lill, 1999; Willingham, 1984). While there may be as many philosophies toward sales as there are sales organizations, nearly all philosophies are extensions of two basic philosophies. “Stimulus/response” sales and “needs assessment” sales represent two philosophies common to most sales practitioners (Warner, 1986).

A. Common Sales Philosophies

1. Stimulus/Response Sales

The “stimulus-response” sales philosophy is characterized by a sales representative presenting or demonstrating a product to the prospect in hopes of stimulating a response. An example of this sales philosophy might be a telemarketing campaign to sell season tickets. The sales representative contacts the prospect by phone, informs the prospect of the features, functions and benefits of owning season tickets and then asks for the order. If the response is not positive but the prospect shows some interest, the sales representative will present a smaller but similar package. This process continues until the prospect selects a package or informs the sales representative that he or she is not interested in buying at that time.

The strength of the stimulus-response sales philosophy include its ease of use. Sport managers can train telemarketers and part-time sales associates by removing the research involved in planning for contingencies or assessing the prospect’s needs prior to making the initial contact. The weakness of the stimulus-response sales philosophy is its lack of flexibility. In other words, if the sales representative does not offer an ideal package the first time around, there is no plan for ongoing dialogue.

2. Needs Assessment Sales

When using the needs assessment sales philosophy, the sales representative strives to determine or assess the needs of the prospect. The sales representative might first interview the prospect, asking a series of questions designed to determine the needs of the prospect. Only after determining the prospect’s needs does the sales representative present a sales proposal. Similar to the medical profession, a needs assessment sales representative serves as a diagnostician. The sales representative partners with the prospect to solve an identified problem. Alessandra, a sales expert, states, “In professional selling, as in medicine, prescription before diagnosis is malpractice” (quoted in Lill, 1999, p. 29).

During the communication phase, the representative presents only the inventory that best meets the prospects needs. A sales

Sales Philosophy

representative might use the needs assessment sales philosophy when trying to sell a prospect a sponsorship package for a golf tournament. The sales representative would ask a series of questions to determine needs of the prospect.

Possible questions might include the following:

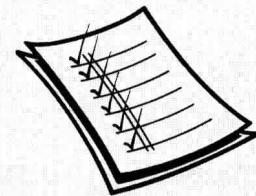
- How do you define your target market(s)?
- How do you develop a relationship with key customers?
- What do you do to build employee morale and loyalty to the company?
- What does your company do to be visible in the community or involved in community events?
- How does your company develop brand awareness?
- Do you golf? If so, how often? At what courses?
- Do any of your clients or key employees golf?

The list can go on and on, depending upon the information the sales organization is seeking in order to make a solid presentation to the client.

The strength of the needs assessment sales philosophy is the tailored or customized presentation that the sales representative can make as a result of an understanding of the prospect's needs and objectives. The weakness of this method is the time expended to do the research necessary to make an appropriate and accurate assessment of the prospect's needs.

The remainder of this chapter elaborates on the needs assessment sales technique using the acronym "SUCCESS."

1. **S**earch
2. **U**nderstand
3. **C**ontact
4. **C**ommunicate
5. **n**egotiate
6. **S**ecure the sale!
7. **S**ervice the customer



B. The Success Sales Philosophy

The SUCCESS sales philosophy is outlined only briefly below, as components of the sales SUCCESS philosophy will be elaborated on in subsequent chapters.

1. SEARCH

A large part of successful selling is directly related to one's ability to target the right prospects. Qualified prospects include individuals or organizations that need the product offered, can afford the product, and are able to make the purchasing decision (Lill, 1999). Searching for individuals lacking one of the above three elements can prove wasteful.

Rather than approaching a mass audience in a random fashion, the sales representative is advised to search out those organizations or individuals that have a linkage with the sport organization or event. The linkages may come in a variety of ways. For example, a hockey team may search out those sporting goods stores selling hockey equipment. Similarly, the hockey team may search for, or solicit as potential clients, actual manufacturers of hockey equipment. Another linkage may evolve as a result of the sport's image and the image of the particular prospect's organization. For example, a local hockey team may find sports bars that target a similar target audience (i.e., young males) as a logical link.

Frequent brainstorming sessions represent an effective way for a sales staff to exploit all possible linkages. Sport organizations with an accurate database of fans who have attended events have already completed an important step in prospecting for potential ticket clients. In fact, if the fan database is extensive enough to address those consumers' other purchasing patterns, it may also help define corporate sponsors who should be targeted.

The Project Future Shox campaign conducted at Wichita State University in 1998 illustrates how prudent searching can reap positive results in a very short time. The purpose of Project Future Shox was to raise \$6 million for the renovation of Tyler Field at Eck Stadium baseball facility. Events Unlimited, a local event management company, coordinated development efforts. A search for the most logical prospects resulted in 16 separate lists of about 5,000 names total. The first sales efforts went to fans that had previously donated to the baseball program. The second list represented fans that had joined an exclusive club to support the baseball program. Subsequent lists included athletic donors, current ticket holders and fans who had purchased playoff tickets in previous seasons. Those 16 lists produced the first \$3 million of the campaign and more than 1,100 personal seat licenses in just four months.

Furthermore, most of the revenue generated came from individuals high on the lists. Fans in the top five or six categories claimed many of the expensive seats. Predictably, once the best lists had been exhausted, sales slowed considerably.

"Without these lists of prospects, we would have struggled tremendously," said Greg Kalkwarf, General Manager of Events Unlimited. "As it was, we had to hire extra people to fill the orders, the sales were coming in so quickly" (Kalkwarf, 1998).

Searching for the appropriate and logical prospect is a continuous process. Both the fan base and client base change



"Without these lists...we would have struggled. As it was, we had to hire extra people to fill the orders..."
Kalkwarf, 1998.

Sales Philosophy

constantly. Prudent sport organizations develop methods of entering new prospects on a daily basis and assigning the responsibility for entering data to a trusted individual. Additional information on effective direct marketing is covered in the chapter, Direct Marketing.

2. Understand the Client's Needs and Company Objectives

Understanding the client's needs and company objectives represents an essential element of successful selling. Presenting inventory packages that lack utility for the prospect and his or her company waste valuable resources (e.g., time and money) of all stakeholders.

A comprehensive understanding of the client's needs requires significant time and effort. For example, sales representatives should possess a thorough understanding of the following prior to making the initial contact:

The company's:

- Competitors
- Product mix and product line
- Decision makers(s)
- Gatekeeper(s)
- Objectives (e.g., marketing, strategic, product introductions, expansions)
- Marketing strategy
- Target audience
- Organizational structure

The above list certainly is not comprehensive. There is a lot of information that sales representatives should, and could, determine (see chapter on Direct Marketing for more elaborate detail). The cogent point to remember is the need to present a plan that has utility for the client. A thorough study of client-related information provides the sales representative with tools necessary to begin a successful sales process. Any relevant data missing prior to Contact should be gathered during the communicate phase.

3. Contacting the Prospect

Contacting the prospect represents an important element of the overall sales SUCCESS philosophy. First impressions are lasting. Consequently, the initial contact made by a sport sales representative needs to be well received. Unfortunately, the effort of a sales representative is often wasted for the following reasons:

- Using a communication style that fails to complement the client's.
- Visiting with a person who does not have decision making powers.

- Visiting with a person who is unreceptive to the sport and/or the sport organization.

The following provides insights regarding how to make a successful contact (see the Budgeting chapter for similar ideas used in contacting media personnel).

a. Getting past the gatekeeper.

Most corporate executives operate in what Spoelstra calls the ivory tower” (1991). They are protected from visitors by “the gatekeeper, more commonly called the receptionist, the secretary or the administrative assistant. Sport marketing experts advise that sales representatives who make friends with gatekeepers dramatically increase the chances of securing an appointment. Research estimates that approximately 60-80% of all gatekeepers have “significant influence” over purchases (Lill, 1999). Rapport may be enhanced with the gatekeeper by calling him or her by name, by consistently treating the person with respect and by sharing with the gatekeeper reasons for wanting an appointment. Gatekeepers are paid to help decide who gets access to the decision maker. You must convince the gatekeeper of the value of your sport organization.

b. Know who is the decision maker.

Sales representatives need to find out who the decision maker is so they will know who to call for an appointment. Find out the proper name and title of the decision maker before placing the first call. When unaware of who this person is, call the organization and ask for the name and proper spelling so organization records can be updated. There is no need to identify yourself or the sport organization. Most will answer on the spot; a few may transfer you directly to the decision maker’s office. Later, the sales representative can call and ask for the CEO by name. Asking the gatekeeper for the decision maker’s name and/or title just before you ask for an appointment broadcasts the fact that you don’t know the person, sending off alarms that the gatekeeper better keep the gate shut!

c. Cultivate the decision maker.

Most sport sales representatives do not make a sale on the first try. Cultivating the decision maker, however, increases the chances of a successful sale at a later time. Cultivation could include simply adding the decision maker to the sport organization’s mailing list and sending the person personalized, informative, non-threatening letters. Spoelstra (1991) suggests the inclusion of a small gift with a letter. Gatekeepers may discard letters if they don’t think the decision maker has interest, but they are unlikely to throw out a set of player trading cards or a program autographed by the coach. Both the gatekeeper and the decision maker will remember these letters and gifts when the sales representative calls to ask for an appointment.