

WINNING THE
HIGH TECH
SALES GAME

JAMES T. HEALY

Winning the High Tech Sales Game

James T. Healy

With A Foreword by Jim Holden



Reston Publishing Company, Inc.
A Prentice-Hall Company
Reston, Virginia

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Healy, James Thomas

Winning the high tech sales game.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Selling—High technology. I. Title.

HF5439.H54H43 1985

621.381'7'0688

84-15114

ISBN 0-8359-8700-0

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A Prentice-Hall Company

Reston, Virginia 22090

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To my wife, Hwa-Cha, for her
understanding and support*

Foreword

Being involved in sales, you have no doubt both won and lost orders. But, have you ever seriously thought about why you have won or lost? How many people would say, "I won because I had the best product," or, "I lost because of delivery"? Certainly these responses may reflect legitimate issues, but they do not address the fundamental reason for winning or losing—the existence of *sales control*. Control is setting the pace for the competition where they are competing with you versus you competing with them. It's not only getting the order, but getting the order in a timely manner and keeping the sales cycle as short as possible (See Figure 1).

Control in a sales situation is a function of organization. Organization, especially strategic organization of the selling process results in efficiency in terms of exposure to prospects and effectiveness in terms of hit rate or the number of prospects who become your customers, rather than the competitor's customers.

In a fast-paced competitive selling situation, the competition can be full of surprises. The question becomes, how do you handle them and inflict a few potent surprises of your own? More importantly, how do you achieve and maintain control of the selling situation and keep the competition at bay?

Suppose, for example, that as the customer is about to choose between your office automation system and a competitor's, your adversary suddenly offers a free-installation-and-trial period or cuts the price, both strong concessions leading to a close which your company cannot match. Do you simply slink sideways out the door? Or have you planned for such contingencies in a way that makes those competitive moves less harmful or even advantageous to you?

Or suppose the prospect is scheduled to visit your plant one day and the competition's plant the next. Usually it is very difficult to close the sale on the first day of the tour but you fear the competition might be able to close on the second day. Rearranging the dates is impossible, so now what do you do?

The basic question is: How do you develop the psychological side of the selling-buying relationship to your advantage? How do you take control?

Control is what *Winning the High Tech Sales Game* is all about. But it's not just a book cataloging a range of sales principles and techniques. It is a road map to becoming a strategic thinker.

Strategy stems from the Greek word *strategos*, which means the art of the generals, not the foot soldiers. Strategy is more than an approach to accomplishing a sales objective; it is a way of thinking.

To cite a simple example, suppose a salesperson is involved in a sales situation where the product being sold is red and the competition's is blue. Furthermore, the competition, making an important gain in controlling the selling situation, has demonstrated the value of having a blue product, which the customer now agrees is important.

The salesperson hears an objection: "We like your product, but wish you had it in blue." A foot soldier reacts by rushing to the hardware store for a can of blue paint or calling the factory and saying, "If we don't paint our product blue, we'll lose the order."

The strategist asks, "Why is blue important?" The strategist searches for the underlying concern which precipitates the objection. Perhaps the concern is over appearance. The strategist tries to show the customer how a red product, along with other minor changes, can act as an accent, thus enhancing the area's appearance. The strategist addresses the real concern and neutralizes the objection.

The strategist recognizes the essential components of a sound plan that is fit for a selling "general."

If maximizing control of a competitive sales situation is important, so too is the ability to think strategically. Control is a leadership quality that resides within the strategist, not the tactician or foot soldier. Clearly, salespeople must act as foot soldiers in day-to-day selling; the key, however, is not to think like one.

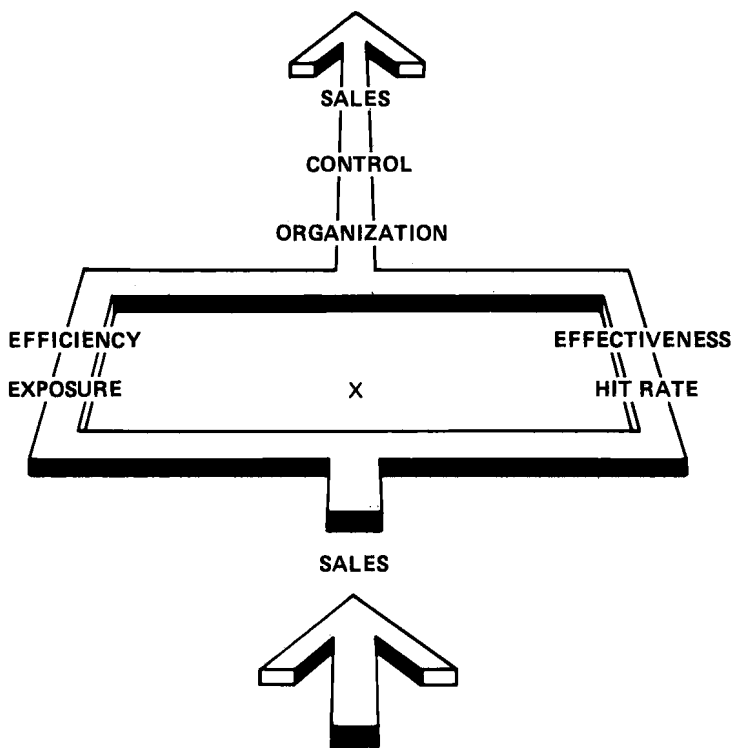


Figure 1: Control in the Sales Situation

Acknowledgments

This book intends to fill the need for a comprehensive, unified, and practical approach to selling high technology products and services. It is the product of 15 years of experience in high technology sales and sales management. I have drawn on this experience, and the expertise and works of many other people in developing this text. To these people I wish to express my sincerest gratitude.

This book would not have been possible without Jim Holden. His contribution in the areas of strategic planning and power selling is the keystone of this text. Jim, president of the Holden Corporation, a sales productivity company, is also a friend. Jim says, "A sales strategy or plan which is devoid of the politics involved is nothing more than a product plan. A sales strategy must incorporate both a product and a political component." Jim has provided me with information from his training courses, which will whet the reader's appetite for more. In sales training, it is not the written word but active participation and interaction that enhances sales skills.

Dr. Gunther Klaus, author of the sales training book, *Sell 'Em*, a fascinating and exciting lecturer on management by objectives and marketing by objectives, a professor at the University of California, a member of the Board of Directors of many companies (four of which he founded), and my former employer, was a strength for me in writing this book. Every time I had a mental block, listening to his tapes would relax me and I would be back on track. He has graciously permitted me to quote him liberally in this text.

For the psychological aspects of selling, particularly the verbal and non-verbal skills, I relied upon the writings of Allen

E. Ivey and Lynn Simex-Downing, specifically their textbook, *Counseling with Psychotherapy: Skills, Theories and Practice*.

For much of the motivational and political theory in this book, I referred to Harold J. Leavitt's excellent concise fourth edition of *Managerial Psychological*. His book helped me gain a better understanding of things I knew intuitively.

I have also referred to information contained in The Alexander Hamilton Institute's Modern Business Reports: *The Marketing Newsletter*. These letters outline pragmatic approaches to the many problems salespeople face.

I would specifically like to thank Frank J. Burge, the man who convinced me to become a salesperson and who provided me with my first sales training through a series of newsletters based on the ideas of the old masters of sales training, Zenn Kaufman, Morris Pickens, Red Motley, and J. Douglas Edwards.

Strictly speaking, customers are those who customarily buy from you. Otherwise, they are prospects. I have avoided the cold words "prospect" and "vendor" in favor of the warmer words "customer" and "supplier." I have also used the words "customer," "buyer," and "user" interchangeably, depending on the focus I was trying to achieve.

Finally, I wish to offer my sincerest gratitude to Suzanne Nobel, Sunny Merik, and to all the other people (too many to mention) for helping me achieve my goal.

Introduction

High technology selling is neither an art nor a science: it is a game. The selling game is not a typical game where two opponents compete by a set of predetermined rules, nor is it a game of alliances where one group engages another in battling for a specific prize.

Selling is a multifaceted game of elimination, without rules, among several contenders, with the customer as the prize. Often, it isn't until the prize is won that the real game, to keep the prize, begins.

The selling game is a game of strategy, maneuvers, and patterns. A strategy is developed to position and present the solution being sold in terms of both the customer's needs and the political environment. Maneuvering misleads and deludes the competitor, while pattern recognition compensates for the lack of rules.

The buyer and competitor do not play by a set of rules, or if they do, the rules are ambiguous and neither fully accepted nor fully known. Therefore, what passes for rules in the sales game are actually patterns. Just as there is a pattern to a typical negotiator's conduct, so competitors and buyers follow certain distinguishable patterns.

When playing the sales game, it is vital to discern the business and political patterns of the customers and the strategic and tactical patterns of the competitors, then use this knowledge to gain an advantage. It is these patterns that give relevance to how the high technology sales game is played.

Over the centuries, selling has remained essentially unchanged, although the emphasis and focus has shifted from time to time. Salespeople in high technology must acquire the qualities of ego-drive and empathy, and develop customer and

product knowledge. In addition, they should think strategically. Thinking strategically means looking beyond the obvious and understanding the big picture. High technology salespeople, in fact all professional salespeople, have to augment conventional selling habits and attitudes with strategy to win in today's business environment.

If the strategy focuses the many skills required in playing the sales game on a business-solution in terms of the political environment, the salespeople will gain control of the sales situation. They will diminish the competitor's influence while advancing their own position. They will win consistently.

Control in this sense means the ability to simultaneously exercise self restraint and influence others. It is the means by which the sales process is regulated. In fact, control is the process, the mechanism or technique, for achieving the result.

A salesperson in control does not react when the competitor acts; does not say "How high?" when the customer says "Jump!"; is not surprised when the customer places the order, and does not sink into the depths of depression when the factory slips the delivery.

Control means being prepared for a competitive attack or counterattack, means ensuring that the customer understands the value of the offer, means influencing the timing of the purchase by collapsing or extending the time frame as required, and means that contingencies are in place for dealing with the fact that the product and the factory cannot perform perfectly all the time.

In this book, various aspects of gaining control when selling high technology products are addressed, including personal selling skills, strategic competitive focus, and political customer orientation. Additionally, selling tools such as proposals, demonstrations, and presentations are described in detail. Finally, the organizational and environmental issues surrounding a high technology sales force are reviewed.

This book was written to provide salespeople with alternative courses of action so that they can gain and maintain control of the selling situation.

Winning the High Tech Sales Game

Contents

Foreword	xi
Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction	xvii



PART 1: The Person and the Tools

1	The salesperson makes the difference	3
2	Know your product but know your customer first	9
3	Promise less than you can deliver	19
4	Sell solutions, not products	27
5	Differentiate your position	31
6	Develop strategy around the customer's objectives	37
7	Selling is changing the customer's behavior	45
8	Close before answering all the customer's questions	51

- 9 Present your solution early 57
- 10 Use showmanship judiciously 63
- 11 Demonstrations are risky 67
- 12 Respond rapidly and personally 73
- 13 The proposal is your signature 79
- 14 Charge for everything 85
- 15 You have two ears and one mouth. Nature's message is: Listen twice as much as you talk 89
- 16 Kindness is a powerful sales device 97
- 17 You don't have to talk to communicate 105
- 18 Be vague to get clarity 113
- 19 People do things for their own reasons 121



PART 2: The Customer and the Competitor

- 20 Know where you're going, or you'll end up somewhere else 129
- 21 Sell strategically 135
- 22 Don't depend on luck 141
- 23 Never change your sales strategy 147
- 24 Keep others ignorant of your strategy 153
- 25 Execute your strategy tactically 161
- 26 Prepare for unsavory competitive tactics 167
- 27 Salespeople influence without authority 175

- 28** Develop an in-house salesperson 183
- 29** Penetrate upper management 189
- 30** Align with the power 197
- 31** Provide value to the power 203
- 32** Welcome objections 207
- 33** Uncover underlying objections 213
- 34** Turn objections into benefits 219
- 35** Focus on detail 225
- 36** When negotiating, make silence your ally 231
- 37** Never ask the customer “if” they want your product 239
- 38** Ask for the order 245
- 39** Close—then advertise 255
- 40** After six calls, forget it 261



PART 3: The Manager and the Territory

- 41** Sales managers make things happen 273
- 42** Your first duty is to get the sale 277
- 43** Do not base decisions on hope or fear 283
- 44** Don't hire the sales candidate who says, “The customer is always right” 287
- 45** Just about anybody can learn to sell 295
- 46** Most sales training is disastrous 299

47	Superstars can help the average performers	305
48	Participation is the panacea for a sales conference	313
49	Discontented salespeople get the job done	319
50	Create sales and customers	325
51	One person must be in charge	331
52	Let salespeople break the bank	337
53	A sales forecast is never wrong	343
54	Sell the factory like you sell the customer	349
55	“Got” business reports are important	355
56	If you can’t perceive things that you can’t see or hear, you don’t belong in sales	359
	Topic Index	365

PART

1

The Person and the Tools