

# Growth Principle #3: Guess what? You're in sales!

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Excellent products and services are great, but you have to SELL THEM.

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At some point in every business' growth cycle the leaders lose sight of their real job – sales. They get hung up on staffing issues, quality improvement, planning, or new product development and completely forget that if no one is buying what they're selling they have a colossal problem.

In order to grow your company, you must remember that your business is sales. Your business is not the product you manufacture. Your business is not the service you provide. Your real business is marketing and building the internal capacity to successfully sell and deliver your products and services to a multitude of consumers.

Most founders don't initially launch their company because they are a great manager or a born marketer. They start their particular business because they possess technical skill in a certain area of expertise such as making glass vases, roofing houses, fixing computer systems or teaching people how to ski. So, when it comes to marketing, business owners are often fish out of water.

That's a major drawback in today's competitive business climate, because you can make the most beautiful vases in the world, or be a whiz at troubleshooting computer glitches, and if no one knows you exist you'll be bankrupt in no time. Or if you design a product that no one likes except you, you'll have no market for what you are selling. You simply can't generate revenue without mastering the process of bringing in and retaining customers!

Truly great marketing is an art form - and the strongest companies are willing to invest heavily in professional help to do it right. But every business owner should know their customer base, understand the basic appeal of their products and services, and *think* like a marketer.

At its most basic, marketing is a three step process:

1. **Understand consumer desire.** You can't sell to people you don't understand, so get intimate with your ideal customers right away. Think about every transaction from their perspective. Learn what they like and don't like, where they hang out, who they respect... their age, race, gender and income range. Nothing is too small to pay attention to. This process lets you create a profile of who your best customers are, and will arm you with the data to find them, speak to them, and tailor your business model around issues that are important in their world.
2. **Develop an offering that fits your target customers.** If you're selling diamond rings for \$10,000, and your target customers are middle-class suburban teenagers who like 'bling', it's not going to work. They can't afford what you're selling. Armed with information about your target audience you can make sure that your products and services meet their needs and fit their budget. Maybe in this instance you could create a flashy line of costume jewelry that would suit your target customers better? Or maybe you could re-engineer your products and promotions to appeal to a better target market - upper class professional women.
3. **Connect consumers to the products and services they need through a sale.** This step represents the most obvious stage of the marketing process – reach a customer and close a sale.

You have to know where to reach your target audience, what to say that will peak their interest, and how to remove barriers to buying. Whether you are advertising on TV, writing an editorial column in the local paper, hosting a networking event or making a speech – you have to keep your focus on penetrating your target market and convincing them to make a purchase from you.

There is another key element to the marketing process that is critical and frequently overlooked... What comes after a successful sale? Businesses tend to focus on obtaining new customers to the exclusion of following through on their brand promises and retaining the customers they already have. You need to have a system in place to follow up with customers, encourage repeat purchases, invite referrals and ensure satisfaction.

As you grow your business, I urge you to examine every level of your company from your customer's perspective. Successful entrepreneurs know that each sale has to be mutually beneficial and consumer-focused to move them a step closer to their ultimate dream of running a large, profitable, well-respected organization. By thinking like a marketer and acknowledging your never-ending role as the chief salesperson on your team, you too can set yourself up to succeed down the road.