

# 25 tips to boost your sales

Tips and tricks from  
entrepreneurs and experts

# INTRODUCTION

The Australian economy is showing early signs of recovery, but most entrepreneurs and experts acknowledge the small and medium business owners will face a difficult 12 to 18 months as businesses and consumers get completely back on their feet.

During that period, sales and marketing strategies will continue to be tested. Customers will continue to be hesitant to buy, sales teams may struggle to get deals over the line and business owners will keep grappling with the question of whether or not to discount.

But don't despair - we have asked a range of sales and marketing experts and entrepreneurs for their tips on generating (and keeping) more business, despite the lingering effects of the downturn.

You'll learn about structuring your sales process, refining your message and setting sales targets. There are tips on getting customers to buy in a timely fashion, working your database to get repeat business and leveraging your website to boost sales.

For the sales managers out there, we've got tips on how to create reasons to approach clients, how to close deals quickly and ways to get your best staff to help the rest of your team. There are even some hints on how to reward your selling staff without breaking the bank.

And remember, it's crucial to make sure your sales processes and systems are in place now, when the economy is in the early stages of recovery – that way, when the economy is running at full steam once again, you'll be way ahead of the pack.

**James Thomson**  
Editor, SmartCompany

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## TIP 1:

### DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO WIN, KEEP AND GROW ACCOUNTS

The sales cycle (from lead generation through to client management) generally stretches out when the economy slows, as customers guard their cash, and it is during these times that a robust sales process becomes crucial.

A sales process really needs to have three phases - a sales process for creating an opportunity; a sales process for managing opportunities; and a sales process for retaining and growing accounts won.

A down economy is a good time to review your sales process to improve its effectiveness.

– Rob Hartnett, sales coach and founder of consultancy firm [Selling Strategies](#)

## TIP 2:

### DEVELOP A CLEAR AND CONCISE SALES MESSAGE

Businesses must give a clear, concise message of what exactly their business does before they can even think of making a sale.

You need to have a clear marketing message of intent. What do you do? How do people understand what you do? You need to sell the right way, and to do that you need to ask what it is exactly that you do for people.

Being proactive and talking to people is great, but if you're not clear about what you do then they're not going to understand.

– Sue Barrett, head of sales consulting group [Barrett](#)

## TIP 3:

### HAVE CLEAR TARGETS IN SIGHT

Companies cannot afford to be complacent in a downturn and must figure out a plan to survive, and part of that strategy involves setting clear sales targets.

Look at the numbers to decide what you have to do. If you need X amount of revenue, then look at what your average sale is, and out of that ask how many sales you need to make each year, how many prospects do you need to talk to for sales and ask how many people you need to contact.

A lot of people rely on websites and such, which is nice, but they in themselves do not make you a sale. They keep your brand out there, but you have to proactively put yourself out in the market.

You need to look at details. Know what markets you need to be targetting. Who do you need to be in front of, and how often do you need to do that?

– Sue Barrett, head of sales consulting group Barrett

## TIP 4:

### FIND NON-FINANCIAL WAYS TO REWARD YOUR TOP PERFORMERS

Structuring incentives for your sales people is not easy, particularly in difficult economic times when the bonus pool is looking decidedly shallow. The obvious strategy is to move towards short-term sales commissions, but this can create a competitive and poisonous environment among your sales team and can lead businesses to focus too much on the short-term.

Instead, use non-financial rewards in the short-term, such as flexible working arrangements or time off for a special occasion. Then, depending on whether sales targets have been made, sales staff should get financial bonuses at the end of the year.

– Dr Colin Benjamin, consultant at Marshall Place Associates

## TIP 5:

### NARROW YOUR FOCUS WITH MICRO MARKETING

The days of the mass marketing campaign is fast diminishing. For example, sending a catalogue or flyer to every home in your area just won't work - instead, you need to target your marketing to the people who you know are actually interested in your product.

Any such campaign will need to be multi-disciplined: online, direct email marketing and advertisements in appropriate media. A campaign based around a loyalty or rewards type program can be particularly effective, as you can be certain you are targetting those customers who want your goods.

It's about protecting the margin as best you can. Think of ways of giving them a reason to come to you.

– Brian Walker, principal and founder of retail consultancy firm [The Retail Doctor](#)

## TIP 6:

### USE THE “80/20 RULE”

Organisations that were selling out of inventory in the boom have found themselves with a problem - to free up working capital, there has been a need to run down inventory levels. Of course, this creates another problem - selling stuff that you don't have is a good way to annoy customers.

It's time to employ the “80/20 rule”. Concentrate on the 20% of your products that bring in 80% of your revenue and make sure that you always have these products in stock. You should be able to run down inventory levels across the rest of your range.

– Dr Colin Benjamin, consultant at [Marshall Place Associates](#)

## TIP 7:

### CALL YOUR CUSTOMERS TO ACTION

Companies need to focus on marketing that will deliver them a solid return on investment. In these times you've got to be careful where you spend your money. It's easy to not get a return on your investment and effectively waste your money, which is what you don't want to do right now when you're trying to stockpile cash.

We're focussed on return-on-investment type marketing, call-to-action type marketing messages that drive the revenue of the business.

Call-to-action is something that gives consumers a specific reason to buy. Not necessarily a discount, but points of differentiation, like a special flavour for the month or a new product. Simply from a marketing perspective, it's just about being proactive and getting out there.

– Luke Bayliss, co-founder of Sumo Salad

## TIP 8:

### GRAB A BARGAIN BY NEGOTIATING WITH MEDIA BUYERS

During a downturn, many businesses are making decisions based on fear that the economy will continue to deteriorate. But businesses should do all they can to communicate with ad agencies to pick up good deals while the time is right.

With the decrease in advertising spend across the country, media buying costs are coming down and there are some great deals to be had. During tough times consumers are more conscious of value and tend to spend more time at home, and TV spend can become increasingly effective.

Cement relationships with your media partners and advertising agencies; work with them for mutual benefit. If their business doesn't survive, you will be forced to find new partners, which could take significant time to get them up to speed.

– Chad Polley, marketing manager for video games retailer GameTraders

## TIP 9:

### WIN FAST AND WALK QUICKLY

Timing is everything right now. The economy is very patchy at present. Not only are some industries affected by the economy more than others, there are many organisations that are being more affected than others.

Sales people must work out who to stick with, and when to move on. So you must work with active prospects who are buying and leave those prospects who are negative or shrinking to another time. That is not to say abandon them, just focus on the active accounts that are buying.

– Rob Hartnett, sales coach and founder of consultancy firm [Selling Strategies](#)

## TIP 10:

### UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CUSTOMER'S NEED AND THEIR DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Too many businesses spend too much time trying to sell a product while ignoring how a customer thinks before they buy it.

Between 70% to 80% of businesses don't understand the difference between a customer's needs and their decision-making process - that's the most important aspect of selling. Full stop.

How many times have you had a salesman ask you: "What's important to you when you buy?" They just crap on about functions and features and price, but don't really ask what is important.

Taking the example of a mobile phone, too many companies will try and sell a broad concept - the phone itself - without addressing the specific customer needs, such as USB connectivity, wireless functions, etc.

Remember that a customer doesn't always know what they want. More important is the process by which they make a decision. Their fundamental need may be a phone - that's not rocket science - but the process by which they decide which phone is the key to your sales strategy.

– Adrian McFedries, managing director of franchise consultancy firm [DC Strategy](#)

## TIP 11:

### GET THE STARS TO TEACH THE LAGGARDS

The sales environment can be cut-throat and sales people can be very protective of their intellectual property - that is, their sales methods. Sales people can often operate in their own silos, which is counter-intuitive to a business that is genuine about doing the best by its customers. But good companies need to break down these barriers and force top sales people to share ideas.

Try getting all your sales people together for a brainstorming session to create a sales process that everyone can do. Naturally, this should be led by your sales stars, who will hopefully pass on tips and advice to help other members of their group start climbing towards their level.

– Trent Leyshan, managing director of sales consultancy firm Boom Sales

## TIP 12:

### GIVE CUSTOMERS REASONS TO COME BACK TO YOU

When customers are strapped for cash, it's no surprise they often won't return to favourite destinations, but you need to give them a reason to do so.

The best aphrodisiac for a new sale is an existing sale. It sounds obvious, but we hadn't done it, so now we put an offer on the sale that provides an incentive or deal on the next order.

So in many ways I see a parcel going out as an opportunity to get another sale. The logic is simple - you've got a parcel in super quick time, and you think it's great, and then when you give them something extra it only helps your business.

– Paul Greenberg, co-founder of online retail warehouse Deals Direct



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## TIP 13:

### WORK YOUR DATABASE

The downturn is a good opportunity for you to work your database and contact those on your database who have served you well.

Remind them that you exist. Fill them in on any new products or services you're offering. I recently had a marriage celebrant decide she was going to re-contact her former customers... Not only on the off-chance that they may need her services again, but because they most likely could have friends and associates who might need her services.

A bit of database pruning doesn't go astray, too. Get rid of the dead wood and work hard on satisfying the needs of your top 20% of customers (most likely they're giving you 80% of your business).

Too many times we run around chasing new business and we forget about the 'gold' sitting in our databases. We assume our top customers will always be loyal and we forget to reward them for having got us where we are. They've brought us to the party; the least we can do is dance with them.

– Debra Templar, retail services firm [The Templar Group](#)

## TIP 14:

### TURN CUSTOMERS INTO “RAVING FANS”

We restructured our team to create an additional role in response to client feedback around the ongoing support they were seeking. You need to be conscious of the training required for staff to have the knowledge to perform at an exceptional level.

Internal training is an area we are constantly improving and investing in, and we seek regular feedback from the staff to help us do the best training – always work on creating “raving fans”.

– Karen Cariss, managing director of [Page Upploy](#)

## TIP 15:

### USE EVERYONE YOU KNOW TO GET MORE LEADS

Go back to basics - create a top 100 list of all the people you know. The average person knows 800 people.

Prioritise these people into segments - family and friends, work contacts and so on. Then call them and ask them who they know in your target market.

The important point to remember is that you must be very explicit and clear about what you want. Ask first, "who do you know?", then "can I call them?" and "can I mention your name?"

It's boring but this is how it works.

– Sue Barrett, founder and managing director of sales consultancy firm Barrett

## TIP 16:

### REFRESH YOUR BRAND

Too many brands are "refreshed" for refreshment's sake. For example, the change from "National" to "NAB" was pretty irrelevant for the bank – the customer experience didn't change at all. But a brand like Nudie, a challenger brand known for innovation, needs to continually refresh to continue to be relevant and to grow.

To crank it up it starts with an understanding that it is required (you can't fix a problem if you don't admit it) but then you need to build it into the brand's DNA. Sometimes it is a little thing – in Nudie's case it might be a change to the stories on the labels, which are the same now as they were at launch – but it can equally be something large – for example, what is Nudie's point of view on the environment or climate change? There are ways Nudie could take an active position in relation to these issues and therefore become more relevant and fresh.

– Tim Pethick, founder of Nudie

# TIP 17: DON'T DROP YOUR PRICES

There is a big problem with discounting - once you drop your prices, it is nearly impossible to raise them again.

Companies must find other ways to persuade customers to buy, mainly through offering improved service. Offer customers better terms of trade (by giving them longer to pay), offer priority delivery or think about giving them a little gift with every purchase.

The key is to try and get more revenue out of each customer.

– Dr Colin Benjamin, consultant at Marshall Place Associates

# TIP 18: TURN SMALL SIZE INTO AN ADVANTAGE

SMEs can be small and nimble where a huge company, like Telstra can't, so Telstra's size can also be an advantage for us because it lets us do things differently. We focus on selling our network as an alternative to Telstra by trying to be more flexible and easy to deal with for our channel partners, carriers and ISPs.

– Jason Ashton, CEO of Big Air

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## TIP 19:

### BOOST REFERRALS FROM CLIENTS

One strategy for boosting referrals from existing clients is to offer them incentives for each referral.

It offers another reason to contact existing clients and can even be done online.

One of our clients, a business-to-business telco reseller, offered its clients cash for referrals that resulted in subsequent sales. The cash was paid through Paypal. He says the company immediately noticed an increase in referrals.

– Jason West, CEO of online marketing firm Websalad

## TIP 20:

### PURCHASE A DATABASE OF QUALITY LEADS

Buying a database of leads could be a cost-efficient way of generating new business, provided they are pre-qualified for your target audience and you get the list for the right price.

In every industry somebody is collecting names. It could be the industry association, a credit agency or a potential business partner. The critical question is whether the list is any good and whether it matches the company's needs.

Firms must define their ideal prospect and make sure the list is pre-qualified for them, otherwise time and resources will be wasted. Lead generating should be like a rifle, not a shotgun.

To avoid wasting money, firms must do the calculations on what it would cost to get the names any other way. If you are not collecting data on the cost of a quality lead, then it is a very hard decision to make.

– Tom McKaskill, serial entrepreneur and author

## TIP 21:

### ADOPT “BACKDOOR” SELLING

What people miss is that you can sell to all levels of the organisation, not just the CTO or the CIO. We often sell to a departmental level, and then because the software is so useful, so easy to use, it spreads throughout the organisation.

If you don't have a large direct sales force, try getting in through the backdoor, and have a way of scaling up to company-wide.

– Scott Farquhar, co-founder of enterprise software house Atlassian

## TIP 22:

### CREATE REASONS TO CONTACT YOUR CLIENTS

Modifying your rate card, for example, creating discounts for buying in bulk or making early purchases, can give you a good reason to get in touch with your customers and others on your marketing list.

– Dr Colin Benjamin, consultant at Marshall Place Associates

## TIP 23:

### USE FREE WEBTOOLS TO OPTIMISE YOUR ONLINE MARKETING SUCCESS

Google's Website Optimiser is a free tool offered by Google that allows businesses to test and optimise website design and content. It enables users to work out which aspects of design or content are creating leads and which are not.

Much more sophisticated software for website testing is available, and at the enterprise level you can get web testing software such as Vertster for about \$US200 a month.

– Jacqui Walker, entertainer, vocalist, actor and MC

## TIP 24:

### GAIN LEADS BY BUILDING TRAFFIC ON YOUR WEBSITE

To get leads from your website you must get traffic to your website. Most internet traffic is still coming to sites via Google searches, so it is critical to optimise your site to rank well in Google searches for key words.

Potential customers will come through searches on your brand but if you are good at search engine optimisation it will also come through “head terms”, which are key words in your industry.

For example, if you are a funeral director you want to be listed high for “funeral director”, “funeral parlour” and your city.

You can increase traffic to your website through Google AdWords, pay per click advertising or affiliate marketing programs, where you split revenue with other companies that send leads your way from their website.

– [Chris Thomas, search engine optimisation expert at Reseo](#)

## TIP 25:

### USE SOCIAL MEDIA, SUCH AS TWITTER, TO GENERATE LEADS

Twitter, the latest social media trend, has 10 million users and is growing four times faster than Facebook. It's massive and getting bigger, and can therefore be used to generate leads.

Twitter's search function enables you to search users' Twitter messages for key words that may give you a clue as to their potential interest in your products or services.

Having a presence in Twitter can raise your profile, and following others in your industry can help you keep in touch with what they are talking about.

Facebook is also becoming more relevant to business people. People are using it to network with like-minded people. For instance, Small Business Victoria has created a group on Facebook, which about 300 businesses have joined.

– [Chris Thomas, search engine optimisation expert at Reseo](#)