

Sales – Straight From the Custom-Hers Mouth!

**By Terri Whitesel
President/Founder
Interpret-Her™**

Last week I was running to a presentation and stopped at my local Copy Max to pick-up one last item I needed. The Copy Max service team saw me as I walked in the door. By the time I reached the counter they had pulled my order. Handing it to me, the sales person said, “You look like you are in a hurry, there’s no need to wait, we’ll add the charge to the invoice on the other job we are doing for you.” I smiled and thanked him as I ran out the door. I have to admit, I was taken aback at first by his offer - what, not charge me before I ran out the door? Is this good for business? Well, maybe not for the typical corporation’s point-of-view, BUT it was great for me – the repeat customer.

This experience, and the various comments I have heard from fellow female business owners got me thinking. How do women define sales? How do companies service the *on-the-go* female business owner, and what is the cost of losing her sale?

Sales - Time for a New Definition?

Sales is different from marketing – just ask any salesperson and he/she will tell you, “Marketing’s job is to bring me qualified customers - my job is to sell them!” In the case where direct sales is not involved, a retailer or channel will tell marketing, “Your job is to get the customer interested enough to at least research and try the product. We’ll take care of the rest.” The problem with this approach is that it is born out of a product-centric model - created before the Internet - when comparison shopping, product problems, company values and service reputation could not be quickly learned. Today, with a mouse click, a potential customer can profile your company and based on *her* buying criteria, eliminate you from *her* sales cycle.

When we ask women about their buying experience and the sales process, they tell us they want to know how easy it will be to get follow-up service and how difficult it will be to find “refills, filters and the stuff needed to continue using the thing they are buying.” These are all part of her sales picture – she views the experience holistically – AND judges you on the sum of your parts. To the female buyer, the sale involves ALL of her purchase steps not just the last “two feet” in front of the sales rep, cashier, or as she opens her mail order package.

Sales- From Her Service Point of View

The typical sales process involves the following four phases:

1. The Discovery Phase
2. The Evaluation Phase
3. The Purchase Phase
4. The Use Phase
5. The Extend Phase

1. The Discovery Phase

Not every purchase requires research. However, for those first-time purchases where cost and time is a factor and a variety of options exist, her sale may not be so easy.

During the *Discovery Phase*, women will research every bit of information they can find about their intended purchase. They’ll ask friends, colleagues, and family. They will read magazines, study newspapers and research the Internet to check out prices. Increasingly important to her are Opinion sites where she can learn what others are saying about a company, its’ social causes and how they treat their employees – both U.S. and abroad.

2. The Evaluation Phase

In this phase, she narrows the field, and you may or may not make it to *her* next step. She'll think back on her experiences with *you* - on the phone (did *you* return her calls?) - did *you* send her the information promised? - did *you* listen to her questions? She'll remember how convenient *your* hours were, how *your* store was laid out. She will make her decision based on all her criteria.

For my business needs, I researched prices, hours, location and services at three different national quick copy vendors – on paper they all looked equal – I soon found out they weren't!

3. The Purchase Phase

It's now time for her to buy and the last chance you'll have to answer her questions and concerns. She's narrowed and prioritized her list of what is most important – the non-negotiables – the must haves that she brings to the purchase table. If she's working with your sales person, that person must be trained how to ask, listen, and respond to her questions. If your sales training has created a team that goes for *the quick close*, her way of buying can be very frustrating and the quick close approach can turn her off.

The sales success or failure also rests on how well you have done your product and service development homework. What options does she have to choose from? What service can you provide her? Can your "on-the-floor sales and service team" make a decision without an act of *corporate congress*? You might win the "short-term sale" at this point. Whether she returns and/or recommends the item she has purchased remains to be seen. If your business model follows the "buy a razor / earn a lifetime of razor blade sales" approach, your real profit is yet to come. The sale is still on!

After dismal failures with two of Copy Max's national competitors - both of which failed in terms of timely delivery, correct order fulfillment and service in solving their errors, only Copy Max earned my repeat business. Also, remember the offer to allow me to pay the next time I came in? This was a great example of employee empowerment in action.

4. The Use Phase

This is the phase that often kills potential new sales. By new sales we mean the powerful word-of-mouth referral you could receive when she tells her nearest and dearest 30 friends how wonderful your product or service is. Ask yourself - did your sale include a 100-page "quick start" manual? Once back home or at the office, did she discover she needed additional items to get up and running? Did she call your 9-5 (Mon-Fri.) "Help Desk" after she made her evening or over the weekend purchase, only to find no help until the next day or Monday?

I have referred a number of female business owners to my local Copy Max vendor. I've been there at night and on Sunday when my schedule requires service.

5. The Extend Phase

Product line extensions, add-ons, and value-added components - whatever you call them, they represent significant future sales. With today's narrow margins they may be the ONLY place where true bottom line revenue is made. Your "sales" technique may have *locked her in* for a year, but if you don't continue to earn her business you will lose renewal business AND, for months before her contract ends, her dissatisfaction will be heard by family, friends, online discussion forums, and spread through the very same Opinion site that brought her to your door.

Copy Max's Extend Phase is a Frequent User's card which gives cash rebates toward future purchases. This same program offers discount coupons for both in- store and online services. Recently, I got an unexpected bonus – a year end summary of all business purchases – a great way to make sure I don't miss any tax deductions.

The Value of One Sale Multiplied

What is the true cost of losing one sale? In the last six months I have spent approximately \$1,700 dollars in quick copy services- I estimate that I will spend at least \$3,500 in a year. There are 1,000 Copy Max stores across the US. If *each* store delivers the same sales and service to just *one* customer like me at *each* location, the corporation will earn \$3,500,000 in revenue. Not bad for one sale!



Translating *her* mindshare
into *your* marketshare.

www.interpret-her.com