



Maximizing Sales Opportunities: Who To Sell To

By Jim Stewart

*Jim Stewart is a regular contributor to **North Country Business** on topical business issues. This article is the final in a series of articles on *Selling Techniques*.*

Before a salesperson can sell anything, there must be someone to sell something to. This sounds obvious and yet evidence would suggest that many salespeople leave the locating of buyers to chance.

There are three classifications of candidates that may be considered, in determining where to spend precious selling time:

1. **Suspects**—those individuals or companies who you suspect will have a likely need for what you are selling.
2. **Prospects**—those who not only have the need for what you are selling, but also have the resources to make the purchase. This includes the financial capacity, the decision making authority and the desire to make a buying decision.
3. **Customers**—those who have reached a decision to buy what you are selling.

Every company/salesperson's objective is to secure as many customers as possible within their business or sales territory. Since all customers must first be prospects and all prospects must first be suspects, it is critical to locate as many suspects as possible within a defined territory or market area.

The first step is to develop a "Suspect Description"—i.e., a clear description of what characteristics and needs the ideal candidate(s) might possess. To do this, you begin by describing those who have already bought what is being sold. This can be done by describing two key characteristics about those who have already made the purchase/decision in question:

1. What the purchaser has done with the purchase (i.e., how it has met the need)? This tells you what needs a product or service is likely to meet in the future for other candidates.
2. How satisfied a customer has been with the purchase? Comparing those customers who have been very satisfied with those who have only been somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied at all, tells us what type of candidates are likely to find the most reason for buying now, and what level of satisfaction they are likely to achieve as a result of their purchase.

When you find people who have a legitimate need for your products or services, and they have characteristics similar to your existing customers, four things are likely to happen:

1. You are less likely to encounter "buying resistance."
2. You are likely to sell more to the same buyer in the future.
3. They will be more likely to recommend the purchase to other candidates with similar needs.
4. They are less likely to focus on price and prefer to focus on value (i.e., they will pay more).

Obviously, not everyone will have a need for everything that is sold. This is why you must devise a method of distinguishing between those who are likely to buy and those who aren't if you are to make to most of your valuable selling time.