

THE VALUE ADDED SALES PROCESS

Many of the problems that salespeople encounter come from a short-term, transaction-oriented sales mentality. This transactional approach means that they go from deal to deal and from order to order. Customers feel like a means to an end.

Value Added Selling is a philosophy and a process. It's not a sales call. The Value Added Sales Process brings maximum value to the customer and to the sales rep. Because it's a process, you must understand the strategic significance of your actions and the impact they have on the customer. Value added salespeople are thinkers and planners.

What Is the Value Added Selling Process?

Traditional, seller-focused approaches to selling concentrate on the act of acquiring new business: filling the pipeline, pitching the product, and closing the deal. Most of the strategies and tactics salespeople learn in this approach are geared toward writing orders.

Because Value Added Selling is customer-focused, the strategies and tactics used in this model concentrate on maximizing the value that the salesperson brings to the table. This automatically stretches the time horizon beyond the acquisition point. Value added salespeople understand the buyer's needs from the moment that these needs exist up to and including complete need satisfaction.

Value Added Selling mirrors the process that buyers use to make better long-range buying decisions. The Value Added Selling process begins with the salesperson developing an in-depth understanding of the buyer's needs, wants, and concerns. This insight into the buyer's priorities helps the salesperson view his solution as value received, not just value added. The process continues up to and including the buyer's purchasing, receiving, using, and eventually disposing of the product you're attempting to sell.

Another way to think of the Value Added Selling process is that it parallels every step of the buyer's Critical Buying Path™. The Critical Buying Path™ is the sequence of steps that buyers go through from the moment that a need exists up to and including disposal of the solution that they have not yet purchased.

This expanded view of the sales process means that the salesperson's job is not limited to chasing new business and writing deals. It includes activities like helping the buyer achieve smooth transitions, assuring customer satisfaction, and maximizing product or service performance during usage.

Value added salespeople define their role in broader terms. They wear many hats—one is business acquisition, but it's not their only hat. They specialize in customer satisfaction, logistics support, applications, expediting, disposal, transitions, training, etc.

The way to become a value added salesperson is to determine the path your buyer follows, and seek ways to add value at every step along that path.

Strategic Overview

It's easier to understand the Value Added Selling process from the buyer's point of view. This timeline describes how buyers think about their needs, define what they want in a solution, arrange to purchase it, receive the goods, use them to achieve maximum performance (economy and

productivity), and eventually dispose of them. Value added salespeople move on parallel tracks with their buyers.

Imagine a process divided into three common-sense phases: pre-sale, transition, and post-sale. The pre-sale phase is the planning phase. These are all the activities buyers engage in to determine their needs and choose the right solution. The acquisition phase is pretty much what it sounds like. The buyer places an order, prepares to receive your products and services, and receives the goods. The post-sale phase is the usage phase. The buyer transforms the solution into something that performs best for him.

The buyer's needs vary depending on which phase of the sale they're in. The salesperson's role changes and evolves depending on where the buyer is. The sales activities parallel and support the buying activities.

During Planning, the buyer's greatest need is for information. The salesperson is an information provider. During Acquisition, the buyer's greatest need is for smooth and seamless transitions. The salesperson's role is to assure a smooth transition. During Usage, the customer's greatest need is for maximum performance and economy. The salesperson's role is to be a customer satisfaction specialist.

In the pre-sale phase, the salesperson is in the *offensive selling mode*—pursuing new business. During the acquisition and usage phases, the salesperson is in the *defensive selling mode*—protecting existing business. Defensive selling is a neglected topic in most sales training, but in Value Added Selling it is a critical part of what we teach and what salespeople do.

Management is to blame for the lack of attention paid to defensive selling. Most compensation plans and sales quotas focus on acquiring new business. Few emphasize increasing customer satisfaction with existing customers.

There are four major groups of sales strategies that value added salespeople employ. These strategies parallel the buyer's critical activities. During offensive selling, salespeople pursue new business.

Focusing is the first group of strategies. Focusing is identifying viable sales opportunities, penetrating the account thoroughly, and developing a customer-value focus. The salesperson's analytical and diagnostic skills play an important role here.

Persuasion is the second group of strategies. The salesperson is still in the offensive selling mode. This is projecting one's uniqueness, differentiating one's solution, and presenting a compelling argument to buy. The salesperson's promotional skills and persuasiveness contribute to their success at this point in the process.

The buyer has placed the order and is waiting to receive goods. The salesperson begins her defensive selling activities. *Supporting* is the third group of strategies. This is process and people support. The salesperson's logistics skills and people skills play an important role at this stage of the Value Added Selling process.

After-marketing is the fourth group of strategies. This is the sale-after-the-sale. It's defensive selling at its best. This is the process of getting credit for all of your value added, looking for ways to re-create value for the customer, and increasing your business with existing customers. The salesperson's follow-up and creativity are instrumental at this point.

Throughout the Value Added Selling process the salesperson evolves. He goes from diagnostician to promoter to expediter to customer satisfaction specialist. His activities parallel his customer's

activities. This is customer-oriented selling at its best. Before determining his next step, the salesperson must first determine where his customer is in the process.

Value Added Selling is both a philosophy and a process. The salesperson's role changes and evolves as the buyer's role changes. Understanding the strategic significance of this model helps you to *think* about selling—understanding strategically what you must do to advance the sale along its natural path. This path begins when the buyer's need exists and continues until the customer uses the solution and prepares to dispose of it. This view of selling enlarges and enriches the salesperson's role in business. Value Added Selling is evolutionary, not revolutionary. The salesperson's role evolves throughout the sales process. It now goes beyond offensive selling to defensive selling—from promoting to assuring complete satisfaction with their solution. This view of selling celebrates the significant role that salespeople play in delivering greater value to the customer. Value Added Selling is sales professionalism at its best.

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