

## Ask SCORE

*I recently completed development of a new item for the pet industry and will be receiving the first shipment of product shortly. Though my background is in engineering, I now need to go out and sell the product to distributors. Any tips on how to become a successful salesman?*

Among the many titles you take on when owning a small business is Chief Salesperson. Your business literally cannot live without sales growth, and it's up to you keep start—and keep—those customers coming.

SCORE mentor Jerry Glenn, a former executive with Armstrong Building Products, puts it best: “Sales is a constant, daily activity that will never go away.”

Some people understandably have doubts about their ability to generate sales. They may worry that they simply aren't “sales savvy,” or associate selling with negative stereotypes often seen on TV.

The truth is that selling is easier and less onerous than you think. The key is to plan, build your skills, and practice—much like every other facet of becoming a small business owner.

Sales begin with setting realistic goals as part of your business plan. Learn everything you can about your target market: who and where they are, how you can reach them, etc. The more information you gather on these and other considerations, the more realistically you can project short- and long-term sales volume necessary to meet obligations and generate profit.

You must also develop a true “competitive advantage” that differentiates your business from your competition, and know how to explain it to others. “Write out your ‘pitch’ and then practice with friends or others who have some sales experience,” suggests Glenn. “Ask for their impressions and suggestions for things you can improve.”

The old expression about never having a second chance to make a first impression still holds true as well. Whether you're making a sales pitch in person, over the phone or online, always be polite, be courteous, and listen to what the prospective customer is saying.

“Many times, we are so wrapped up in making the sales presentation that we pay no attention to how the customer responds,” Glenn says, adding that it's also helpful to have examples of what your business does readily available to “show off” your skills. For example, an interior designer would want to have samples of interior finishes or a notebook with images of past jobs.

That leads to another must-have ingredient for sales growth: a good reputation. Satisfied customers are usually willing to refer your business to others, especially when you've exceeded their expectations. Just make sure doing so doesn't compromise your profit or time commitments. Customers may expect price breaks or fast turnarounds every time.

“And always have an insatiable desire to continually improve your products and services,” adds Glenn. “Many people think that that once they've achieved a certain sales plateau, the business will always operate at that level or higher. In truth, customers will come and go for a variety of reasons.”

*This column is brought to you by the Merrimack Valley Chapter of SCORE, with nearly 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit [merrimackvalley.score.org](http://merrimackvalley.score.org) for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.*

