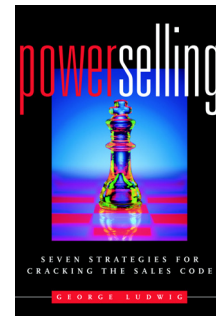


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Nurturing Your Own “Green Grass”: Six Ways to Reinvest in Your Current Clients

*If your economic state is looking bleak, don't strike out for greener client pastures.
Sales expert George Ludwig explains how to coax more business
from ground that's already proven fertile.*

Chicago, IL (September 2004)—Imagine for a moment that your business is lackluster and your third-quarter sales numbers are not on track. What's that? You say you don't *have* to imagine? You're not alone. We may be on the cusp of a recovery, but many companies haven't yet gotten the memo. And if you're like many of your financially frustrated counterparts, your first instinct is to round up your sales team and send them prospecting for new leads. After all, your current client list isn't keeping you well-fed, so it's time to seek out greener pastures. Right?

Wrong, says George Ludwig, author of the new book *Power Selling: Seven Strategies for Cracking the Sales Code* (Dearborn Trade Publishing, July 2004, ISBN: 0-7931-8571-8, \$19.95). Your sales team needs to take action all right, but they need to be working their magic a little closer to home.

“New business always seems more attractive and exciting than the same old accounts that you've serviced for umpteen years,” says Ludwig. “It's the ‘grass is always greener’ syndrome. But it's an illusion. You know the grass on your side of the fence is nourishing, and if you keep it well-watered and tended, there's much more where that came from. Probably more than you ever thought possible. That's why smart companies reinvest their energy into their current accounts before seeking new ones.”

“This strategy makes sense for two reasons,” he adds. “First, you don’t want to lose your clients by under-servicing them. Second, they can be fertile ground for harvesting even *more* business. You’re already ‘in’ with these clients, they know your name, and presumably they like what you bring to the table. You must simply convince them that there’s more you can do for them. Shouldn’t that be easier than starting from scratch with someone else?”

So how, exactly, do you reinvest in your current clients? Ludwig offers the following suggestions:

- **Focus on increasing client share, not just market share.** Get deeper inside your current clients. Spread yourself thick, not thin. You must dig beneath the surface that comprises your current interactions with a given client. Get to know everything about their business and identify problems you can solve. This may mean introducing them to new products and services you carry, or it may mean showing them why they need even more of the products and services they currently buy from you. It may mean convincing them to venture into new markets. Be creative. Partner with them in every possible way.

- **Rethink unproductive beliefs.** One of the big reasons sales managers don’t try to increase their client share is simple cynicism. They just don’t believe their organization is worthy. Let’s say your company supplies tires to SuperCar, a major automobile maker. You also carry headlights. But one of your competitors, Headlights USA, dominates that market. What you don’t know is that H-USA is hanging on by a thread because of their lack of personal service. Yet, you believe that SuperCar would never defect from H-USA in favor of little old you. Unconsciously, you convey that belief to your team. The result is that no one even considers dethroning the headlight king. An opportunity to double your SuperCar business dies a quiet, unnoticed death.

- **Network deep inside your clients’ infrastructure.** Though we’d all like to think the business world is a meritocracy, sometimes decisions really *do* come down to “who you know.” So get to know everyone you can inside the client’s walls, from CEO to receptionist. Strengthen relationships at every opportunity. Show your face at open houses and ribbon cuttings and charitable events. Get as many champions as possible inside the company. This is an especially good idea in an era of downsizing. (Otherwise, what might become of you if your one point-person leaves?) But even bigger than that issue, it may create opportunities to sell more products and services.

- **Be “Johnny on the Spot.”** A good salesperson will go to the ends of the Earth to keep a good client happy. Period. This means if a client calls you up with a question at 6 p.m., just as you’re heading out the door for home, you take your coat off and help him find a solution. If something you sold him malfunctions, replace it instantly, at no charge. If you have to personally drive a desperately needed part to someone 300 miles away on a Sunday, gas up the car and hit the road. If you don’t, your competitor might. And people tend to reward such genuine commitment with referrals, renewed contracts, and an open mind for your ideas.

• **Invite feedback from your best clients. Take action based on that feedback.** Try this technique: pinpoint your five top clients. Take each contact person out for a nice lunch and instigate a frank discussion about your company. Ask what you could do better, sure, but focus more on what your clients deem your best practices. Then, resolve to fix the problems your client identified and duplicate your “good” practices—the ones that keep your clients loyal and happy—everywhere.

• **No matter how “down” you’re feeling, don’t let your clients know.** It is one of the more unfortunate realities of human nature that people tend to disassociate themselves from other people who are in crisis. This also holds true in the corporate world. If clients think that your company is struggling, they may be tempted to abandon ship. So always maintain a successful, upbeat demeanor when talking to clients. Stay focused and make sure you’re in what Ludwig calls your “supercharged selling state” when talking to clients. (He explains how to attain this state of being in *Power Selling*.)

Of course, it’s hardly a news flash that good, solid, creative long-term client relationships are the bedrock of business. That’s common sense. The hard part is remembering that truth—and acting on it—when economic storm clouds begin to threaten.

“Fear can be a powerful motivator, but unfortunately it often sends companies flailing, panic stricken, in the wrong direction,” says Ludwig. “Once that fear creeps in and obscures your long-term vision, you’ve already put distance between yourself and your current clients. And that’s the one thing you should *never* lose sight of. Do something to cultivate those relationships every single day and you’re more likely to keep them—and you might even find some great new sources of business that were in your backyard all along.”

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About the Author:

George Ludwig has more than twenty-five years of sales, sales management, and sales training experience, including five years of presenting his sales success seminar all over the country. As a nationally known keynote speaker, sales trainer, coach, and corporate consultant, Ludwig trains over 10,000 people per year from various corporations and associations, including Sprint, Southwest Airlines, Mazda North America, Century 21, Purdue University, Johnson & Johnson, and many others. He is a popular contributor to trade publications and newspapers, including *Selling Power*, *Sales and Marketing Management*, *Entrepreneur*, *Investors Business Daily*, *Time*, and *The New York Times*.

About the Book:

Power Selling: Seven Strategies for Cracking the Sales Code (Dearborn Trade Publishing, July 2004, ISBN: 0-7931-8571-8, \$19.95) is available at neighborhood and online booksellers or by calling (800) 245-2665. Dearborn Trade Publishing, a Kaplan Professional Company, is the nation’s premier trainer and information provider for business and financial leaders committed to profiting from breakthrough ideas.