

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR SALESFORCE WITH THE RESOURCES THEY NEED

Does it matter how attractive a salesperson is? Does their personality make a big difference?

It matters quite a lot.

What else can make a salesperson effective? How can a company provide resources to its sales force to improve its effectiveness? A recent article by Dr. Thuy Nguyen and co-authors Dr. Audhesh Paswan and Dr. Alan Dubinsky categorized several types of resources available to salespeople, looking at which resources salespeople were likely to use across four types of customers (1) new customers, (2) long-term customers, (3) win-back customers, and (4) short-term customers.

The authors categorize these resources as either firm-based or personal and as either internal or external. The study looked for which specific resources were used for different types of customers. They found that some resources are universally helpful, while some are more context-dependent.

Important to all customer types: The study found that firm intangible resources such as brand image and company reputation were crucial to all four types of customers. A salesperson's personal, tangible resources such as appearance, physical attractiveness, and communication skills were also essential to all four types of customers.

New customers: The most critical resources for a new customer are firm-based. Things like firm reputation, brand status, and pricing are more important to new customers than a salesperson's personality.

Long-term customers: A long-term customer is more likely to negotiate for a discount and get it, unlike a new customer. Also, for long-term customers, the findings indicated that personal knowledge was essential.

Win-back customers: Salespersons use personal internal resources for win-back customers. These resources include emotional intelligence, knowledge, personality, expertise, professionalism, and selling tactics. Their research found that, overall, it takes more resources to satisfy win-back customers compared to other customer groups.

Short-term customers: Short-term customers are most likely to be influenced by brand image and company reputation. Short-term customers are also won by salespeople using excellent knowledge and the skills to help them. Short-term customers also receive the least resources, indicating that companies should investigate whether they are overlooking these customers.

Organizations need to understand how they can support their salespeople since they play such a pivotal role in the company's success. The authors suggest that through training and effective resource utilization, salespeople and their managers can identify a customer's top priorities and offer them the things they most value. Also, this research highlights the great importance of having a high-quality sales force. "Salespeople may well be the most valuable assets, a source of competitive advantage, and the engine of survival and growth for the firm."¹

¹Nguyen, T., Paswan, A., & Dubinsky, A. (2018). Allocation of Salespeople's resources for generating new sales opportunities across four types of customers. *Industrial Marketing Management*.