

## Sales Activities and the Selling Process

When was the last time you were really sold something? For most of what we purchase, we buy, but we are not sold. Do you see the distinction? If you go into Wal-Mart, pick a product off the shelf, and take it to the cash register, you are buying. When you go to a PC store and the sales consultant convinces you of the value of a SONY VAIO versus an HP notebook that costs hundreds of dollars less, you have been sold. The classic sales moment occurs when you are sold life insurance at home by a very effective door-to-door insurance agent.

There are a number of important issues related to sales:

- How does the marketing group communicate to the sales force the underlying message to carry to the customer?
- How are salespeople selected and trained?
- How are they motivated, incentivized, or compensated?
- For whom will the salespeople actually work?
- How are they managed? Who controls them?
- How do we get feedback from the customer through the salesperson to the company?

Sales activities and processes vary by organization and individual, but generally include prospecting, a pre-approach, an approach, the sales presentation, overcoming objections, closing the sale, and post-sales follow-up. Sound familiar? We have all been on the receiving end of sales presentations throughout our lives. Sales is a part of product and service promotion and takes many forms, from phone prospecting and telemarketing to in-person sales in car showrooms, department and specialty stores, or via online sales pitches and activities.

The prospecting function is the process of locating potential customers through research, by cold-calling, working through customer lists, or using methods specific to an industry or company. Evaluating a prospect's needs, feelings, ability to buy, and other factors characterizes the pre-approach process, followed by the actual approach by the salesperson. Much of the process is information-gathering to allow the salesperson to make the right pitch to the consumer that will match the consumer needs with the product or service benefits and features.

The presentation of the product must attract and hold a consumer's attention and move him or her toward the possibility of a closing of the sale. If the consumer raises objections, the salesperson must be ready with clear and logical responses to again direct the consumer toward a closing of the sale.

Finally, the company support staff, and usually the sales staff, are responsible for follow-up and additional sales later, if appropriate.