Sales representatives for American Express sell a wide variety of marketing programs along with their charge card services to a diverse set of retailers and service providers. Customizing each sales presentation to the specific needs of each buyer had become quite a challenge, with sales representatives spending 3 to 18 hours planning for a single presentation. Standardizing the presentations to cut down on preparation time was not a viable alternative, as noted by Lisa Gregg, director of sales development: “Depending on the application, the card may have hundreds of different benefits. A supermarket manager has different needs than a client in the furniture business. We wanted to create a message to fit the specific needs of our customers. Obviously a sales message that reflects the customer’s world is going to be more persuasive than a marketing message with boilerplate content.”

To make sales presentation planning and delivery more efficient and effective, the sales and marketing departments at American Express joined forces to create a database based on the best practices and presentations in specific market segments. Sales representatives now input specific customer information, then the database produces sales materials ranging from industry data sheets to PowerPoint slides that can be used in the sales presentation. Customers now receive sales presentations based on their unique needs, and American Express has greatly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of its sales organization.

**Objectives**

After completing this module, you should be able to

1. Describe the evolution of personal selling from ancient times to the modern era.
2. Explain the contributions of personal selling to society, business firms, and customers.
3. Distinguish between transaction-focused traditional selling and trust-based relationship selling.
4. Discuss five alternative approaches to personal selling.
5. Describe the three primary roles fulfilled by consultative salespeople.
6. Understand the sales process as a series of interrelated steps.

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**EVOLUTION OF PERSONAL SELLING**

The successful professional salesperson of today and the future is likely a better listener than a talker, is more oriented toward developing long-term relationships with customers than placing an emphasis on high-pressure, short-term sales techniques, and has the skills and patience to endure lengthy, complex sales processes. Like the American Express salespeople in the opening vignette, they strive to deliver relevant presentations based on unique customer needs. Teamwork between salespeople and others in the organization, also illustrated in the American Express example, is increasingly important for sales success. For more on teamwork, see “Professional Selling in the 21st Century: The Importance of Teamwork in Sales.”

Personal selling is defined as personal communication with an audience through paid personnel of an organization or its agents in such a way that the audience perceives the communicator’s organization as being the source of the message. The audience may be an individual or a group representing another organization or a household. An audience may also be an individual acting solely on his or her behalf. In this book, we typically describe personal selling in a business-to-business context, in which a salesperson or sales team interacts with one or more individuals from another organization.

Personal selling has evolved into a different activity than it was just a decade ago. Throughout this course, you learn about new technologies and techniques...
that have contributed to this evolution. This module provides an overview of personal selling, affording insight into the operating rationale of today’s salespeople and sales managers. It also describes different approaches to personal selling and presents the sales process as a series of interrelated steps. The appendix at the end of the module discusses several important aspects of sales careers, including types of selling jobs and characteristics and skills needed for sales success. In the highly competitive, complex environment of the world business community, personal selling and sales management have never played more critical roles.

**Origins of Personal Selling**

Ancient Greek history documents selling as an exchange activity, and the term salesman appears in the writings of Plato. However, true salespeople, those who earned a living only by selling, did not exist in any sizable number until the Industrial Revolution in England, from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to this time, traders, merchants, and artisans filled the selling function. These predecessors of contemporary marketers were generally viewed with contempt because deception was often used in the sale of goods.

In the latter phase of the Middle Ages, the first door-to-door salesperson appeared in the form of the peddler. Peddlers collected produce from local farmers, sold it to townspeople, and, in turn, bought manufactured goods in town for subsequent sale in rural areas. Like many other early salespeople, they performed other important marketing functions—in this case, purchasing, assembling, sorting, and redistributing of goods.

**Industrial Revolution Era**

As the Industrial Revolution began to blossom in the middle of the eighteenth century, the economic justification for salespeople gained momentum. Local economies were no longer self-sufficient, and as intercity and international trade began to flourish, economies of scale in production spurred the growth of mass markets in geographically dispersed areas. The continual need to reach new customers in these dispersed markets called for an increasing number of salespeople.

It is interesting to note the job activities of the first wave of salespeople in the era of the Industrial Revolution. The following quotation describes a salesperson who served the customer in conjunction with a producer:

Thus, a salesman representing the producing firm, armed with samples of the firm’s products, could bring the latter to the attention of a large num-

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**The Importance of Teamwork in Sales**

Jerry Heffel, president of the Southwestern Company, offers his perspective on teamwork:

_Sometimes the salesperson is referred to as the lead car in the business train. But just having a lead car doesn’t make a train. For this reason, a salesperson who is effective long-term is also an effective team player—he or she realizes they need coordinated involvement from many different parts of the organization in order to serve the customer._

At the same time, whenever they see themselves as part of the customer’s team, and that they are both striving for the same outcome, they become an indispensible part of the value chain for that customer. Southwestern’s sales training philosophy stresses this team aspect: we tell our salespeople that they are the gas and oil of the free enterprise system, but they also need the tires, the car body, the drive train, and what’s in the trunk to get anywhere significant.
ber of potential customers—whether buying for sale to others or for their own production requirements—who might not, without the salesman's visit, have learnt of the product's existence, and give them the opportunity of examining and discussing it without having to go out of their way to do so. . . . Even if the salesman did not succeed in obtaining an order, he frequently picked up valuable information on the state of the market, sometimes the very reasons for refusal. . . . This information could be very useful to the producer.4

Post–Industrial Revolution Era

By the early 1800s, personal selling was well established in England but just beginning to develop in the United States.5 This situation changed noticeably after 1850, and by the latter part of the century, salespeople were a well-established part of business practice in the United States. For example, one wholesaler in the Detroit area reported sending out 400 traveling salespeople in the 1880s6.

At the dawning of the twentieth century, an exciting time in the economic history of the United States, it became apparent that marketing, especially advertising and personal selling, would play a crucial role in the rapid transition of the economy from an agrarian base to one of mass production and efficient transportation.

Glimpses of the lives of salespeople in the early 1900s, gained from literature of that period, reveal an adventurous, aggressive, and valuable group of employees often working on the frontier of new markets. Already, however, the independent maverick salespeople who had blazed the early trails to new markets were beginning to disappear. One clear indication that selling was becoming a more structured activity was the development of a canned sales presentation by John H. Patterson of the National Cash Register Company (NCR). This presentation, a virtual script to guide NCR salespeople on how to sell cash registers, was based on the premise that salespeople are not “born, but rather they are made.”7

Sales historians noted the changes occurring in personal selling in the early twentieth century. Charles W. Hoyt, author of one of the first textbooks on sales management, chronicled this transition in 1912, noting two types of salespeople:

The old kind of salesman is the “big me” species. . . . He works for himself and, so far as possible, according to his own ideas. . . . There is another type of salesman. He is the new kind. At present he is in the minority, but he works for the fastest growing and most successful houses of the day. He works for the house, and the house works for him. He welcomes and uses every bit of help the house sends to him.8

Hoyt’s observations about the “old” and the “new” salesperson summed up the changing role of personal selling. The managements of firms in the United States were beginning to understand the tremendous potential of personal selling and, simultaneously, the need to shape the growth of the sales function. In particular, a widespread interest arose in how to reduce the cost of sales. According to Hoyt, this did not mean hiring lower-cost salespeople, but instead called for “distributing much larger quantities of goods with less motion.”9

War and Depression Era

The 30-year span from 1915 to 1945 was marked by three overwhelming events—two World Wars and the Great Depression in the United States. Because economic activity concentrated on the war efforts, new sales methods did not develop quickly during those periods. During the Great Depression, however, business firms, starved for sales volume, often employed aggressive salespeople to produce badly needed revenue. Then, with renewed prosperity in the post–World War II era, salespeople emerged as important employees for an increasing number of firms that were beginning to realize the benefits of research-based integrated marketing programs.
Professionalism: The Modern Era

In the middle 1940s personal selling became more professional. Not only did buyers begin to demand more from salespeople, but they also grew intolerant of high-pressure, fast-talking salespeople, preferring instead a well-informed, customer-oriented salesperson. In 1947, the Harvard Business Review published “Low-Pressure Selling,” a classic article followed by many others that called for salespeople to increase the effectiveness of their sales efforts by improving their professional demeanor.

An emphasis on sales professionalism is the keynote of the current era. The term has varied meanings, but in this context we use it to mean a customer-oriented approach that uses truthful, nonmanipulative tactics to satisfy the long-term needs of both the customer and the selling firm. The effective salesperson of today is no longer a mere presenter of information but now must stand equipped to respond to a variety of customer needs before, during, and after the sale. In addition, salespeople must be able to work effectively with others in their organizations to meet or exceed customer expectations.

The current stage in the evolution of the sales professional is aptly illustrated in a Selling magazine interview with Stephen E. Heiman, a leading sales consultant and trainer:

The future will call increasingly for non-manipulative sales skills. Twisting a customer’s need to fit our product or service is “yesterday’s way of selling,” says Heiman. The new way requires an ability to “ask, listen, and understand the issues behind the product need,” he says. Forget the notion that your job is to tell the customer why your product is better than all the rest. “The major job you have is understanding the customer’s concept,” Heiman maintains. “Unless you’re perceived to be making a contribution to your customer’s success,” Heiman says, “you’re not ready for selling in the 21st century.”

Future evolution is inevitable as tomorrow’s salesperson responds to a more complex, dynamic environment. Also, increased sophistication of buyers and of new technologies will demand more from the next generation of salespeople. Exhibit 1.1 summarizes some of the likely events of the future.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PERSONAL SELLING

Although advertising has traditionally captured most of the attention of students and researchers, personal selling is actually the most important part of marketing communications for most business firms. This is particularly true in firms that engage in business-to-business marketing. More money is spent on personal selling than on any other form of marketing communications, whether it be advertising, sales promotion, publicity, or public relations. We now take a look at how this investment is justified by reviewing the contributions of personal selling to society in general, to the employing firm, and to customers.

Salespeople and Society

Salespeople contribute to their nations’ economic growth in two basic ways. They act as stimuli for economic transactions, and they further the diffusion of innovation.

Salespeople as Economic Stimuli

Salespeople are expected to stimulate action in the business world—hence the term economic stimuli. In a fluctuating economy, salespeople make invaluable contributions by assisting in recovery cycles and by helping to sustain periods of relative prosperity. As the world economic system deals with issues such as increased globalization of business, more emphasis on customer satisfaction, and building competitiveness through quality improvement programs, it is expected that salespeople will be recognized as a key force in executing the appropriate strategies and tactics necessary for survival and growth.
Salespeople and Diffusion of Innovation

Salespeople play a critical role in the diffusion of innovation, the process whereby new products, services, and ideas are distributed to the members of society. Consumers who are likely to be early adopters of an innovation often rely on salespeople as a primary source of information. Frequently, well-informed, specialized salespeople provide useful information to potential consumers who then purchase from a lower-cost outlet. The role of salespeople in the diffusion of industrial products and services is particularly crucial. Imagine trying to purchase a companywide computer system without the assistance of a competent salesperson or sales team!

While acting as an agent of innovation, the salesperson invariably encounters a strong resistance to change in the latter stages of the diffusion process. The status quo seems to be extremely satisfactory to many parties, even though, in the long run, change is necessary for continued progress or survival. By encouraging the adoption of innovative products and services, salespeople may indeed be making a positive contribution to society.

Salespeople and the Employing Firm

Because salespeople are in direct contact with the all-important customer, they can make valuable contributions to their employers. Salespeople contribute to their firms as revenue producers, as sources of market research and feedback, and as candidates for management positions.

Salespeople as Revenue Producers

Salespeople occupy the somewhat unique role of revenue producers in their firms. Consequently, they usually feel the brunt of that pressure along with the management
of the firm. Although accountants and financial staff are concerned with profitability in bottom-line terms, salespeople are constantly reminded of their responsibility to achieve a healthy “top line” on the profit and loss statement. This should not suggest that salespeople are concerned only with sales revenue and not with overall profitability. Indeed, salespeople are increasingly responsible for improving profitability, not only by producing sales revenues, but also by improving the productivity of their actions.

Market Research and Feedback

Because salespeople spend so much time in direct contact with their customers, it is only logical that they would play an important role in market research and in providing feedback to their firms. For example, on a weekly basis, regional sales managers from the Discovery Channel discuss details of the past week’s activity with each of their sales representatives. On an ongoing basis, Discovery Channel sales managers encourage new ideas from the salesforce and actively seek input while working with salespeople in the field. This regular solicitation of ideas helps to improve sales performance, formulate future strategies, and build a sales culture based on communication and cooperation.13

Some would argue that salespeople are not trained as market researchers, or that salespeople’s time could be better used than in research and feedback activities. Many firms, however, refute this argument by finding numerous ways to capitalize on the salesforce as a reservoir of ideas. It is not an exaggeration to say that many firms have concluded that they cannot afford to operate in the absence of salesforce feedback and research.

Salespeople as Future Managers

In recent years, marketing and sales personnel have been in strong demand for upper management positions. Recognizing the need for a top management trained in sales, many firms use the sales job as an entry-level position that provides a foundation for future assignments. As progressive firms continue to emphasize customer orientation as a basic operating concept, it is only natural that salespeople who have learned how to meet customer needs will be good candidates for management jobs.

Salespeople and the Customer

Extensive research by Learning International, a large training and consulting firm, reveals the expectations that buyers have of salespeople. According to respondents of a Learning International survey, buyers like to deal with salespeople who

- are honest
- understand general business and economic trends, as well as the buyer’s business
- provide guidance throughout the sales process
- help the buyer to solve problems
- have a pleasant personality and a good professional appearance
- coordinate all aspects of the product and service to provide a total package14

The overall conclusion is that buyers expect salespeople to contribute to the success of the buyer’s firm. Buyers value the information furnished by salespeople, and more than ever before, they value the problem-solving skills of salespeople. See “An Ethical Dilemma” for a scenario in which the salesperson must think about where to draw the line in sharing information with customers.

As salespeople serve their customers, they simultaneously serve their employers and society. When the interests of these parties conflict, the salesperson can be caught in the middle. By learning to resolve these conflicts as a routine part of their jobs, salespeople further contribute to developing a business system based on progress through problem solving. Sales ethics will be discussed in detail in Module 2.

CLASSIFICATION OF PERSONAL SELLING APPROACHES

In this section, we take a closer look at alternative approaches to personal selling that professionals may choose from to best interact with their customers. Some of these approaches are simple. Other approaches are more sophisticated and require that the sales-
person play a strategic role to use them successfully. More than three decades ago, four basic approaches to personal selling were identified: stimulus response, mental states, need satisfaction, and problem solving. Since that time, another approach to personal selling, termed consultative selling, has gained popularity. All five approaches to selling are practiced today. Furthermore, many salespeople use elements of more than one approach in their own hybrids of personal selling.

As a prelude to our discussion of different approaches to personal selling, an expansion of two key points is in order. Recall that personal selling differs from other forms of marketing communications because it is a personal communication delivered by employees or agents of the sales organization. Because the personal element is present, salespeople have the opportunity to alter their sales messages and behaviors during a sales presentation or as they encounter different sales situations and different customers. This is referred to as adaptive selling. Because salespeople often encounter buyers with different personalities, communications styles, needs, and goals, adaptive selling is an important concept.

A second point is that personal selling is moving from transaction-based methods to relationship-based methods. Rather than trying to maximize sales in the short run, relationship-based selling approaches focus on solving customer problems, providing opportunities, and adding value to the customer’s business over an extended period. Exhibit 1.2 illustrates how transaction-based selling differs from relationship-based selling. We now explore one element of Exhibit 1.2 in detail—personal selling approaches.

Stimulus Response Selling

Of the five views of personal selling, stimulus response selling is the simplest. The theoretical background for this approach originated in early experiments with animal behavior. The key idea is that various stimuli can elicit predictable responses. Salespeople furnish the stimuli from a repertoire of words and actions designed to produce the desired response. This approach to selling is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

An example of the stimulus response view of selling would be continued affirmation, a method in which a series of questions or statements furnished by the salesperson is designed to condition the prospective buyer to answering “yes” time after time, until, it is hoped, he or she will be inclined to say “yes” to the entire sales proposition. This method is often used by telemarketing personnel, who rely on comprehensive sales scripts read or delivered from memory.

Stimulus response sales strategies, particularly when implemented with a canned sales presentation, have some advantages for the seller. The sales message can be structured in a logical order. Questions and objections from the buyer can usually be anticipated and addressed before they are magnified during buyer–seller interaction. Inexperienced salespeople can rely on stimulus response sales methods in some settings, and this may eventually contribute to sales expertise.
The limitations of stimulus response methods, however, can be severe, especially if the salesperson is dealing with a professional buyer. Most buyers like to take an active role in sales dialogue, and the stimulus response approach calls for the salesperson to dominate the flow of conversation. The lack of flexibility in this approach is also a disadvantage, as buyer responses and unforeseen interruptions may neutralize or damage the effectiveness of the stimuli.

Considering the net effects of this method’s advantages and disadvantages, it appears most suitable for relatively unimportant purchase decisions, when time is severely
constrained and when professional buyers are not the prospects. As consumers in general become more sophisticated, this approach will become more problematic.

### Mental States Selling

**Mental states selling**, or the *formula approach* to personal selling, assumes that the buying process for most buyers is essentially identical and that buyers can be led through certain mental states, or steps, in the buying process. These mental states are typically referred to as AIDA (attention, interest, desire, and action). Appropriate sales messages provide a transition from one mental state to the next.

Like stimulus response selling, the mental states approach relies on a highly structured sales presentation. The salesperson does most of the talking, as feedback from the prospect could be disruptive to the flow of the presentation.

A positive feature of this method is that it forces the salesperson to plan the sales presentation prior to calling on the customer. It also helps the salesperson recognize that timing is an important element in the purchase decision process and that careful listening is necessary to determine which stage the buyer is in at any given point.

A problem with the mental states method is that it is difficult to determine which state a prospect is in. Sometimes a prospect is spanning two mental states or moving back and forth between two states during the sales presentation. Consequently, the heavy guidance structure the salesperson implements may be inappropriate, confusing, and even counterproductive to sales effectiveness. We should also note that this method is not customer oriented. Although the salesperson tailors the presentation to each customer somewhat, this is done by noting customer mental states rather than needs. See “An Ethical Dilemma” for a situation in which the salesperson is contemplating the movement of the prospect into the “action” stage.

The mental states method is illustrated in Exhibit 1.3. Note that this version includes “conviction” as an intermediate stage between interest and desire. Such minor variations are commonplace in different renditions of this approach to selling.

### Need Satisfaction Selling

**Need satisfaction selling** is based on the notion that the customer is buying to satisfy a particular need or set of needs. This approach is shown in Figure 1.2. It is the salesperson’s task to identify the need to be met, then to help the buyer meet the need. Unlike the mental states and stimulus response methods, this method focuses on the customer rather than on the salesperson. The salesperson uses a questioning, probing tactic to uncover important buyer needs. Customer responses dominate the early portion of the sales interaction, and only after relevant needs have been established does the salesperson begin to relate how his or her offering can satisfy these needs.
Rachel Duke sells advertising for her college newspaper. One of her potential clients is contemplating buying an ad for an upcoming special issue featuring bars and restaurants. Over the past two weeks, Rachel has tried unsuccessfully to get a commitment from the restaurant owner to place an ad. Her sales manager has suggested that Rachel call the prospect and tell him that there is only one remaining ad space in the special issue, and that she must have an immediate answer to ensure that the prospect’s ad will appear in the special issue. The sales manager said, “Rachel, this guy is stalling. You’ve got to move him to action, and this technique will do the trick.” Rachel was troubled by her manager’s advice, since the special issue had plenty of ad space remaining. If you were Rachel, would you follow her sales manager’s advice? Why or why not?

Customers seem to appreciate this selling method and are often willing to spend considerable time in preliminary meetings to define needs prior to a sales presentation or written sales proposal. Also, this method avoids the defensiveness that arises in some prospects when a salesperson rushes to the persuasive part of the sales message without adequate attention to the buyer’s needs.

**Problem-Solving Selling**

Problem-solving selling is an extension of need satisfaction selling. It goes beyond identifying needs to developing alternative solutions for satisfying these needs. The problem-solving approach to selling is depicted in Figure 1.3. Sometimes even competitors’ offerings are included as alternatives in the purchase decision.

The problem-solving approach to selling is practiced by Square D sales representative Randy Scott in Altamonte Springs, Florida. Scott sells electronic products to industrial distributors. According to Scott, certainly the product has to solve a problem for the customer. With our customers, that means either reducing or removing costs. Distributors want to

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<th>Mental State</th>
<th>Sales Step</th>
<th>Critical Sales Task</th>
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<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Get prospects excited, then you get them to like you</td>
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<td>Interest</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>“What’s in it for me?”</td>
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<td>Product—“Will it do what I want it to do?”</td>
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<td>Price—“Is it worth it?”</td>
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<td>“The hassle of change”</td>
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<td>“Cheaper elsewhere”</td>
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<td>Peers—“What will others think of it?”</td>
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<td>Priority—“Do I need it now?” (sense of urgency)</td>
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<td>Conviction</td>
<td>Conviction</td>
<td>“What’s in it for me?”</td>
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<td>Desire</td>
<td>Desire</td>
<td>Overcome their stall</td>
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<td>Action</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Alternate choice close: which, not if!</td>
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keep their inventory at a low cost. When we come out with something new, they’re hesitant to put it out without any proven wins for them. So first, it has to be a problem solver—it has to address a concern they have about the existing product. Second, we demo it for them, show them how it will work. Third, we have to leave samples with them. Fourth, and this actually takes place before the other three, we have to plant the seed of enthusiasm for the product in the customer’s mind ahead of time.\textsuperscript{18}

As the Square D example points out, the problem-solving approach to selling can take a lot of time. In some cases, the selling company cannot afford this much time with each prospective customer. In other cases, the customers may be unwilling to spend the time. Insurance salespeople, for example, report this to be so in their field. The problem-solving approach appears to be most successful in technical industrial sales situations, in which the parties involved are usually oriented toward scientific reasoning and processes and thus find this approach to sales amenable.

**Consultative Selling**

Consultative selling is the process of helping customers reach their strategic goals by using the products, services, and expertise of the sales organization.\textsuperscript{19} Notice that this method focuses on achieving strategic goals of customers, not just meeting needs or solving problems. Salespeople confirm their customers’ strategic goals, then work collaboratively with customers to achieve those goals.
In consultative selling, salespeople fulfill three primary roles: strategic orchestrator, business consultant, and long-term ally. As a **strategic orchestrator**, the salesperson arranges the use of the sales organization’s resources in an effort to satisfy the customer. This usually calls for involving other individuals in the sales organization. For example, the salesperson may need expert advice from production or logistics personnel to fully address a customer problem or opportunity. In the **business consultant** role, the salesperson uses internal and external (outside the sales organization) sources to become an expert on the customer’s business. This role also includes an educational element—that is, salespeople educate their customers on products they offer and how these products compare with competitive offerings. As a **long-term ally**, the salesperson supports the customer, even when an immediate sale is not expected.

Among the successful consultative selling organizations is Airgas, a large industrial gas company with 950 salespeople in North America. In selling oxygen, nitrogen, and argon for various applications, Airgas becomes the long-term ally of its customers by fulfilling the two additional roles of the consultative seller. According to Pat Visintainer, Airgas sales and marketing vice president, sales personnel serve as strategic orchestrators in that they recognize that they “can no longer do it all alone. Good salespeople recognize the resources at their disposal and tap into those resources.” According to Visintainer, Airgas salespeople fulfill the business consultant role by focusing on vendor reduction and process cost reduction for their customers rather than simply selling at a lower price. By identifying customer cost savings, Airgas salespeople become value-added long-term consultants rather than one-shot low-price sellers. For more on consultative selling, see “Professional Selling in the 21st Century: Consultative Selling.”

**SALES PROCESS**

The nonselling activities on which most salespeople spend a majority of their time are essential for the successful execution of the most important part of the salesperson’s job, the **sales process**. The sales process has traditionally been described as a series of interrelated steps beginning with locating qualified prospective customers. From there, the salesperson plans the sales presentation, makes an appointment to see the customer, completes the sale, and performs post-sale activities.

As you should recall from the earlier discussion of the continued evolution of personal selling (refer to Exhibit 1.1), the sales process is increasingly being viewed as a relationship management process, as depicted in Figure 1.4. In this conceptualization of the sales process, salespeople strive to attain lasting relationships with their customers.

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**Consultative Selling**

L.A. Mitchell, sales planner for Lucent Technologies, comments on the increasing use of consultative selling.

*Professional selling is becoming much more of a consultative process than in years past. The pace of business has accelerated, and it is hard for individual buyers to be experts on everything they buy. That’s where consultative selling comes in. When buyers know they have a problem, but don’t know how to solve it, our salespeople can offer a tailored solution. The solution must fit within the buyer’s allotted budget, and it must be consistent with the goals and strategies within the buying organization. Consultative salespeople must also be on the scene after the sale to be sure that any necessary training and service issues are handled to the client’s satisfaction. With consultative selling, making the sale is important, but the real focus is on providing expertise which enables clients to improve company operations and productivity.*
Salespeople must possess certain attributes to inspire trust in their customers and to be able to adapt their selling strategy to different situations. One or more selling approaches are used in the sales process. The three major phases of the sales process are initiating, developing, and enhancing customer relationships.

The basis for such relationships may vary, but the element of trust between the customer and the salesperson is an essential part of enduring relationships. To earn the trust of customers, salespeople should be customer oriented, honest, dependable, competent, and likable. These attributes are reflected by Blake Conrad, who sells medical supplies for Centurion Specialty Care. Conrad, based in Denver, says:

> You simply cannot have productive relationships with your customers unless they trust you. I work really hard to show customers that I care about their bottom line, and I would never sell them something they don’t really need. If I don’t have an answer for them on the spot, I make every effort to get the answer and get back to them the same day. Customers appreciate the fact that I do what I say and follow up on all the details. To me, being customer oriented and dependable is just part of my job. It makes selling a lot more fun when your customers trust you, and—guess what—I sell more to customers who trust me.

Another important element of achieving sound relationships with customers is to recognize that individual customers and their particular needs must be addressed with appropriate selling strategies and tactics. In selling, we discuss strategy at four levels: corporate, business unit, marketing department, and the overall sales function. An individual salesperson is strongly guided by strategy at these higher levels in the organization but must also develop selling strategies and tactics to fit the sales territory, each customer, and ultimately, each sales call. Our coverage in this text focuses on developing sales strategies for individual customers and specific sales calls.

When studying the sales process, we should note that there are countless versions of the process in terms of number of steps and the names of the steps. If, however, you were to examine popular trade books on selling and training manuals used by different corporations, you would find that the various depictions of the sales process are actually more alike than truly unique. The sales process shown in Figure 1.4 is comparable with most versions of the sales process, with the exception of those versions that
advocate high-pressure methods centering on how to get the customer to “say yes” rather than focusing on meeting the customer’s true needs. This version of the sales process suggests that salespeople must have certain attributes to inspire trust in their customers and that salespeople should adapt their selling strategy to fit the situation. The three phases of the sales process are initiating, developing, and enhancing customer relationships. For discussion purposes, the first two phases have been subdivided into a total of six steps. The seventh and final step in the sales process is that of enhancing customer relationships, which, in many cases, extends over a prolonged time period.

Another point that should be stressed is that the sales process is broken into steps to facilitate discussion and sales training, not to suggest discrete lines between the steps. The steps are actually highly interrelated and, in some instances, may overlap. Further, the stepwise flow of Figure 1.4 does not imply a strict sequence of events. Salespeople may move back and forth in the process with a given customer, sometimes shifting from step to step several times in the same sales encounter. Finally, completion of the sales process typically will require multiple sales calls.

The remainder of this book explores the sales process shown in Figure 1.4. Part I, comprised of Modules 2–4, covers the Foundations of Professional Selling. Module 2 discusses the important topics of building trust and sales ethics. Module 3 provides in-depth coverage of buyer behavior, while Module 4 focuses on the communications skills necessary for sales success. Part II, Initiating Customer Relationships, opens with prospecting and the preapproach in Module 5. Module 6 covers planning the presentation and approaching the customer. Developing Customer Relationships is treated in Part III. Module 7 discusses the sales presentation delivery, while Module 8 covers addressing concerns and earning commitment. Part IV, Enhancing Customer Relationships, focuses on how salespeople add customer value through follow-up in Module 9, and through self-leadership and teamwork in Module 10. If you are interested in learning more about careers in professional selling, please see the appendix to this module.

SUMMARY

1. Describe the evolution of personal selling from ancient times to the modern era. The history of personal selling can be traced as far back as ancient Greece. The Industrial Revolution enhanced the importance of salespeople, and personal selling as we know it today had its roots in the early twentieth century. The current era of sales professionalism represents a further evolution.

2. Explain the contributions of personal selling to society, business firms, and customers. Salespeople contribute to society by acting as stimuli in the economic process and by assisting in the diffusion of innovation. They contribute to their employers by producing revenue, performing research and feedback activities, and comprising a pool of future managers. They contribute to customers by providing timely knowledge to assist in solving problems.

3. Distinguish between transaction-focused traditional selling and trust-based relationship selling. Summarized in Exhibit 1.2, trust-based selling focuses more on the customer than does transaction-focused selling. The salesperson will act as a consultant to the customer in trust-based selling, whereas transaction-based selling concentrates more on making sales calls and closing sales. There is far more emphasis on post-sales follow-up with relationship selling than with transaction selling, and salespeople must have a broader range of skills to practice relationship selling.

4. Discuss five alternative approaches to personal selling. Alternative approaches to personal selling include stimulus response, mental states, need satisfaction, problem solving, and the consultative approach. Stimulus response selling often uses the same sales presentation for all customers. The mental states approach prescribes that the
salesperson lead the buyer through stages in the buying process. Need satisfaction selling focuses on relating benefits of the seller’s products or services to the buyer's particular situation. Problem-solving selling extends need satisfaction by concentrating on various alternatives available to the buyer. Consultative selling focuses on helping customers achieve strategic goals, not just meeting needs or solving problems. In consultative selling, salespersons fulfill three primary roles: strategic orchestrator, business consultant, and long-term ally to the customer.

5. Describe the three primary roles fulfilled by consultative salespeople. The three roles are strategic orchestrator, business consultant, and long-term ally. As a strategic orchestrator, salespeople coordinate the use of the sales organization’s resources to satisfy the customer. As a business consultant, the salesperson becomes an expert on the customer’s business and educates the customer on how his or her products can benefit the customer. The consultative salesperson acts as a long-term ally to the customer, acting in the customer’s best interest even when an immediate sale is not expected.

6. Discuss the sales process as a series of interrelated steps. As presented in Figure 1.4 the sales process involves initiating, developing, and enhancing customer relationships. Salespeople initiate customer relationships through prospecting and preapproach activities, presentation planning, and approaching the customer. Customer relationships are developed when salespeople make sales presentations and earn a commitment from their customers. Salespeople enhance customer relationships by following up after the sale, taking a leadership role, and sometimes working as part of a team to constantly increase the value received by the customer. The details of the sales process are covered in Modules 5–10 in this book.

UNDERSTANDING PROFESSIONAL SELLING TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>personal selling</th>
<th>mental states selling</th>
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<tr>
<td>canned sales presentation</td>
<td>AIDA</td>
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<tr>
<td>sales professionalism</td>
<td>need satisfaction selling</td>
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<tr>
<td>economic stimuli</td>
<td>problem-solving selling</td>
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<td>diffusion of innovation</td>
<td>consultative selling</td>
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<td>revenue producers</td>
<td>strategic orchestrator</td>
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<td>adaptive selling</td>
<td>business consultant</td>
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<td>stimulus response selling</td>
<td>long-term ally</td>
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<td>continued affirmation</td>
<td>sales process</td>
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DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL SELLING KNOWLEDGE

1. What factors will influence the continued evolution of personal selling?
2. How do salespeople contribute to our society? Are there negative aspects of personal selling from a societal perspective?
3. What are the primary contributions made by salespeople to their employers?
4. Most businesses would have a difficult time surviving without the benefits of the salespeople who call on them. Do you agree?
5. How are need satisfaction and problem-solving selling related? How do they differ?
6. How does the consultative selling approach differ from problem-solving and need satisfaction selling? Explain the three key roles of consultative salespersons.
7. When do you think stimulus response selling would be most effective?
8. How important is teamwork between the customer and the sales organization in practicing consultative selling? How does teamwork within the sales organization factor into consultative selling?
9. Is adaptive selling as important in domestic markets as it is in international markets?
10. Discuss the final step of the sales process (enhancing customer relationships) as related to the continuing evolution of personal selling.


1. **Situation:** Assume you are a salesperson for a packaging manufacturing company that supplies retail stores with custom-imprinted shopping bags. The company has manufacturing facilities in Texas, Georgia, New York, and California. There are five functional areas in the company: marketing (includes sales), production, finance and accounting, customer service and shipping, and human resources. You work out of the California plant, which serves the United States west of the Rocky Mountains. Within the marketing department, your key contact is the product manager who routinely interacts with individuals from production, customer service, and shipping to coordinate production runs with promised delivery dates. The product manager has no direct authority over any of the personnel in production or customer service and shipping. For the following situations, explain how you would try to gain the cooperation of the right people to meet customer needs. It is important that you achieve customer satisfaction but not at the expense of profitability.

**Scenario A:** A large customer unexpectedly runs out of shopping bags and is requesting a shipment within 72 hours. Normal lead time for existing customers is 10 working days. Production is fully booked, that is, there is no idle capacity in the California plant.

**Scenario B:** A long-time customer buys three different sizes of shopping bags, all shipped in identical corrugated boxes. The smallest size bags are packed 500 to a box, the medium-size bags 250 to a box, and the largest 100 to a box. Black and white labels on one end of the corrugated boxes denote bag sizes. The customer wants brightly colored labels of three different colors to denote bag size. According to the customer, store employees could then tell at a glance if stock for a particular size was running low and thus place prompt requests for reorders. Currently, the black and white labels are applied by a machine as part of the manufacturing process. The colored labels would have to be custom produced and hand-fed into the labeling machine, whereas existing labels are printed inexpensively in large quantities and fed automatically into the labeling machine.

2. Your knowledge of selling can help you get started in a sales career. Landing a job is like making a major sale in that your knowledge, skills, and attitudes must meet the needs of the employer. One way to match up with employer needs is to use the feature-advantage-benefit (FAB) approach to assess yourself relative to employer needs. In selling, a feature is a factual statement about the product or service, for example, “at 10 pounds, it is the lightest electrical motor in its performance category.” An advantage describes how the product can be used or help the customer, for example, “it is light enough to be used in portable applications.” The benefit is the favorable outcome the customer will experience from the advantage, for example, “your customers no longer will have to come to the repair center for assistance, as service reps will be able to use portable repair kits in the field.” To translate this method to the job search, think of yourself as the “product.” Select an appropriate company and discover what they are looking for in sales job applicants. You can use classified ads, the college placement center, personal contacts, or other sources to find a sales position that you are interested in. Using the example on the following page as a starting point, complete a FAB worksheet that shows how you are qualified for the job. In a real job search, this information could be translated to your résumé or cover letter requesting an interview.

3. Many industry observers believe that entrepreneurs must have strong selling skills to succeed. At a minimum, entrepreneurs should understand the sales process well enough to direct the sales efforts of others. To better understand the linkages between entrepreneurship and selling, visit the *Inc* magazine Web site at http://www.inc.com. From the home page, click on the “Sales” link. What suggestions can you find that relate to material in this module?
The FAB Job-Search Matrix (Example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Need</th>
<th>B Feature</th>
<th>C Advantage</th>
<th>D Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer or Problem</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>“This means . . .”</td>
<td>Employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This job requires . . .”</td>
<td>“I have . . .”</td>
<td>“You will . . .”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequent sales presentations to individuals and groups</td>
<td>taken 10 classes that required presentations</td>
<td>I require limited or no training in making presentations</td>
<td>save on the cost of training; you have ability and confidence to be productive early</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(List additional needs, features, advantages, and benefits.)
MAKING PROFESSIONAL SELLING DECISIONS

Case 1.1: Biomod, Inc.

Background
Biomod, Inc., a California-based manufacturer of educational models of the human body, has been in business since the mid-1960s. The company’s products, sold primarily to middle schools in the United States, are available in plastic or as computer images. Accompanying products include lesson plans for teachers and workbooks and computer programs for students. Biomod has enjoyed healthy sales increases in recent years, as schools increasingly integrated computer-assisted instruction into their curricula. Five years ago, Biomod began selling consumer versions of its models through selected specialty educational toy stores and recently began selling on its own Web site. In addition, Biomod is also selling on the Web through Hypermart.com and Ed-Toys. Further, Biomod has had discussions with Toys “R” Us, and the giant retailer seems eager to stock Biomod products.

Current Situation
Biomod has employed Zack Wilson, a recent graduate of San Diego State University, for the past six months. He has become familiar with all aspects of marketing the Biomod product line and is now the sales representative for electronic retailing accounts. Zack is truly excited about his job, as he sees the explosive growth potential for selling Biomod products on the Internet. His first big success came when he convinced Hypermart.com to sell Biomod products. After all, Hypermart has the reputation in most circles as the premier electronic retailer. Thirty days after his initial sales to Hypermart, Zack was thrilled to land Ed-Toys as his second electronic retailer.

No doubt about it, Zack Wilson was on a roll. Securing commitments from Hypermart and Ed-Toys within a month was almost too good to be true. In fact, there was only one problem facing Zack Wilson. Hypermart had begun discounting the Biomod product line as much as 20 percent off suggested retail, and Ed-Toys was unhappy with the intense price competition. The following conversation had just taken place between Zack and Ed-Toys buyer Andrea Haughton:

Andrea: Zack, your line looked really promising to us at suggested retail prices, but meeting Hypermart’s pricing sucks the profit right out of the equation. Are you selling Hypermart at a lower price than us?
Zack: Absolutely not! Hypermart just decided to promote our line with the discounts.
Biomedical line, and Warren responded that he was more concerned with growing Hypermart’s market share than with profit margins. He told Zack, “Our game plan is grab a dominant share, then worry about margins.” At this point, Warren gave Zack something else to think about:

Warren: Hey, Zack, I noticed you guys are selling the same products on your own Web site as the ones we’re selling on ours.

Zack: True, what’s the problem?

Warren: Well, I just read in the trade press where Home Depot told their vendors that they don’t buy from their (Home Depot’s) competitors and that they view vendor Web sites as competitors to their retail business. Maybe we feel the same way. We sell on the Web, and if you do too, then you’re really a competitor for us.

Zack: Warren, you know that we only do a little volume on the Web. Our site is really more of an information site.

Warren: But you do offer an alternative to other electronic retailers and us by selling on your own site. And by the way, don’t your store retailers oppose your selling on the Web?

Zack: At this point, most of them are small retailers, and frankly speaking, they view you as more of a threat than us selling on our own site. Besides, our store division salesforce is working on a software package that will enable our store retailers to easily set up their own Web sites over the next six months or so.

Warren: Unbelievable! What you’re saying is that another division in your company is creating even more Web-based competition for me! I thought we had a real future together, but I’ve got to do some heavy-duty thinking on that. Thanks, Zack, but I’m really busy and need to move on to some other priorities this afternoon. Call me if you have any new thoughts on where we go from here.

Zack left Hypermart and began the hour-long drive back to the office. “Good thing I’ve a little time to think about this situation,” he thought as he drove along. “I need to talk with Rebecca Stanley just as soon as I get to the office.”

Questions
1. How do you think Zack got into this dilemma?
2. If you were Rebecca Stanley, Zack’s sales manager, what would you advise Zack to do?

Scene 1: Location—Rebecca’s office. Action—Zack explains to Rebecca what has occurred with the Ed-Toys and Hypermart accounts. Rather than telling Zack how to deal with Hypermart and Ed-Toys from this point forward, Rebecca directs Zack to devise his own strategy. Rebecca then tells Zack that she would like to visit both accounts with him within a week, and that she should like to review his strategy for Hypermart and Ed-Toys within 48 hours.

Upon completion of the role play, address the following questions:
1. Is Rebecca justified in telling Zack to devise his own strategy rather than giving him specific direction at this time? What are the advantages and disadvantages of her approach?
2. How could this situation have been prevented?

Scene 2: Location—Rebecca’s office. Action—Zack presents his strategy to Rebecca.

Upon completion of the role play, address the following questions:
1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Zack’s interaction with Ed-Toys and Hypermart?
2. What further suggestions can you make for dealing with Hypermart and Ed-Toys?

Case 1.2: Plastico, Inc.

Background
Plastico, Inc., located in New York, is a manufacturer of plastic components. The company is noted for producing high-quality products. Its salesforce calls on large accounts, such as refrigerator manufacturers who might need large quantities of custom-made products, such as door liners. Recent increases in new-home sales over the past several years have fueled refrigerator sales and, subsequently, sales at Plastico. Moreover, federal regulations requiring that dishwasher liners be made of plastic, rather than porcelain, have enhanced Plastico’s sales.

Current Situation
Sharon Stone had recently been assigned to the central Michigan territory. Although this was her first sales job, she felt confident and was eager to begin. She had taken a sales course in college and had just completed the company’s training program. The company stressed the use of an organized sales presentation in which the salesperson organizes the key points into a planned sequence
that allows for adaptive behavior by the salesperson as the presentation progresses. She was familiar with this approach because she had studied it in her college sales course.

Sharon’s first call was on a small refrigerator manufacturer in Ann Arbor. She had called the day before to set up an appointment with materials purchasing manager David Kline at 9:00 A.M. On the morning of her meeting, Sharon was running behind schedule because of an alarm clock malfunction. As a result, she ended up in traffic she did not anticipate and did not arrive for her appointment until 9:10 A.M. When she informed the receptionist she had an appointment with David Kline, she was told he was in another meeting. He did agree, however, to see Sharon when his meeting was finished, which would be about 9:45 A.M. Sharon was upset Kline would not wait 10 minutes for her and let the receptionist know it.

At 9:50 A.M. Sharon was introducing herself to Kline. She noticed his office was filled with University of Michigan memorabilia. She remembered from her training that the first thing to do was build rapport with the prospect. Thus she asked Kline if he went to the University of Michigan. This got the ball rolling quickly. Kline had graduated from Michigan and was a big fan of the basketball and football teams. He was more than happy to talk about them. Sharon was excited; she knew this would help her build rapport. After about 25 minutes of football and basketball chitchat, Sharon figured it was time to get down to business.

After finally getting Kline off the subject of sports, Sharon began to discuss the benefits of her product. She figured if she did not control the conversation Kline would revert to discussing sports. She went on and on about the material compounds comprising Plastico plastics, as well as the processes used to develop plastic liners. She explained the customizing process, the product’s durability, Plastico’s ability to provide door liners in any color, and her company’s return and credit policies. After nearly 25 minutes, she finally asked Kline if he had any questions.

Kline asked her if she had any product samples with her. Sharon had to apologize—in all the confusion this morning she ran off and left the samples at home. Then Kline asked her about the company’s turnaround time from order to delivery. Knowing quick turnaround was important to Kline, and feeling this prospect may be slipping away, she told him it was about four weeks, although she knew it was really closer to five. However, she thought, if Kline ordered from them and it took a little longer, she could always blame it on production. When the issue of price emerged, Sharon was not able to clearly justify in Kline’s mind why Plastico was slightly higher than the competition. She thought that she had clearly explained the benefits of the product and that it should be obvious that Plastico is a better choice.

Finally, Kline told Sharon he would have to excuse himself. He had a meeting to attend on the other side of town. He thanked her for coming by and told her he would consider her offer. Sharon thanked Kline for his time and departed. As she reflected on her first call she wondered where she went wrong. She thought she would jot down some notes about her call to discuss with her sales manager later.

Questions

1. What problems do you see with Sharon’s first sales call?
2. If you were Sharon’s sales manager, what would you recommend she do to improve her chances of succeeding?

Situation: Read Case 1.2.
Characters: Sharon Stone, Plastico sales representative
Scene: Location—Plastico’s Michigan office during a weekly sales meeting shortly after her sales call with David Kline.
Action—Sharon reviews her sales call with David Kline with other Plastico sales representatives and their sales manager. This is a regular feature of the weekly meetings, with the idea being that all sales representatives can learn from the experiences of others. Sharon has decided to compare her call with David Kline to some of the material from her sales training with Plastico. This material, which contrasts transaction-focused selling with trust-based relationship selling, is shown in Exhibit 1.2. Her review will analyze whether she did or did not practice trust-based relationship selling during her call with David Kline.

Upon completion of the role play, address the following questions:

1. Is Sharon’s review of her sales call accurate?
2. What steps should Sharon take to begin to develop a strong relationship with David Kline?
This appendix is designed to give an in-depth look at sales careers. We first discuss characteristics of sales careers, then describe several different types of personal selling jobs. The appendix concludes with a discussion of the skills and qualifications necessary for success in sales careers.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF SALES CAREERS**

Although individual opinions will vary, the ideal career for most individuals offers a bright future, including good opportunities for financial rewards and job advancement. As you read the following sections on the characteristics of sales careers, you might think about what you expect from a career and whether your expectations could be met in a sales career. The characteristics to be discussed are

- job security
- advancement opportunities
- immediate feedback
- prestige
- job variety
- independence
- compensation

**Job Security**

Salespeople are revenue producers and thus enjoy relatively good job security compared with other occupational groups. Certainly, individual job security depends on individual performance, but in general, salespeople are usually the last group to be negatively affected by personnel cutbacks.

Competent salespeople also have some degree of job security based on the universality of their basic sales skills. In many cases, salespeople are able to successfully move to another employer, maybe even change industries, because sales skills are largely transferable. For salespeople working in declining or stagnant industries, this is heartening news.

Furthermore, projections by the U.S. Department of Labor indicate strong demand for salespeople in all categories in the future (see Exhibit 1A.1). And growth in the number of salespeople should bring a corresponding growth in the number of sales management positions. According to Exhibit 1A.1, there are particularly good opportunities in service industries, including financial services.

**Advancement Opportunities**

As the business world continues to become more competitive, the advancement opportunities for salespeople will continue to be an attractive dimension of sales careers. In highly competitive markets, individuals and companies that are successful in determining and meeting customer needs will be rewarded. A case in point is Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett-Packard, who began her career as a sales representative for AT&T. She later led the spinoff of Lucent Technologies from AT&T and used her sales skills to raise $3 billion on Wall Street to fund the largest public offering in U.S. history. According to Jo Weiss of Catalyst, Inc., a
company that tracks women in business, a sales background was key to Fiorina’s ascent to the top at Hewlett-Packard. Joel Ronning, CEO of Digital River, an e-commerce company in Minneapolis, adds, “Any good CEO has to understand sales. You’re constantly selling in all aspects of your life. In my early sales experience, I learned persistence and not to take rejection personally, which made all the difference in the world.”2

Immediate Feedback
Salespeople receive constant, immediate feedback on their job performance. Usually, the results of their efforts can be plainly observed by both salespeople and their sales managers—a source of motivation and job satisfaction. On a daily basis, salespeople receive direct feedback from their customers, and this can be stimulating, challenging, and productive. According to a survey conducted by Purchasing magazine, business buyers want suppliers to work closely with them to raise performance levels, contain costs, and develop the latest technologies. The same survey indicates a need for salespeople to overcome obstacles and solve problems that inhibit the accomplishment of mutually agreed-on goals. With such buyer expectations, it is readily apparent that seeking and using feedback is an important part of salespeople’s careers.3

Prestige
Traditionally, sales has not been a prestigious occupation in the eyes of the general public. There is some evidence that as the general public learns more about the activities and qualifications of professional salespeople, the image of salespeople, and thus the prestige of selling, is improving. An analysis of the popular press (excluding business publications) reveals that there are more positive than negative mentions of news-making salespeople. In a positive light, salespeople are frequently seen as knowledgeable, well trained, educated, and capable of solving customer problems. The negative aspects of salespeople’s image often center on deception and high-pressure techniques.4

The struggling, down-and-out huckster as depicted by Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s 1949 classic Death of a Salesman is hardly typical of the professional salesperson of today and the future. Professional salespeople destroy such unfavorable stereotypes, and they would not jeopardize customer relationships by using high-pressure sales techniques to force a premature sale.5 These perceptions are especially true in the business world, where encounters with professional salespeople are commonplace.

Job Variety
Salespeople rarely vegetate due to boredom. Their jobs are multifaceted and dynamic. For a person seeking the comfort of a well-established routine, sales might not be a good career choice. In sales, day-to-day variation on the job is the norm. Customers change, new products and services are developed, and competition introduces new elements at a rapid pace.
The opportunity to become immersed in the job and bring creativity to bear is demonstrated by General Mills, whose salesforce has been named one of the best in America. According to John Maschuzik, vice president of sales in the western United States, salespeople’s customization of promotional efforts for their customers is crucial to the company’s success. Maschuzik says that General Mills gives their salespeople a lot of latitude and the opportunity to be creative in spending retail promotion money.6

**Independence**

Sales jobs often allow independence of action. This independence is frequently a by-product of decentralized sales operations in which salespeople live and work away from headquarters, therefore working from their homes and making their own plans for extensive travel.

Independence of action and freedom to make decisions are usually presented as advantages that sales positions have over tightly supervised jobs. College students who prefer sales careers rate freedom to make decisions second only to salary as an important job consideration.7 Despite its appeal, however, independence does present some problems. New recruits working from their homes may find the lack of a company office somewhat disorienting. They may need an office environment to relate to, especially if their past work experience provided regular contact in an office environment.

The independence of action traditionally enjoyed by salespeople is being scrutinized by sales managers more heavily now than in the past. The emphasis on sales productivity, accomplished in part through cost containment, is encouraging sales managers to take a more active role in dictating travel plans and sales call schedules.

**Compensation**

Compensation is generally thought to be a strong advantage of sales careers. Pay is closely tied to performance, especially if commissions and bonuses are part of the pay package.

Starting salaries for inexperienced salespersons with a college degree typically average $40,000. Between the extremes of the highly experienced salesperson and the inexperienced recruit, an average salesperson earns approximately $45,000–$60,000 per year. More experienced salespersons, including those who deal with large customers, often earn in the $85,000–$135,000 range.

**CLASSIFICATION OF PERSONAL SELLING JOBS**

Because there are so many unique sales jobs, the term *salesperson* is not by itself very descriptive. A salesperson could be a flower vendor at a busy downtown intersection or the sales executive negotiating the sale of Boeing aircraft to the People’s Republic of China.

We briefly discuss six types of personal selling jobs:

- sales support
- new business
- existing business
- inside sales (nonretail)
- direct-to-consumer sales
- combination sales jobs

**Sales Support**

Sales support personnel are not usually involved in the direct solicitation of purchase orders. Rather, their primary responsibility is dissemination of information and performance of other activities designed to stimulate sales. They might concentrate at the end-user level or another level in the channel of distribution to support the overall sales effort. They may report to another salesperson, who is responsible for direct
handling of purchase orders, or to the sales manager. There are two well-known categories of support salespeople: missionary or detail salespeople and technical support salespeople.

**Missionary salespeople** usually work for a manufacturer but may also be found working for brokers and manufacturing representatives, especially in the grocery industry. There are strong similarities between sales missionaries and religious missionaries. Like their counterparts, sales missionaries are expected to “spread the word” with the purpose of conversion—to customer status. Once converted, the customer receives reinforcing messages, new information, and the benefit of the missionary’s activities to strengthen the relationship between buyer and seller.

In the pharmaceutical industry, the **detailer** is a fixture. Detailers working at the physician level furnish valuable information regarding the capabilities and limitations of medications in an attempt to get the physician to prescribe their product. Another sales representative from the same pharmaceutical company will sell the medication to the wholesaler or pharmacist, but it is the detailer’s job to support the direct sales effort by calling on physicians.

Technical specialists are sometimes considered to be sales support personnel. These **technical support salespeople** may assist in design and specification processes, installation of equipment, training of the customer’s employees, and follow-up service of a technical nature. They are sometimes part of a sales team that includes another salesperson who specializes in identifying and satisfying customer needs by recommending the appropriate product or service.

**New Business**

New business is generated for the selling firm by adding new customers or introducing new products to the marketplace. Two types of new-business salespeople are pioneers and order-getters.

**Pioneers**, as the term suggests, are constantly involved with either new products, new customers, or both. Their task requires creative selling and the ability to counter the resistance to change that will likely be present in prospective customers. Pioneers are well represented in the sale of business franchises, in which the sales representatives travel from city to city seeking new franchisees.

**Order-getters** are salespeople who actively seek orders, usually in a highly competitive environment. Although all pioneers are also order-getters, the reverse is not true. An order-getter may serve existing customers on an ongoing basis, whereas the pioneer moves on to new customers as soon as possible. Order-getters may seek new business by selling an existing customer additional items from the product line. A well-known tactic is to establish a relationship with a customer by selling a single product from the line, then to follow up with subsequent sales calls for other items from the product line.

Most corporations emphasize sales growth, and salespeople operating as pioneers and order-getters are at the heart of sales growth objectives. The pressure to perform in these roles is fairly intense; the results are highly visible. For these reasons, the new-business salesperson is often among the elite in any company’s salesforce.

**Existing Business**

In direct contrast to new-business salespeople, other salespeople’s primary responsibility is to maintain relationships with existing customers. Salespeople who specialize in maintaining existing business include **order-takers**. These salespeople frequently work for wholesalers, and as the term **order-taker** implies, they are not too involved in creative selling. Route salespeople who work an established customer base, taking routine reorders of stock items, are order-takers. They sometimes follow a pioneer salesperson and take over the account after the pioneer has made the initial sale.

These salespeople are no less valuable to their firms than the new-business salespeople, but creative selling skills are less important to this category of sales personnel. Their strengths tend to be reliability and competence in assuring customer convenience. Customers grow to depend on the services provided by this type of salesperson. As most
markets are becoming more competitive, the role of existing-business salespeople is sometimes critical to prevent erosion of the customer base.

Many firms, believing that it is easier to protect and maintain profitable customers than it is to find replacement customers, are reinforcing sales efforts to existing customers. For example, Frito-Lay uses 18,000 route service salespeople to call on retail customers at least three times weekly. Larger customers see their Frito-Lay representative on a daily basis. These salespeople spend a lot of their time educating customers about the profitability of Frito-Lay’s snack foods, which leads to increased sales for both the retailer and for Frito-Lay.

Inside Sales

In this text, inside sales refers to nonretail salespeople who remain in their employer’s place of business while dealing with customers. The inside-sales operation has received considerable attention in recent years, not only as a supplementary sales tactic, but also as an alternative to field selling.

Inside sales can be conducted on an active or passive sales basis. Active inside sales include the solicitation of entire orders, either as part of a telemarketing operation or when customers walk into the seller’s facilities. Passive inside sales imply the acceptance, rather than solicitation, of customer orders, although it is common practice for these transactions to include add-on sales attempts. We should note that customer service personnel sometimes function as inside-sales personnel as an ongoing part of their jobs.

Direct-to-Consumer Sales

Direct-to-consumer salespeople are the most numerous type. There are more than 4.5 million retail salespeople in this country and perhaps another million selling real estate, insurance, and securities. Add to this figure another several million selling direct to the consumer for such companies as Tupperware, Mary Kay, and Avon.

This diverse category of salespeople ranges from the part-time, often temporary salesperson in a retail store to the highly educated, professionally trained stockbroker on Wall Street. As a general statement, the more challenging direct-to-consumer sales positions are those involving the sale of intangible services such as insurance and financial services.

Combination Sales Jobs

Now that we have reviewed some of the basic types of sales jobs, let us consider the salesperson who performs multiple types of sales jobs within the framework of a single position. We use the case of the territory manager’s position with Beecham Products, U.S.A., to illustrate the combination sales job concept. Beecham, whose products include Aqua-Fresh toothpaste, markets a wide range of consumer goods to food, drug, variety, and mass merchandisers. The territory manager’s job blends responsibilities for developing new business, maintaining and stimulating existing business, and performing sales support activities.

During a typical day in the field, the Beecham territory manager is involved in sales support activities such as merchandising and in-store promotion at the individual retail store level. Maintaining contact and goodwill with store personnel is another routine sales support activity. The territory manager also makes sales calls on chain headquarters personnel to handle existing business and to seek new business. And it is the territory manager who introduces new Beecham products in the marketplace.

QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS REQUIRED FOR SUCCESS BY SALESPERSONS

Because there are so many different types of jobs in sales, it is rather difficult to generalize about the qualifications and skills needed for success. This list would have to vary
according to the details of a given job. Even then, it is reasonable to believe that for any
given job, different persons with different skills could be successful. These conclusions
have been reached after decades of research that has tried to correlate sales performance
with physical traits, mental abilities, personality characteristics, and the experience and
background of the salesperson.\(^8\)

Many of the skills and characteristics leading to success in sales would do the same
in practically any professional business occupation. For example, the *Occupational Out-
look Handbook* published by the U.S. Department of Labor points out the importance
of various personal attributes for success in sales, including the following: initiative, tact,
patience, good communications skills, motivation, honesty, and maturity.\(^9\) Who could
dispute the value of such traits for any occupation?

Success in sales is increasingly being thought of in terms of a strategic team effort,
rather than the characteristics of individual salespersons. For example, three studies of
more than 200 companies that employ 25,000 salespersons in the United States and
Australia found that being customer oriented and cooperating as a team player were
critical to salespersons’ success.\(^10\)

Being careful not to suggest that sales success is solely a function of individual traits,
let us consider some of the skills and qualifications that are thought to be especially crit-
ical for success in most sales jobs. Five factors that seem to be particularly important for
success in sales are empathy, ego drive, ego strength, verbal communication skills, and
enthusiasm. These factors have been selected after reviewing three primary sources of
information:

- a study of more than 750,000 salespeople in 15,000 companies (Greenberg and
  Greenberg)\(^11\)
- two reviews of four decades of research on factors related to sales success (Comer
  and Dubinsky; and Brown, Leigh, and Haygood)\(^12\)
- surveys of sales executives\(^13\)

**Empathy**

In a sales context, *empathy* (the ability to see things as others would see them) includes
being able to read cues furnished by the customer to better determine the customer’s
viewpoint. According to Spiro and Weitz, empathy is crucial for successful interaction
between a buyer and a seller.\(^14\) An empathetic salesperson is presumably in a better po-
sition to tailor the sales presentation to the customer during the planning stages. More
important, empathetic salespeople can adjust to feedback during the presentation.

The research of Greenberg and Greenberg found empathy to be a significant pre-
dictor of sales success. This finding was partially supported in the review by Comer and
Dubinsky, who found empathy to be an important factor in consumer and insurance
sales but not in retail or industrial sales. However, Pilling and Eroglu found that retail
buyers were more likely to listen to future sales presentations and make purchases from
salespeople who displayed empathy.\(^15\) Even though some studies do not find direct links
between salesperson empathy and success, empathy is generally accepted as an impor-
tant trait for successful salespeople.\(^16\) As relationship selling grows in importance, em-
pathy logically will become even more important for sales success.

**Ego Drive**

In a sales context, *ego drive* (an indication of the degree of determination a person has
to achieve goals and overcome obstacles in striving for success) is manifested as an inner
need to persuade others in order to achieve personal gratification. Greenberg and
Greenberg point out the complementary relationship between empathy and ego drive
that is necessary for sales success. The salesperson who is extremely empathetic but lacks
ego drive may have problems in taking active steps to confirm a sale. However, a sales-
person with more ego drive than empathy may ignore the customer’s viewpoint in an
ill-advised, overly anxious attempt to gain commitment from the customer.
Ego Strength

The degree to which a person is able to achieve an approximation of inner drives is ego strength. Salespeople with high levels of ego strength are likely to be self-assured and self-accepting. Salespeople with healthy egos are better equipped to deal with the possibility of rejection throughout the sales process. They are probably less likely to experience sales call reluctance and are resilient enough to overcome the disappointment of inevitable lost sales.

Salespeople with strong ego drives who are well equipped to do their job will likely be high in self-efficacy; that is, they will strongly believe that they can be successful on the job. In situations in which their initial efforts meet resistance, rejection, or failure, salespeople high in self-efficacy are likely to persist in pursuing their goals. For example, Gene Benassi, a sales representative with office furniture supplier Herman Miller, persevered with the Pentagon for more than 10 years, occasionally receiving small contracts. Finally, he landed a large, 15-year contract. As noted by a Herman Miller executive, Benassi “never gave up on getting a big deal. With teamwork and perseverance and the ability to build a long-term relationship, he finally got the customer to sign.”

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Interpersonal communication skills, including listening and questioning, are essential for sales success. An in-depth study of 300 sales executives, salespeople, and customers of 24 major sales companies in North America, Europe, and Japan found that effective salespeople are constantly seeking ways to improve communication skills that enable them to develop, explain, and implement customer solutions. The companies in the study are some of the best in the world at professional selling: Sony, Xerox, American Airlines, Fuji, and Scott paper.

To meet customer needs, salespeople must be able to solicit opinions, listen effectively, and confirm customer needs and concerns. They must be capable of probing customer expectations with open- and closed-end questions and responding in a flexible manner to individual personalities and different business cultures in ways that demonstrate respect for differences. This requires adaptable, socially intelligent salespeople, especially when dealing with multicultural customers.

The importance of communication skills has been recognized by sales managers, recruiters, and sales researchers. These skills can be continually refined throughout a sales career, a positive factor from both a personal and a career development perspective.

Enthusiasm

When sales executives and recruiters discuss qualifications for sales positions, they invariably include enthusiasm. They are usually referring to dual dimensions of enthusiasm—an enthusiastic attitude in a general sense and a special enthusiasm for selling. On-campus recruiters have mentioned that they seek students who are well beyond “interested in sales” to the point of truly being enthusiastic about career opportunities in sales. Recruiters are somewhat weary of “selling sales” as a viable career, and they welcome the job applicant who displays genuine enthusiasm for the field.

Comments on Qualifications and Skills

The qualifications and skills needed for sales success are different today from those required for success two decades ago. As the popularity of relationship selling grows, the skills necessary for sales success will evolve to meet the needs of the marketplace. For example, Greenberg and Greenberg’s research has identified what they call an “emerging factor” for sales success, a strong motivation to provide service to the customer. They contrast this service motivation with ego drive by noting that, although ego drive relates to persuading others, service motivation comes from desiring the approval of others. For example, a salesperson may be extremely gratified to please a customer through superior postsale service. Greenberg and Greenberg conclude that most
salespeople will need both service motivation and ego drive to succeed, although they note that extremely high levels of both attributes are not likely to exist in the same individual. A survey of 28,000 people in 59 major companies by the Forum Corporation reports that a service motivation, along with understanding and respect for customers, is far more effective than aggressive selling tactics in terms of generating sales.21

Our discussion of factors related to sales success is necessarily brief, as a fully descriptive treatment of the topic must be tied to a given sales position. Veteran sales managers and recruiters can often specify with amazing precision what qualifications and skills are needed to succeed in a given sales job. These assessments are usually based on a mixture of objective and subjective judgments.

Professional selling offers virtually unlimited career opportunities for the right person. Many of the skills and qualifications necessary for success in selling are also important for success as an entrepreneur or as a leader in a corporate setting. For those interested in learning more about sales careers, consult these sources: Sales & Marketing Management magazine at http://salesandmarketing.com; Selling Power magazine at http://sellingpower.com; and Sales & Marketing Executives-International, a professional organization, at http://www.smei.org.