Introduction

Is your sales cycle slow and unreliable? Do you run into problems keeping a steady stream of customers? Are you running into problems converting your customers into repeat buyers?

If you said yes to any of those questions, you're in the right place. Whether you're a first-time entrepreneur or an established business, we all run into problems in the sales pipeline from time to time. But as the old saying goes, "Nothing happens until somebody sells something!"

You're here because you want sales solutions. I'm here to give them to you. So let me start out by letting you know what you'll find in this eBook.

In six chapters I'm going to take you through the process of setting up and running your online sales and marketing funnel from beginning to end. If you're a beginner here, you're going to want to take it slowly and make sure you've absorbed each chapter before moving on to the next one. And even though we're talking about fundamentals here, I hope there'll be enough interesting tidbits in here to help you tighten up your funnel if you're a seasoned veteran.

(Of course just because you already know this stuff that's no reason to breeze through. Every athlete knows there's nothing more important than constantly practicing the fundamentals.)

With each chapter I'm going to give you the information in as concentrated form as I can, and then I'll wrap up with a set of suggested action steps. Especially if you're a first-timer, I recommend you seriously consider going through these steps one by one. Of course that's your call, but a systematic approach in your sales and marketing funnel is bound to pay off in a big way. So without further ado, let's get started!

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Chapter I: Finding Your Ideal Prospect Avatar

Before anything else, you need to set up your ideal prospect avatar. Without a prospect avatar, you might as well not even be selling. It's the North Star you sail by, and without it you crash and sink on the rocks. It's that important.

So what's an ideal prospect avatar? Simply put, it's a *thorough* description of your *ideal* prospect. It's the way you know who you're trying to sell to when you sell online. When you put it together you're going to want to include things like the prospect's business size, industry, budget, etc. You're also going to want to know what problem they have that they're going to want you to solve.

Now, I know: that stuff sounds pretty obvious. But you know what's not obvious?

I'll tell you. What's not obvious is that when you put together your prospect avatar you're not just trying to understand your prospect from a business perspective. You're doing that, of course. But even more so you're trying to understand who your prospect is as a human being. You'll want to ask yourself questions like: What position does the decision-maker have in the company I want to sell to? What problems does this person deal with all day? What kinds of thoughts and concerns does this person have?

Maybe you're thinking this all sounds like a lot of unnecessary effort. Why bother with getting into their head when it's obvious they need your solution?

Well, it might be obvious to you that they need your solution, but it's only obvious to you because you're looking at the problem from *your* point of view. The whole point of putting together the prospect avatar is that it forces you to look at the process from your prospect's point of view. Even if your solution is a one hundred percent perfect match for your prospect, it doesn't matter unless you can show your prospects that *in their own terms*.

The great thing about taking the time to write out a prospect avatar is that while you're doing it you'll realize new aspects of your solution that appeal to your prospect. By taking the time to force yourself to look at the problem from your customer's point of view, you realize what makes your solution stand out in your customer's eyes. And that knowledge will help you frame your solution in the best possible way.

When you make your prospect avatar, you're going to want to take some time to write out as clear and as thorough an idea of your ideal prospect as you possibly can. In the action steps I've listed out a few suggested questions to ask yourself, but that's by no means an exhaustive list. Feel free to pose your own questions and get your mental map together that way. Whatever you do, writing out your prospect avatar is an important first step in getting your prospecting and sales cycles working at their full capacity.

Action Steps

1. Answer these questions: who is your ideal prospect? What industry are they in? What size business do they have?
2. What problem does your ideal prospect have, and how can you solve it? What kind of budget does your ideal prospect have for dealing with this issue?
3. Take some time to get to know your ideal prospect. Imagine the person who will make the final decision on whether or not to buy your solution. Try to see the world as they see it. Take some time on this. Write out a couple of pages, just trying to get into their head. What does this person do all day? What kinds of problems do they face? What do they think about all the time? (Don’t worry about getting too detailed. Remember: the reason you’re doing this is because you want to be able to appeal to your prospect *as an individual human being*, and you can’t do that if you don’t know who they are.)

Chapter II: Writing the Right Messages

Now that you've got your prospect avatar together, it's time to write out your messages. With email selling, there are two general types of leads you'll need to know about: warm leads and cold leads.

It's a simple enough difference. The warm leads are the ones who have subscribed to your email list, purchased your goods or services before, or otherwise "opted in" to your message. The cold leads are the ones who haven't done any of that stuff yet.

You're going to structure your appeal differently depending on whether you're dealing with a warm or a cold lead. The basic reasoning for that is pretty simple: if they've opted in to your message, you can assume they're at least willing to listen to a sales pitch every once in a while, but if they haven't you've got to put in some work to get them to give you the time of day. In other words, it's a lot easier to get someone to listen to you once you're already on their radar than while you're still trying to get their attention.

So, practically speaking, you're going to have to take a different approach for the warm leads than you will with the cold leads. Let's talk about the cold ones first.

When you're talking to a cold lead, the name of the game is that you want to turn them into a warm lead. That is, you want to get the prospect's attention and prompt them into starting a conversation that eventually leads to a sale. Now, this is a complicated problem and there are entire schools of thought built up around how to turn a cold lead into a warm lead, but here are a few things for you to think about:

- Email subject lines: one of the most important things when it comes to emailing cold leads is making sure the email actually *gets opened*! You need something that prompts your prospect's curiosity enough to want to know more. It might take you some A/B testing, but you're going to need to figure out what kinds of subject lines actually work for your list. A few ideas: ask a question, use an eye-catching number, or leave the subject line blank.
- Length of the email: once they've opened the email, they'll either read it or not. A short email is more likely to get read in its entirety, but a long email makes it easier to fully explain your offer. My advice: catch their attention with a short email (no longer than 150 words) and get the chance to explain more later on.
- Call to action: remember, the goal here is to start a conversation. All you need to do is ask your prospect if they want to set up a phone call to discuss your solution further, or if they're

interested in hearing further from your company. At the very least, you want to prompt them to respond saying they'd like to hear more.

With warm leads, the same guidelines generally apply. Your goal here is to offer value to the prospect and eventually secure a sale. You're going to want to offer your prospects valuable information and carry on the conversation as you guide them through the sales cycle.

That valuable information can be in the form of YouTube videos, strategy tips, how-to guides, news updates, or links to new content on your site. Now that you've done your prospect avatar, you already know more or less what your ideal prospect should be interested in. By combining email marketing with content marketing, you can continually add value for your prospects while at the same time having a good reason to contact them on a weekly or a monthly basis.

Most importantly, you need to offer your warm leads an incentive and a call to action in your emails. With extended email campaigns you might not want to include a sales pitch in every email, but with shorter ones you should be sure to let them know why they should buy now (whether it's a discount, extended service, etc.) and what they should do to get in touch.

Action Steps

1. Define your goals for your cold emails.
2. Come up with ideas to test for your cold emails. What kinds of subject lines do you want to use? What calls to action will you test?
3. Decide how you're going to add value for your warm prospects in your emails.

Chapter III: Optimize Your Funnel

Once you've written up your email sequences, the next thing to do is build and optimize your sales and marketing funnel. Optimizing your funnel is a constant process, so in this chapter I'm going to go over the basics of what your funnel should look like, what kinds of problems you're likely to run into, and a few ideas of how to solve those problems.

Your sales and marketing funnel runs from prospect acquisition, through the conversation you have with your prospects, and on down to the point where you turn that prospect into an enthusiastic customer. (Technically it doesn't even end there, since a good marketer knows it's always easier to turn a buyer into a repeat customer than to convert a prospect into a first-time buyer.) In your online marketing efforts you're going to want to set up a fairly simple process with the following steps:

1. Prospect acquisition: we'll talk a little more about this in the next chapter, but for now all you need to know is that you can acquire prospects in several different ways. But since we're trying to keep things as simple as possible, we'll focus on building your prospect list manually.
2. Generating interest: this includes all of the steps between the time you first contact the prospect to the time you close the sale. It includes all the communications you'll have with your prospect during that time, as well as qualifying the prospect and overcoming objections. How long does this take? That depends on a lot of factors, including the length of your sales cycle, the cost of your solution, and the prospect's level of interest. Some solutions are easy to sell with a short email campaign, while some of them call for long-term engagement.
3. Closing the sale: this is the happy day when you and your prospect finally tie the knot and they realize they've needed your solution all along. All your hard work has paid off. Congratulations!
4. Repeat sales: don't get too busy celebrating once you've closed with a prospect, though. The conversation still continues, and you should always be ready to upsell or resell with a customer.

So let's say you've set up your funnel already. What kinds of problems are you running into now? Maybe you're getting low traffic on your site, or prospects aren't opting into your mailing list like they should.

If your site isn't drawing the levels of traffic you're after, you need to find a way to get more targeted eyeballs looking at it. You can do that with advertising through search engines or social media sites, by stepping up your presence on social media, through search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, or any combination of these. Remember: what you want to do with your site is to interest your targeted prospects enough for them to opt into hearing from you on a regular basis.

Let's say you're getting good traffic on your site, but your opt-in rates are low. Have you offered your visitors the chance to opt into your email list? That's an absolute must. Assuming you've already done that, have you offered them some incentive to opt into your list? When you offer your prospects access to exclusive content in exchange for their contact information, you give them a compelling reason to make the change from cold prospects to warm ones.

So what if you've got ample traffic to your site and great opt-in rates, but your prospects aren't converting into customers like they should. What now?

Well, there are a number of possibilities. It could be that your email campaign isn't compelling enough to generate the level of conversion you're aiming for. In that case, you might want to consider a content marketing campaign or a more involved email campaign.

Another possibility is that you're talking to the wrong people. You need to qualify your prospects. Qualifying your prospects is an important step in any sales campaign, and that's part of what I'm going to cover in the next chapter.

Action Steps

1. Start out with the bare minimum for your sales and marketing funnel: a functioning website, an opt-in box for prospects to join your mailing list, an incentive for them to join the list, and a basic email campaign for your prospects.
2. Keep track of your website traffic, opt-in rates, and conversion rates. Set specific goals for each of these metrics and consider making changes if any of them drops too low.

Chapter IV: Get a List & Qualify Prospects

So you've got your emails written, you've set up your website, and you're ready to start sending emails. What next?

It's time for you to build your email list. Now, in an ideal world all of your leads would be warm leads who opted into your list through your website. And don't get me wrong, you should definitely set that up and try to get as many warm leads as possible. But organic list growth is a slow process, and if you're running into trouble with your sales and marketing funnel you probably don't have time to wait for that to happen.

So you're going to have to try some cold prospects. When you're trying cold prospects you've got two options: building your own prospect list manually, or purchasing a list from an online seller.

I'll be honest with you: building a list on your own is a slow, tedious process, especially if you don't have the right tools. But buying a list is a risky business, because you're likely to end up with a bunch of useless addresses that won't do you any good. Your best bet is to put together a list on your own, using the right tools to find the right prospects for you.

We'll talk some more about the tools you'll need when we get to Chapter 5, but for now let's focus on what you're looking for in a prospect.

At some point during the sales and marketing cycle, you're going to have to qualify your prospect. That means you've got to make sure the person you're talking to is at least a pretty good match to your ideal prospect avatar. The main things you want to make sure of when you're qualifying your prospect are that a) you're talking to someone with the authority to make a purchase decision, and b) you're dealing with a company that's the right size, budget, and industry to be able to use your solution.

So how do you qualify the prospect? Well, if you're building your list through opt-ins from your site, you're going to want to structure your incentive so that it won't appeal to anyone who isn't a good match to your ideal prospect avatar. On the other hand, if you're manually building a list of cold prospects, you're going to need some tools to make sure you're putting the right people on your list. And that's what we'll cover in Chapter 5.

Action Steps

1. Decide on how you're going to get your list. Will you purchase a list, put your own list together manually, or slowly put your list together through opt-ins? Some combination of all three?
2. Use online tools to find the right prospects. (More about this in the next chapter.)

3. Be thoughtful when you’re putting together the content for your website and your opt-in incentives. Try to offer the kind of incentives that will only appeal to qualified prospects.

Chapter V: Leverage the Right Tools

So what kinds of tools do you need when you're setting up your online sales and marketing funnel? Three things: a batch email software, a business search engine, and an analytical tool.

Pretty much, you're going to need a batch email software because you're potentially going to be sending out thousands of emails at once, and you don't want to waste your time by doing all of that by hand. With a service like MailChimp or BulkMailer, you can send out your mass emails in one blast. You can keep multiple lists, separating out your warm and cold clients. Not only that, but you can also get valuable data on how many people are opening your emails, following links to your site, or opting out of your mailing list. Over time, you can use this data to hone your approach to email marketing and maximize your success rates.

But how are you going to build that email list in the first place? That's what your business search engine is for.

With a business search engine like EasyBusiness, you can build your own list of B2B prospects from the EasyBusiness database. EasyBusiness allows you to filter your search by location, business activities, executives, company info, or employee size. With all the filters available, you can find your targeted leads as fast as possible and get to what really matters to you: sharing your solution with the people who need it most.

Kompass's international classification system with EasyBusiness includes 15 families, 67 industries, over 3,000 business sectors, and 56,000 products and services. It's been translated into 24 languages, collecting data from all over the world, allowing you to find individual email addresses and more for the people who need your solution.

If EasyBusiness sounds like something your company could use, check us out online or call us directly at (609) 785-5986. Mention this eBook and you'll receive a 10 percent discount. (You can go ahead and call now. The eBook will still be here when you get back.)

But even with a batch email service and a business search engine, you're going to need a tool to analyze your sales and marketing funnel. With a tool like SalesForce (which just so happens to be integrated into EasyBusiness), you've got a wide array of services geared toward increasing the growth of your business. SalesForce is an all-in-one Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution. It analyzes your prospects as a group, but it also allows you to track and predict individual customer needs and desires. With SalesForce, you can interact with your customers via mobile apps, allowing you to treat every prospect as if they were your only customer.

Action Steps

1. Find a batch email software that works for you. There are a wide variety of available software solutions, so with a little searching you're bound to find one that suits your needs. If you've got a small company, services like MailChimp include a free subscription level, with more extensive services becoming available at higher levels.
2. Find a business search engine that gets the results you need. Of course we'd prefer that you go with EasyBusiness, so let me just remind you that there's a 10 percent discount if you mention this eBook when you're talking to our sales personnel.
3. Find yourself the right CRM. Again, if you go with EasyBusiness you automatically have access to SalesForce, but there are other CRMs out there and it's also possible for you to get the SalesForce CRM on its own. Whatever your decision, we wish you the best of luck in your efforts.

Chapter VI: Sales Departments vs. All Automatic Process

Now that you've got your sales and marketing funnel set up, you'll probably be wondering how much of a "hands-on" approach you should take to your process. Because the fact is, once you've got the funnel set up, you can have automatic process send your emails and go a long way towards processing your customer's purchases with little to no input on your part. What's your sales team going to have to do once the funnel's in place?

For one thing, they're going to have to get your email lists together and work with the individual prospects. In some ways, you can think of the marketing funnel as a tool to bring prospects to your sales team and warm them up for the purchase.

For another thing, streamlining your marketing funnel can be a full-time job in and of itself. Like we talked about in Chapter 3, it's possible for problems to pop up anywhere along the line, and your sales and marketing team will need to be in place to solve those. They'll be improving emails, drawing website traffic with social media and search engine marketing, and increasing engagement with the site itself through content marketing.

So even with the automatic processes running themselves, you'll still need a small, dedicated sales team to handle closing and prospect acquisition. Someday in the not too distant future there may be an entirely automatic selling process, but for now there's plenty of fine-tuning to make to keep your sales team busy bringing your solution to the people who need it most.

I hope this eBook's been helpful to you, and I hope you've got a better idea of how to set up your marketing funnel than you did when you first started it. I wish you the best of luck in your endeavors, and I hope you've learned something valuable here. With that, I'll close up with one last set of action steps, and then I'll leave you to grow your business!

Action Steps

1. Set up your content marketing funnel. Take all of the steps outlined in this eBook, and make sure your funnel is driving sales.
2. Track the progress of your funnel over time. Identify strengths and weaknesses. Find problem points and improve them, one by one. Remember: there's always something more you can do to improve that funnel.
3. As your business grows, gather a great sales team around you. Make sure to find people who can best represent your brand and engage your prospects in productive conversations. Remember: nothing happens until somebody sells something!