

What's your brand?



The Job Purpose of a Sales Manager is *to achieve sales through others* – a nice and straight forward definition. The *role* though is far from straight forward; adapting management, leadership and communication styles to the needs of each individual in the team, building and sustaining a highly engaging environment around the team, and retaining an up to date understanding of customer needs and the market place as a whole are just some of the challenges involved.

With all these immediate and tactical issues, it can be all too easy to lose sight of the importance of influencing some of the longer-term issues which in turn influence success in the role and future career progression. This edition of *21st Sales Management* considers just one of these: **Personal Brand**.

So what exactly is 'brand'?

We most often think of brands in relation to retail products, such as jeans, shoes and cars. In fact as you read the word 'jeans' you probably thought of brands such as Levi and Wrangler. A brand though is a lot more than a name... 'brand' is about what that name means to you at an emotional level. So when you think of Wrangler, whatever words describe how you feel about that product is the brand, which in Wrangler's case is probably something like "quality" and "durable".

Cars are another good example. Brands such as Volvo and Lamborghini mean something at an emotional level to people, which for Volvo is likely to mean "established", "solid" and "safe".

The brand of a retail product doesn't happen by chance. Marketing teams invest significant time to understand the brand that a given product needs in the market place in order to enjoy competitive advantage, and then invest significant resource to develop this brand image in the mind of the consumer. Consumers perceive value in a strong brand, so the building of a strong brand has a significant impact on both profit and profitability.

Brands aren't built overnight though; to build a strong brand marketing teams communicate messages consistently over a long period of time, these 'messages' being conveyed by not just words, but by product appearance, feel, packaging, who endorses the product etc.

About the author

Tim Royds is director of *highclere*, an organisation that provides bespoke B2B sales consultancy and training solutions in the UK and internationally. He has over 36 years' experience in sales, Sales Management, sales coaching, sales consultancy and sales training. He is also author of the part-published 9-book series "Sales Management..." each of which focuses in on a specific facet of this challenging role.



All of which brings us to the relevance of this to the Sales Manager...

Exactly the same principles apply to your personal brand too. Your personal brand is about how others perceive you and your value to them. Building your personal brand isn't about what you do this morning or this afternoon... it's about sending a consistent set of messages over a long period of time by what you say, what you do, how you do these things, and even your appearance and who you're associated with.

What personal brand do you *want* to have?

This will depend on who you want to influence – as in the well-known saying: "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder"!

Let's take your team first of all. Imagine for a moment that I'm conducting a piece of market research, that I speak with each member of your team, and that they are going to be 100% honest with me... When I ask them the question: "*Tell me, what words would you use to describe your Sales Manager?*" what would you like them to say? That's your personal brand, or more accurately the personal brand you would *like* to have.

Indeed this is a very good question to ask yourself in real life, along with a second (similar) question, which is: "*What would they say?!*" If the answer to these two questions is different, then some work is required!

Comment: It's a good idea to include in your personal brand qualities such as "supportive to the team", "battles for the team", "high expectations" and "healthy impatience"...

The very same questions are relevant to your manager, your colleagues in other functions within the business, and those who will be involved in deciding your next promotion. What brand is it important to have so that they want you to have the role? Referring back to an earlier comment: this isn't just about something you do one morning; it's about sending a consistent set of messages by all means possible over a long period of time.

Let me provide one or two examples here...

I remember discussing with a colleague what it was that had accelerated his career progression. With absolute certainty he said: "*As soon I began to put my hand up when they were asking for volunteers to help with project Groups*" ('they' being functions such as marketing and project management). In other words, he'd created the brand that he was someone who added value in meetings and could make projects happen, and he did this by actually doing these things in front of the people who made decisions about promotions.

It's worth commenting here that it's just as easy to create a brand of **inability** – which is exactly what my friend would have done if he'd volunteered and then **not** been able

to meet the remit. Avoid putting yourself in situations which communicate your inabilities; focus on those that capitalise on your strengths.

The "Sales Management..." book series

The first 4 books in the 9 book "Sales Management..." series are available now via both **Amazon** and **Kindle**...

"Sales Management: What it's *really* all about"

"Sales Management: So now you're a Sales Manager"

"Sales Management: Developing the skills of the sales team"

"Sales Management: Field Based Coaching"



Which also links into issues such as...

...your responsiveness to important e-mails

...how quickly you respond to requests for information

...how able you are to effectively prioritise

...how much you focus on proactive rather than reactive activities

...how often you escalate difficult issues rather than deal with them yourself

...how stressed you appear to others when there's plenty to do

...etc.

How you are consistently seen to manage all these issues will answer the question for others: "*How can I expect ***** to react in this situation?*" You'll train them to expect a particular answer by consistently doing the same thing over again. That's brand.

All of which brings me on to three important questions related to your career growth:

1. How do you want those who are going to be making the decision about future roles within the business perceive you – what do you need your brand to be?
2. How do they perceive you now – so what is your brand right now?
3. What do you need to do in order to strongly reinforce your desired brand and/or correct any misconceptions?

The answers to these questions are not necessarily about what needs doing to effectively manage the 'now'. They are though important – they are the longer-term issues which will influence exactly what it is that you achieve in the longer-term.

Personal brand outside your company

Exactly the same is true of developing a personal brand outside the confines of your company. What do you want this to be? What needs to be done to build and sustain this brand image?

Of course, much of what's been mentioned before is likely to be just as relevant to external contacts as it is to internal contacts – responsiveness to emails and message left on LinkedIn, for example. Although there's equally an argument to say that if you consistently respond quickly to messages received via social media such as LinkedIn, you could be creating a brand image of someone who spends all day on social networks rather than achieving sales through others! So there is a balance...

Comment: The Sales Tip on our YouTube channel for November 2018 was all about “responsiveness”. See bit.ly/Nov18SalesTip



And speaking of LinkedIn, as I was reminded when attending a webinar this week... what photo do you have on your LinkedIn profile? What does that say about you? I've seen some profile photos on LinkedIn which very clearly convey the message: “Not serious”, and others of the person in highly formal business attire with a very serious facial expression too. I'm not saying that one or the other (or indeed something in between!) is the 'right' message to convey. What I *am* saying though is that it's very important to be clear about the message you want to convey, and then upload the photograph which achieves this.

Your external brand image could also impact on your future job roles internally too. As an example, which of these two potential extremes of a spectrum is the brand that's most appropriate for your future career progression?

- A) Someone who knows no one in professional circles outside the immediate company, or
- B) Someone who networks extensively and has well developed contacts in professional Institutes, industry representative bodies and other relevant areas, and so has an unusually broad understanding of current and expected future industry trends.

If it is B) by the way, this should not be at the expense of achieving (preferably exceeding) the goals and objectives of the Sales Manager role – it's *aswell as*. Though having said that, it could actually help with them of course.

Summary

“Brand” is about perceptions, and most often thought of in the context of retail sales. The principles though have many applications, not least of which is consideration of what **personal brand** the Sales Manager wants to build for themselves.

Personal brand can impact on achievement in the immediate role, and will certainly impact on career development.

All of which leads to three critical questions:

1. What do you need your personal brand to be?
2. What is your personal brand right now?
3. What do you need to do in order to strongly reinforce your desired personal brand and/or correct any misconceptions?

Next edition of 21st Century Sales Management.....will be available during May, subject TBA (and do get in touch if you'd like us to consider a particular Sales Management topic).