

# A Welcome Addition



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Who *hasn't* heard the phrase, "Do you want fries with that?" It's a standard line that almost everyone has been asked at one time or another while ordering at a fast-food restaurant. What you might not realize, though, is that this question is a simple but classic example of suggestion selling, an important sales technique that benefits both customers and salespeople. Learn more about what suggestion selling is, why it's important, and how you can use this technique effectively.

How would you feel if you spent \$100 or more to buy an e-reader, took it to the beach, and found that you couldn't download any books to it? You would probably be pretty disappointed. When you purchased the product, the salesperson should have explained to you that you would need the 3G model to access the Internet without a wireless connection. In fact, s/he should have suggested that you purchase that model to meet your needs. The salesperson *should* have used suggestion selling.



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## Objectives

- A** Explain the importance of suggestion selling.
- B** Demonstrate proper procedures to use in suggestion selling.

- ▲ Effective salespeople make sure that their customers purchase products that meet their needs. So, since you want to access the Internet while on the beach, your salesperson should have used suggestion selling to recommend a 3G e-reader to you.

**Suggestion selling** (sometimes called suggestive selling) is an important and effective sales technique in which a salesperson attempts to increase a customer's purchase by suggesting that s/he buy additional goods or services. These suggestions are based on the customer's needs. Usually, suggestion selling occurs *after* the customer has made the original buying decision. Here are some examples of suggestion selling:

- A customer has just decided to purchase a camera. The salesperson might suggest that he also buy a tripod, an extra charger, extra memory cards, etc.
- A couple wants to purchase an appliance, such as a refrigerator or a dishwasher. The salesperson might suggest that they also buy an extended service contract on the appliance or special cleaners and scratch removers for the stainless steel.
- A customer has chosen to buy a dress. The salesperson might "suggestion sell" her a pair of matching shoes, a coordinating jacket or sweater, or earrings that complete the look.

Since the suggestions used in this selling technique are based on customer needs, the salesperson should never appear pushy or try to sell items the customer does not want. Suggestion selling is not intended to be high-pressure selling. Instead, it represents a sincere effort to serve the customer. You'll find that customers appreciate being reminded of or told about additional items, such as the batteries for a child's toy or the extra cleaning solution to go with a steam mop.



▲ A popular technique for suggestion selling is to show related products that can be used with the customer's original purchase.

### The importance of suggestion selling

So, why is suggestion selling so important? The most obvious reason that salespeople use this technique is to build the sale—more sales can lead to more profit for the company. Let's look at an average sale, and then compare it to a sale in which suggestion selling was used.

#### **Average Sale:**

Point-and-shoot digital camera: \$199.99

Total sale: \$199.99

Store's cost (70 percent): \$139.99

**Gross profit: \$60.00**

#### **Sale Using Suggestion Selling:**

Point-and-shoot digital camera: \$199.99

Carrying case: \$35.00

Two extra memory cards: \$23.50

Total sale: \$258.49

Store's cost (70 percent): \$180.94

**Gross profit: \$77.55**

That's \$17.55 in additional gross profit—all because suggestion selling was used!

Salespeople who are working on **commission** can increase the amount they earn by using suggestion selling. Consider the average sale of the camera as an example. If the salesperson earned a 10-percent commission, s/he earned \$19.99 in commission on the average sale. However, if the salesperson used suggestion selling, the 10-percent commission would have been \$25.84.

Another reason that suggestion selling is important is that it saves time. Salespeople using this technique do not have to make additional sales presentations for the products they're suggesting. They simply suggest additional goods or services related to the customer's original purchase.

Customer satisfaction is certainly another very important reason to use suggestion selling. As you know, customer satisfaction should be the final outcome of the entire selling process. By suggesting helpful items to customers, salespeople are able to better ensure their customers' satisfaction. This increased satisfaction can result when customers:

- Learn about new goods or services or are reminded of forgotten items
- Save money by getting good bargains
- Save time by not having to return to the business to purchase additional items
- Enhance the appearance or usefulness of other purchases

So remember, three parties can benefit when you use suggestion selling:

1. The company benefits because it can earn additional profits, reduce its inventory more quickly, and obtain the customer's goodwill.
2. The salesperson benefits by increasing the sales total, possibly earning higher commissions, and saving time.
3. The customer benefits by being more satisfied with the purchase, the salesperson, and the company.

### Ideas for suggestion selling

If you are an alert salesperson, you can increase your sales volume by using suggestion selling. Since customers buy a wide variety of products, how will you know what to suggest? Take a look at some possible choices.



**Related products.** A sure-fire technique for suggestion selling is to show a customer a related product that can be used with her/his original purchase. Possible related suggestions include:

- A T-shirt with jeans
- A bowl of soup with a sandwich
- A bottle of wiper fluid with new windshield wipers
- A hotel room with a plane ticket

Can you think of more? A creative salesperson may go beyond the obvious combinations and surprise customers with items they didn't think of.

The following conversation shows how a salesperson suggests related products to a customer who has just purchased his/her first laptop computer:

*Salesperson: "I know you are going to enjoy this laptop. The pre-installed software will allow you to run a variety of programs with ease."*

*Customer: "You're right. I'm anxious to try out all the new features that my old desktop system didn't have."*

*Salesperson: "What are your printing needs?"*

*Customer: "I don't print documents on a daily basis, but I do think it might be nice to have the option if I need it."*

*Salesperson: "May I suggest this wireless printer? It's affordably priced and simple to use."*

*Customer: "I don't know. I hadn't planned to buy one today."*

*Salesperson: "I think it would help you to use the full potential of your new laptop. You can use it not just for printing, but also for making copies, scanning papers or photos, and even sending faxes."*

*Customer: "OK. It sounds like a product I could really use."*

- ▲ What related products could you suggest to a customer who is purchasing a laptop computer?



You might also consider suggesting a related service the business has available for its customers—alterations for clothing, engraving for jewelry, monogramming for luggage and linens, etc.

**Larger quantities.** When items wear down or run out quickly, it is in the customer's best interest for you to suggest buying more of these items at one time. For example, a business that prints a lot of documents goes through paper fast. So, why not suggest that the office manager order a larger box of copy paper this time? The business will ultimately need it, and it certainly won't go to waste.

A great way to suggestion sell a larger quantity is to remind customers of how they can save money. The larger box of copy paper, for instance, may include 5,000 sheets for \$32, whereas the small box includes 500 sheets for \$6. At that price, it would cost almost double to purchase the same amount of paper included in the larger box. Therefore, suggest that the customer purchase the larger box as a better bargain.

**Products for special occasions or seasons.** Most of the time, customers have hidden buying needs—needs they haven't mentioned to you or aren't even thinking about themselves. One way to suggestion sell is to remind customers of upcoming occasions such as Father's Day, graduation, or Valentine's Day. You could say something like this, for example: "Don't forget that the Fourth of July holiday is only a month away. If you're like me, you'll be spending time outdoors at barbecues or pool parties. These sunglasses would look really stylish with the tank top and shorts you just picked out."

**New or additional product uses.** Salespeople who are familiar with their products know what they can do and how they can be used. A desk organizer can also be used to separate cookie sheets and cutting boards inside a kitchen cabinet—why not suggest that your customer buy two? Address labels are great for putting on the inside covers of books you don't want to lose—why not suggest that your customer order an extra roll? By knowing your products thoroughly, you can suggest not just products to your customers, but *ideas!*



- ▲ Seek out your customers' hidden buying needs for upcoming holidays, events, and other occasions. Your customers will thank you for it!

## THE GRAY ZONE

As you might imagine, the salesperson using a suggestion-selling technique may confront many different ethical dilemmas. Here are a few examples:

- A car salesperson wants to increase her sales total and commission by suggestion selling, but she knows her customer is on a very strict budget. Should she make any suggestions at all in this situation?
- A salesperson's manager has urged him to use suggestion selling more often. He's trying to suggest a shirt to go with a customer's jeans choice, but none of the shirts really look good on the customer, and time is running out. Should he suggest something he's not sure is flattering?
- A salesperson for an office-supply provider wants to increase sales totals by suggesting that customers buy in larger quantities; however, the salesperson is new to the company and not yet familiar with client needs. Is it too soon for her to start suggestion selling?

**New products.** Customers are curious. They like to see the new season's clothes, the latest models of popular electronics, improved packaging, imported items, etc. A customer may have made a buying decision about one product, but s/he may not be aware of a new product that might also interest her/him. Show customers new products and suggest that they buy them at this time as well, while the size, color, or model they like is available. Use suggestion selling to keep your customers up to date!

**Higher priced products.** Sometimes, the product a customer wants to purchase comes in different models with added features. Think of the options that may be available on a car, for instance—automated parking assist, heated seats, keyless entry, etc. When different models and features are available, the salesperson should suggest the better quality product and explain the benefits of the higher priced item to the customer. This technique is called **trading-up**. The customer has already made the buying decision, but the salesperson is suggestion selling additional features that the customer might want to purchase as well. Be sure not to pressure customers

### Ideas for suggestion selling

- Related products
- Larger quantities
- Products for special occasions or seasons
- New or additional product uses
- New products
- Higher priced products

into spending more money if they do not need or cannot use the added features. Remember—your primary job is to help them make good buying decisions.

### Summary

Suggestion selling is a sales technique in which a salesperson attempts to increase a customer's purchase by suggesting that s/he buy additional goods or services. Suggestion selling is important because it benefits the customer, the salesperson, and the company. Salespeople might choose to "suggestion sell" related products, larger quantities of the same product, products for special occasions or seasons, products with new or additional uses, new products, or higher priced products.



- ▲ Study the different models and features of your products to successfully use the trading-up technique. Then, you can easily suggest better quality goods and services to customers who want to buy.



1. What is suggestion selling?
2. Why is suggestion selling important?
3. What are some types of products that salespeople might suggestion sell?

# Make a Suggestion

Suggestion selling is an important technique for every salesperson to learn. And, the good news is—it's simple! But, before you put it into practice, keep a few general guidelines about suggestion selling in mind:

**Don't hesitate!** Approach suggestion selling with confidence. Remember that it is a service you're providing to your customers. By suggesting additional products, you are meeting their needs and possibly also saving them time or money. So, don't hesitate to suggestion sell—your customers will appreciate your effort.

**Keep customer needs in mind.** Don't suggest products that the customer can't use. If you're not sure about this, try putting yourself in the customer's shoes. How would you feel if a salesperson were suggesting the same product to you? Would you appreciate the suggestion, or would you feel that the salesperson was just trying to increase the sale?

**Be price-sensitive.** In suggestion selling, the “add-on” product should cost less than the original product. A customer will likely be willing to buy extra tennis balls to go with a new racket, but s/he may not be willing to purchase an entire new tennis wardrobe. Be careful not to suggest products that customers cannot afford. For example, if you are selling a car to a college student on a tight budget, it doesn't make sense to suggest luxury features such as leather seats or a Bose stereo system.

**Limit suggestions to one or two additional products.** Don't go overboard with suggestion selling. If you do, you'll risk confusing or frustrating your customers. Limit your suggestions to just one or two additional products—they should make sense and complement your customer's original buying decision.



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- ▲ Always keep your customer's needs in mind, and don't suggest products that s/he can't use.



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## Ready to suggest

Now, you're ready to put your suggestion selling technique into action. Following these five simple steps can help you on your way.

**Step One**—*Wait until the customer has made a commitment to buy.* Remember, suggestion selling works best when the buying decision has already been made. You don't want to confuse the issue by suggesting new or additional products while the customer is still making up his/her mind. You might lose the sale entirely!

Satisfy the customer's original request first. However, make your suggestion before the original product is paid for and packaged. Otherwise, the customer may reject your suggestion because of the additional time involved in complet-

ing a new sale. In some sales situations, however, your suggestions should be made during the original product presentation to help your customer decide on a purchase, such as presenting a tie with a shirt. As you gain sales experience, you will learn how best to approach each situation.



**Step Two**—Make suggestions with the customer's needs in mind. Once the customer has made a buying decision, it's time for you to make suggestions. Take care that your customers don't feel that you are trying to increase your sales at their expense. Make your suggestions sincere, offering the customers items they need and want. For example, you might say, "Mrs. Collins, you may be interested in a dozen donuts to go along with the coffee cake you just ordered. It will give your bed-and-breakfast guests another option tomorrow."

A salesperson may also phrase a suggestion in the form of a question, such as "Do you want the body of your car to last longer? We can protect it by applying rust and paint protector." Make sure that you explain to the customer the benefits of your suggestion, whether in satisfaction or savings (time or money).

**Step Three**—Make positive and specific suggestions. When using the suggestion-selling technique, your suggestions should be positive, encouraging, and specific. You might say something like, "We also offer a service agreement on the lawnmower that covers repairs after the warranty period runs out." Don't be vague or negative, saying things such as, "Was there anything else today?"

**Step Four**—Show and demonstrate the suggested product. A salesperson should always try to show the product to the customer while making the suggestion.



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- ▲ Whenever possible, demonstrate the suggested product, and give your customers the chance to try it out as well.

## Suggestion-Selling Process

**Step One**—Wait until the customer has made a commitment to buy.

**Step Two**—Make suggestions with the customer's needs in mind.

**Step Three**—Make positive and specific suggestions.

**Step Four**—Show and demonstrate the suggested product.

**Step Five**—Close the sale, reassuring the customer.

For example, bring out the external speakers that can be purchased for the iPod. Plug them in and have the customer listen. In this way, the customer experiences what it would be like to own the speakers, too. Giving the customer hands-on experience with the product is the best way to assure successful selling. If you don't have the product on hand, show a picture of it from an advertisement or catalog. This helps the customer to visualize the product.

**Step Five**—Close the sale, reassuring the customer. Once the customer indicates that s/he is interested in the suggested product in addition to the original product, you should attempt to close the sale by asking her/him to make a buying decision.

After the sale is completed, you should reassure the customer of the buying decisions. You might offer a statement such as, "You'll be so glad you got a facial as well as a massage. You'll leave here feeling so relaxed and refreshed today!"

A successful salesperson is one who uses suggestion selling and offers suggestions correctly. Be an expert—make the original sale, then use the power of suggestion to benefit the customer, the business, and yourself.

## Summary

Suggestion selling is an important technique for every salesperson to learn. To perform this technique well, you should be confident, keep customer needs in mind, be price-sensitive, and limit suggestions to one or two additional products. The steps for suggestion selling are: first, wait until the customer has made a commitment to buy; second, make suggestions with the customer's needs in mind; third, make positive and specific suggestions; fourth, show and demonstrate the suggested product; and, lastly, close the sale, reassuring the customer about his/her buying decision.

## TOTAL RECALL

1. What are some general guidelines for suggestion selling?
2. What are the five steps in the suggestion-selling process?