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## Sales veteran: Five tips to drive new sales despite the pandemic



Dennis Sweeny is a sales consultant with 36 years of experience.

DENNIS SWEENY



By [James Dornbrook](#) – Staff Writer, Kansas City Business Journal  
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The global pandemic made it much harder for businesses to land new prospects, but it's not impossible, said professional sales consultant Dennis Sweeny.

Sweeny is a 36-year sales veteran who specializes in making cold calls, developing strong relationships and landing big new prospects that can have a huge impact on revenue. Sweeny shared five tips for being more successful landing sales during the pandemic.

### **Persistence**

The pandemic really hasn't changed the value of being persistent and thick skinned when it comes to making sales, but it's more important than ever.

"If you're sitting there worried about getting laid off or furloughed or fired, it's easy to get discouraged, but the answer is work hard until the fat lady sings and just keep going," Sweeny said. "I can't tell you how many deals I've closed by just keeping going. It may be harder to find a prospect, but they're out there. We've landed big deals during the pandemic, so it's possible. If you start with three prospects and you have six by the end of the month, your chances of closing a deal just doubled, so keep at it."

### **Pay attention to the market**

Sweeny said it's important to keep in mind that the economy doesn't ever completely shut down. There are always opportunities out there somewhere, if you're paying attention.

While the pandemic is having an adverse effect on restaurants, movie theaters, entertainment and retail stores, other areas of the economy are thriving, such as home improvement, grocery stores, technology, etc...

"One of my clients landed a big opportunity with a company doing Covid testing," Sweeny said. "We got the sale because we noticed the government just threw a ton of money at that. So there are opportunities in the pandemic with companies that are doing well. People are spending more time at home. So you need to look at the markets serving that and see if there are new opportunities there. Maybe there is increased activity that could benefit you."

## **Think long term**

Just because an industry is down right now, doesn't mean it will stay that way forever.

Sweeny said closing a big sales deal can sometimes take 12 to 18 months of persistence, and in that time the pandemic could be over and the market more normal again. So don't completely avoid people you're confident are going to say no right now, but instead use this time to build a strong relationship with them.

"One of the benefits of the pandemic is that a ton of business leaders have more idle time to chat, so your ability to reach them and have a good conversation is easier now and you should be taking advantage of this to form a relationship," Sweeny said. "The whole thing about sales is once you've built a relationship, they'll pick up the phone. If you have three or four conversations during the pandemic, just checking in to see how they're doing, they're going to be more accepting to talk with you after this is all over. If they saw you during the pandemic as caring and easy to talk to, they may not even care what you're selling, they might just want to meet you."

## **Be pleasant**

Sweeny said statistics show 50% of sales people don't call back after one or two rejections. After four or five calls, it's down to 10%. But he said taking a no in stride and being pleasant about it is an attribute prospects appreciate.

"When you get a no from someone and you take it in stride, you are starting to build a relationship with that person," Sweeny said. "When I get a no, I typically say I'd like to call them back in a few months to check in on them. If you're pleasant enough and have good manners, they'll say it's no problem. If you get a no from someone three or four times, but you're still charming – what I call being a pleasant annoyance – people just see you as someone who is hard working. Eventually they will give you a meeting, just because they want to meet the person who took four or five nos from them, but kept coming back. So taking a no in stride can be empowering."

## **Form a strong bond**

When you do get your foot in the door for a meeting with key prospect, don't just dive right into business. Sweeny said the most important thing is to use the opportunity to

gather more information that can help you build a strong relationships. Be genuinely interested in their business by asking about it and learning more about the leaders.

“In the beginning of your relationship, nobody cares about your 28 years of experience and how your dad started the business,” Sweeny said. “They might care later, but in the beginning they don’t care. So first ask them questions about what they’ve been doing, what challenges they face in their company or industry and how they’re consuming your service or product. Keep the focus on them. They’ll appreciate your interest and you can use that information to make a more thoughtful pitch to address their situation.”

It’s also important to build a quick bond with them by asking about their interests, chatting about the weather or discussing their favorite food. Basically, show you’re a human being and not a sales robot.

“Let people know you don’t take yourself too seriously and that you understand the world is a bigger place,” Sweeny said. “Basically, be friendly and find things you've got in common. Those connections are so critical in building a relationship of trust to the point where they’ll consider doing business with you.”