

COMMUNICATING PRODUCT OFFER IN THE PROCESS OF PERSONAL SELLING

Summary: This article explains the essence of personal selling as the primary mean of interpersonal communication being an instrument of the integrated promotion mix next to advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations. Own interpretation of the concept of personal selling is being proposed. The further part of this article characterizes the sales staff members. Personality traits of a good seller have been presented. The study brought closer the importance of managing of sales staff. Article describes the basic functions of management of the sales staff in the enterprise such as planning, organising, motivating and controlling the activity of sellers. The final part of the paper includes a summary.

Keywords: personal selling, sales staff, client, company, enterprise

Introduction

Personal selling is one of the oldest forms of exchange of goods in the world. People involved in the sale are defined as sales representatives, regional sales managers, sales agents, brokers or salesmen. Seller is associated with an insistent person attempting to sell a specific product and, therefore, is not positively welcomed by the environment. With the progress of social development, the social image of a contemporary seller significantly differs from the ideas presented earlier. Most of the specialists in the sale are no longer pushy salesmen, but well educated and properly trained professionals.

In the face of growing internal and external competition, diversity of offered products and the large demands of consumers, the sales of goods and services is a difficult task. A useful solution to the problems of sales turns out to be the creation of the sales force in the company. This solution is chosen mainly by producing companies - Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). Communicating product offering of a company with the use of specialists in the field of direct sales is the strength of the modern enterprise. Retailers add value for customers and maintain long-term relationships with them.

1. The essence and meaning of personal selling

Personal selling by many authors is considered as part of the promotion mix. Next to advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion and public relations it creates a system of integrated marketing communication. Personal selling is one of the oldest forms of exchange of goods in the world. It takes place during the direct contact of the seller and the buyer, which occurs during the presentation of the product range or services to a potential buyer. The aim of direct sales is to encourage the customer to purchase. The literature

on this subject offers many definitions of the term. G. Armstrong and P. Kotler claim that “personal selling is the interpersonal tool set of promotional activities. Retailers of companies create and communicate value to customers through personal interaction with them.”¹ J. Lambin writes about “dialogue with current and prospect buyers and direct transmission of personal messages in order to conduct sales in a short time”². R. Nowacki and M. Strużycki define personal sale as the oldest mean of promotion, which mainly aims to convince and encourage consumers to purchase the promoted goods³. Similar view on the personal selling expresses S. Urban: it is a “direct sale of a product, service or idea by the vendor. It also applies to the presentation of offered goods and services”. He writes further: “personal selling is a form of direct contact between the seller and the customer. A seller may adjust the individual components of marketing to the needs and conditions of specific consumer.” Much space to the issue of personal selling devotes T. Trojanowski⁴. Author defines this concept as a *personal conversation of a trade character with a potential customer consisting in building a positive relationship and presentation of the product offer along with granting any information about the conditions of purchase of a product or service, which in turn, should lead to the conclusion of the purchase transaction*. The issue of personal selling was also outlined by the author in relation to foreign markets⁵. E. J. Przydatek write about personal selling that it is “a system of communication with the market and promotion of sale, which is based on a direct contact of the seller with a potential buyer in order to convince him about the value of the product and the advisability of purchase.”⁶

When analysing the presented definitions it should be noted that a large impact on the sales of products has a direct contact with the buyer. Consumers pay attention to the arguments encouraging to the purchase, as well as the attitude of the seller. If the seller has an interest in the client, is nice for the buyer, he will, without a doubt, purchase the item. Consumer’s decision about purchase depends largely on commercial conversation and attitude of the seller. Usually, consumers do not have specific views on their needs and they do not know what they really want. Everything that is said about the product can create the consumer’s needs, which will surely attract him to purchase. A big advantage for the seller would be to know the needs and expectations of a potential buyer in relation to the presented offer.

2. Personal selling staff members

Leading the discussion about sales promotion, one should pay special attention to those employed in the company as sellers. As sales people should be employed people with the appropriate personality traits, because the profession requires certain abilities and skills. H. Schwalbe believes that “sellers are people having a polite and social sophistication. They

¹ G. Armstrong, P. Kotler, *Marketing wprowadzenie*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2012, p. 574.

² L. Lambin, *Strategiczne zarządzanie marketingowe*, PWN, Warszawa 2001, p. 546.

³ R. Nowacki, M. Strużycki, *Reklama w przedsiębiorstwie*, Difin, Warszawa 2002.

⁴ T. Trojanowski, *International promotion mix*, [in:] *Zintegrowana działalność promocyjna na rynkach krajowych i międzynarodowych*, ed. A. Pabian, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Zarządzania Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa 2010, p. 25-27.

⁵ Idem, *The essence and importance of personal selling in market globalisation*, Podnikova Ekonomika a Management, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Zilinie, Zilina 2012, p. 135-136.

⁶ E. Przydatek, J. Przydatek, *Promocja*, WSIP, Warszawa 1999, p. 96.

think positively and this is how they treat their duties and responsibilities. They are vital, energetic and love their profession.”⁷ Optimism and positive thinking are very important features of a good seller. Open attitude of the seller may positively influence a potential buyer, causing a great facility in direct contact. Relying on the opinion of D. Mayer and H. Greenberg it should be noted that success in sales depends on the ability to empathize with others and on intrinsic motivation in the pursuit of success. The combination of these two features leads to the achievement of better results⁸.

A good salesperson should have the ability to listen to his interlocutor. In addition, is patient and listens the client with interest, without interrupting his speech. He should also ensure not to divagate much from the main aim of the conversation. It is also important to show the client that he listens with interest. Excellent seller to some extent, should identify the views and concerns of the buyer, admitting he was right. At the same time during a sales call, should avoid topics related to politics or religion, and do enter to the other issues on which both sides of the conversation may have a different opinion. Professional seller needs to have knowledge of an offer and the conditions of its purchase, should be a communicative person with a positive attitude to people. A. Pabian indicates that people employed as sales should be⁹:

- nice and polite,
- patient,
- positive towards the interlocutor,
- communicative,
- convincing,
- energetic,
- reliable,
- mentally resistant,
- persistent.

Possession of the listed personality traits by the seller certainly make the trade negotiations much easier, which will contribute to the achievement of success in direct sales.

Leading the discussion of personal selling, in addition to characterising the silhouette of an excellent seller, it should also be noted that success in sales will be difficult to achieve without specifying the commerce conversation aim. Before the conversation, the seller should specify the purpose of the interview, which he will aim at during personal contact with the buyer. Objective should not be disclosed to the client. Most often, the objective is to bring the conversation to purchase a product or service. However, the aim of conversation does not have to be just selling the product, it can be e.g. obtaining the consent of the retail outlets to set additional exposure of the goods in the main shopping district and extending the range of new flavours. These types of issues are also the subject of discussions with of the vendor with the client.

In order to obtain the efficiency of the trade talks, sellers often take different types of trainings in sales psychology, merchandising, and trade negotiations, which turn out to be helpful in dealing with buyers. Raising the sales staff qualifications is an important from the point of view of the organisation element of the company's sales strategy. Professionally

⁷ H. Schwalbe, *Marketing w małych i średnich firmach*, Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warszawa 1993, p. 204.

⁸ D. Mayer, H. Greenberg, *Co czyni człowieka dobrym sprzedawcą*, Wydawnictwo HBRP 2012, numer 118/119.

⁹ A. Pabian, *Marketing szkoły wyższej*, Wydawnictwo ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2005, p. 269.

trained and well prepared to fulfil its responsibilities sales staff contributes to the expansion of market share of the company and therefore the costs incurred for training should be considered by managers as a good investment in the future of the organisation.

An important factor in the work of the seller is the appearance. Well groomed dealer is well received by the customer and makes a positive impression. Neat people feel more confident, which has a positive effect on the course of business contacts. Appearance of the seller is somewhat a flagship of an organisation, the client, based on the external appearance of a merchant, can create an image of a company that the seller represents. The right look and dress create a positive impression. Citing research carried out by D. McCorman it should be noted that most customers do not make a purchase transaction with people whose dress and manner of speaking are very different from their own¹⁰.

3. Chosen aspects of management of sales staff

Reasonably conducted business sales activity should include, inter alia, planning, organising, motivating including the management and control of the activity of dealers. Management therefore plays an important role in the organisation and “refers to the process of performing certain things, efficiently and effectively, in conjunction with other people, and through them.”¹¹ Decisions referring to the management of sales staff include determining the objectives, strategy and organisational structure, recruitment and selection, training, supervision and evaluation of sales staff in the company¹².

The first step in managing the sales staff is planning. One of the main issues in the area of planning is to determine the purpose of the vendors. The most commonly defined tasks of retailers include, among others¹³:

- finding new customers (identification and acquisition of potential buyers)
- communication (informing consumers about the company products)
- sales (direct conversation with the customer, product offer presentation, overcoming objections and doubts, transaction closing)
- service (providing the customer additional services, such as consulting problems, technical support, determination the conditions of delivery, payment date, the determination of the amount of trade credit)
- gathering information (conducting market research, preparation of reports from commercial visits).

In addition to the tasks to be performed by vendors we can add, for example, the introduction of new products for sale, determination of the effectiveness of visits at the level of 70%, arranging products on shelves in order, or establishing additional exposure of goods. In the implementation of the sales plan the relevant planning of work is very helpful. The seller, after receiving the tasks, should think about how he will be able to put it into practice.

Planning sales activities aims to determine the objectives and identify the best ways to achieve them. A properly prepared sales business plan will answer the following issues¹⁴:

¹⁰ D. McCorman, *Sztuka sprzedaży*, Wydawnictwo Astrum, Wrocław 1995, p. 13.

¹¹ S. Robbins, D. DeCenzo, *Podstawy zarządzania*, PWE, Warszawa 2002, p. 32.

¹² P. Kotler, *Marketing podręcznik europejski*, PWE, Warszawa 2002, p. 925.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 925.

¹⁴ A. Pabian, *Zrównoważony marketing nowym wyzwaniem dla personelu kierowniczego polskich przedsiębiorstw*, PWE, Warszawa 2002, p. 100.

- what needs to be done in this area,
- who should carry it out,
- how it should be made,
- when,
- where,
- what resources will be needed for the proper completion of the sales.

The next step in the proper completion of the sale is the organisation of sales personnel. The organisational structure of sales personnel depends on the strategy adopted by the company. If you sell one product line in one industry while dispersed customers, the company adopts the structure of territorial sales staff. If the company sells many products for many types of clients, you probably will use the product structure or the structure of the group of buyers, possibly mixed structure which is a combination of both of these structures¹⁵.

Territorial structure of the sales staff consists in assigning vendor a specific area of activity, in which he is selling products of the company. The presented form of organisational structure is the simplest way to organise sales staff and has many advantages. Another type of organisation of work of the sales staff is to adopt the structure of the product. Sellers need to know the product. In the case of a very extensive offer of the company's products, knowledge of all the products causes a lot of inconvenience in the deep understanding of the advantages and characteristics of the products, indicating a defect of the organisational strategy of the sales staff. Another type of organisation is to adopt a strategy sales staff by groups of buyers. A separate group of vendors can be assigned to individual sectors, supporting current clients can be separated from finding new customers or to extract large or medium-sized customers. Organising structure of sales according to purchasing groups enables the company to focus on customer needs. Company ABB producing equipment for industry, changed the structure of the sales from the product sales into the structure of the group of buyers. Changes in the structure led to a stronger customer orientation and service improvement. The fourth type of work organisation of sales staff is a complex sales structure. Adoption of the structure of the organisation of work is beneficial when the company sells a wide range of products to many types of customers in a wide geographic area. Seller can work with the territory and the product, according to the territory and the market, by product and by market or by territory, product and market¹⁶.

Organisation of company sales personnel depends on the needs of clients. Each company must decide on the organisational strategy, which in the best way will contribute to meet the needs of customers.

Organising work of the sales staff involves the acquisition of human, physical and financial resources. P. Zasepa indicates a wide range of sources of obtaining funds for the commercial activities of the company¹⁷.

Effective communication of product listings will not be possible without the use of appropriate incentive system addressed to the sales staff. Motivation is one of the functions of management and aims at bringing about employees to be highly engaged in the performance of their duties. Their actions should help to improve the performance of tasks

biorstw, [in:] *Zarządzanie działalnością marketingową w skali krajowej, międzynarodowej i globalnej*, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Zarządzania Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa 2011, p. 258.

¹⁵ P. Kotler, *Marketing podręcznik...*, op. cit., p. 927.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 927-929.

¹⁷ P. Zasepa, *Venture capital – sposoby dezinwestycji*, Wydawnictwo CeDeWu, Warszawa 2010, p. 17-20.

in order to improve or strengthen the market position of the company in which they work. Motivating employees can take two forms, namely, financial or non-financial. Financial incentives are one of the most desirable form of prizes. This form of motivation include the additional payment vouchers, cash bonuses, material prizes. In addition to financial gratification sales staff can be inspired to work through a variety of non-financial elements of motivation. The most common forms of non-financial incentives include the possibility of advancement, participation in training in the scope of sales, tours, free health care, and team building. Experience of the author in the direct sales leads to the conclusion that the most common forms of motivating of sales staff are financial bonuses to the basic salary. The premium amount depends on the sales generated by the vendor.

Motivating staff members for many entrepreneurs is seen as an additional cost. Such an assumption does not entirely have rational reasons, it should be seen as a good investment in the future of the company. Motivating staff by, for example, funding training means improving the qualifications of employees, which will translate into effective communication and sales of the company products.

The last primary function of management is to control the sales staff. The essence of control is to establish best practices, and then confronting them with actually carried out work. If irregularities are found in the sales staff, they need to be corrected. The positive trends in the communication processes of product listings should be reinforced. These actions should be developed in the planning stage, one have to determine what, when and how it will be inspected, who will provide the control and who will be controlled. After the inspection a report must be created. The report should indicate, inter alia, irregularities which were detected during the inspections and fields for improvement or development. Proper control should be characterised by objectivity, simplicity, rigor and usefulness.

The presented sales staff management aspects form the basis of a reasonable business activity in the field of communication and sales of products to potential customers. Conducting personal sales without the described action is doomed to failure. Developing strategy for the sales activities should include all four management functions provided. Omission in the sales activities of even one function or the use of some of them selectively leads to the failure of communication and sales of company products.

Conclusion

The most effective form of communicating the company's product offering is personal selling. Direct contact of the seller with a potential client gains a significant advantage over the other instruments used in the process of communicating the product. As a result of direct contact with the client of the vendor with the client interpersonal relationships are formed, which have a significant impact on the purchase of a particular manufacturer. Positive association of the seller also affects the positive image of the organisation.

Personal selling is an interesting international phenomenon. In the United States occupation of the seller is highly regarded and well paid. Specialists in personal sales are sought after in the labour market. People who work as vendors enjoy the prestige and social recognition. In Poland, personal selling, among other things, is associated with the acquisition,

visiting potential clients in their own homes, and persuading to buy unnecessary things. Due to the number of promotional activities carried out by retailers, their work contributes to customer acquisition, which in the future may turn into a group of regular customers. For the company sales staff is the most valuable resource of organisation, for which a company should care.

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KOMUNIKOWANIE OFERTY PRODUKTOWEJ W PROCESACH SPRZEDAŻY OSOBISTEJ

Streszczenie: W artykule wyjaśniono istotę sprzedaży osobistej jako podstawowego środka komunikacji interpersonalnej wchodzącego w instrumentarium zintegrowanej promocji mix obok reklamy, promocji sprzedaży, marketingu bezpośredniego i public relations. Zaproponowano własną interpretację pojęcia sprzedaży osobistej. W dalszej części artykułu scharakteryzowano personel sprzedaży. Wskazano między innymi na cechy osobowościowe dobrego sprzedawcy. W opracowaniu przybliżono znaczenie zarządzania personelem sprzedaży. Opisano podstawowe funkcje zarządzania personelem sprzedaży w przedsiębiorstwie, takie jak planowanie, organizowanie, motywowanie oraz kontrolę działalności sprzedawców. W końcowej części opracowania zawarto podsumowanie.

Słowa kluczowe: sprzedaż osobista, personel sprzedaży, klient, przedsiębiorstwo