

Strategic B2B-Sales for Academics

Sales processes and total solutions for
high-tech products and services

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An unequal pair only at first glance

When Peter Demes took on his first management responsibilities in sales in 1986, Hinnerk Rohwedder was not even born yet. While one gained experience in the USA as a division manager, the other was learning to walk, talk and write. The latter, in particular, was to become invaluable almost 20 years later when the two decided to write a book together.

But how did it get this far – and how can that work with more than 30 years of sales and management experience on the one hand and not much more than 30 days of professional experience on the other?

In 2014, their paths crossed for the first time: as neighbors in Göttingen. Peter Demes had his consultancy in the same house where Hinnerk Rohwedder lived after completing his master's degree in political science. From here; he started his first job in corporate communications for a life science company in Göttingen. After that, neighborliness turned into friendship and, finally, this joint project came about.

The idea of combining the experience of one with the questions of the other was appealing from the beginning. The idea grew in Peter Demes to present sales, with its central tasks and interpersonal relationships, for a young, scientifically minded audience in a concise and comprehensible manner. His vision, however, was not a classic 'beginner's book' with which entrants can master the first weeks in a sales job but to present his sales know-how in a condensed and understandable way. In weekly 'editorial conferences', the B2B workshop content that had been successfully introduced to customers over many years met with the fresh, unbiased view of Hinnerk Rohwedder, a 'young professional' who had only a very vague idea of sales at the beginning of the collaboration.

The central hypothesis of this rather unusual collaboration is that if one young professional can understand it and write it down, other young academics can read it and implement it directly.

For!

Daniela, Pia and Sophia



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¹ These links open an external website or email with the email address provided.



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Equal treatment is important to me. For the purpose of easier readability, I have nevertheless chosen the masculine form exclusively in this book, which in no way implies any discrimination against other genders. Corresponding terms apply in principle to all.



Foreword

This is a deep-dive sales book especially for students and academics of any discipline² who want to enter professional life with a sales job, are thinking about it, or have already made the step. If you have chosen this path or wish to do so, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your decision!

For all those who have already assumed sales management responsibility, this book offers a good foundation for being more successful with a team of well-trained employees. For many companies, corporate success in the coming years will depend increasingly on their ability to deliver, as well as on the performance of their sales team. Therefore, it will be indispensable to position the best employees at the interface between one's sales department and the procurement office at the customer.

From my many years of sales and management experience with academics, I know there is excellent potential for sales in you and what you bring to the table. You quickly understand your customers technical and business processes and are then able to communicate with them at eye level – you speak and understand the language of your customers. You see yourself as a problem solver, know your products and then have the answers ready for a wide variety of customer requirements. This is an optimal base! Because in the age of comparable product and service quality, mere 'performance shows' are hardly suitable for winning new customers or keeping existing customers in the long term. As a sales representative, I understand what the customer is planning and how my products bring benefit to his processes. Then I can work with him on optimization. I have to recognize what kind of results he is looking for and contribute to that. To give the customer the necessary security and a high degree of trust that he requires, I offer him a comprehensive, very individual customer- and solution-oriented consulting service, which clearly stands out from that of the competitors.

A fact that does not make your job any easier is that purchasing decisions are rarely made by individuals anymore. Often, sales representatives are faced with a team of experts, procurement teams (also called 'buying centers'³). They consist of a group of employees from the client company and are primarily responsible for a possible purchasing decision. The better you know and understand each of these people and the better you involve them individually in the sales process, the more successful your projects will be. In the course of your work, you will nevertheless have the experience of losing projects even though you are delighted with your own performance and cannot quite identify the reason. If I had been asked in the early days of my sales career why an order was won or lost, I would probably have shrugged my shoulders as well. Today I know, on the one hand, that I invested a lot of work in projects that were doomed to fail from the start and that I missed out on lucrative orders that I could have secured with little effort according to my current level of knowledge. On the other hand, through an analysis of lost orders that I have carried out myself over the years, I have uncovered typical 'mistakes' that a sales representative can make with the customer, and which can lead to rejection. So, to help accelerate your first years of selling, to not make some of my mistakes, and to reach your targets more easily than I was able to do thirty years ago, I will show you the typical reasons for order losses as well as possible countermeasures. I will detail how you can best reach and involve the participants on a human level.

Let's get to the point: your primary goal is to achieve your sales targets against all odds and thus to be able to secure your full commission and bonus entitlement for yourself in the long term. In addition, you do not want to be at the bottom of the annual sales statistics compared to your colleagues, and even less,

² It is suitable for technical and commercial careers and for all other disciplines equally. For example, the book is aimed at students of business administration and economics, biology, biotechnology, chemistry, e-technology, ethnology, forestry, geology, computer science, engineering, mathematics, medicine, ecotrophology, oenology, pharmacy, physics, law, sociology – just to name all those with whom I have had the pleasure of working personally in sales.

³ The term procurement team became established in the 1970s. More information on the buying center is provided by [Wikipedia 'Buying center'](#).

do you want to get into the typical year-end stress – when it becomes clear that the high top-down targets can no more be achieved. The wild actionism in sales that are then often initiated, consisting of rhetoric training, objection handling, guaranteed new customer acquisition, ‘Today everything is different: Sales 2.0/3.0/4.0’, manipulation, programming and so on, is at best a helpless attempt to avoid the actual sales task. A task that requires and makes it possible to be always in control of one's success.

In my opinion, such procedures are not only the reason why sales still have a reputation in society for door-to-door canvassing, but they are also counterproductive in most cases. As a salesperson, it is your job to carry out as many result-relevant projects as possible so that you are not under pressure at the end of the year. And it is your task to build up a business relationship with your customers at eye level, within which both sides can profit. Forced deals, with which the client is dissatisfied after a period of consideration, are nothing more than a flash in the pan, which is often associated with a great deal of effort. My experience shows that a functioning, sustainable and lasting business relationship is always built on respectful, fair sales work for – and not against – the customer and one's own company. Despite pressing short-term sales targets, sales representatives are therefore well advised to focus their attention not only on the first but also on the second and third order of their customer.

This book contains more than three decades of experience in field sales with over twenty years of management experience in national and international sales, and I would like to give you the opportunity to benefit from it. With the contained knowledge about the sales process, customer value, and the very crucial mental success factors, you can develop yourself, optimize your sales skills and achieve your goals for yourself personally without depending on the support of others – no matter in which company you are currently working. It will help you to see through structures and, building on this understanding, to connect your work with your personal benefit. You will recognize in which areas you have so far invested too much work with too little prospect of success, how to balance the effort and benefit of your activities and how to identify result-relevant projects that deserve and get your full attention.

With the insights from this book, you will be able to make your sales activities much more economical, on an interpersonal level even more valuable, thus maximizing your chances of success. In the long run, this success will no longer be overlooked in the company, and your colleagues will begin to look to you for guidance. This is often how sales leadership begins. If then, you feel that sales could become your profession, this book would have proven worthwhile for both you and me.

I hope you will enjoy the reading and the implementation of your findings as much as we enjoyed the writing. And I look forward to discussions and exchange of experience with you – feel free to get in touch at any time!

Yours, Dr. Peter Demes



Introduction and content structure

I personally don't like the word 'sales professional'. Nobody would call a good doctor a 'medical professional' or a good lawyer a 'legal professional.' The label sales professional assumes that sales is not a full-fledged profession but rather a questionable talent. It also implies the idea that the sales professional does not care whether his client ultimately benefits from the service he has acquired or not. And that he achieves his goal, the conclusion of the deal, if necessary, at the customer's burden. Even today, one hears comparisons from older colleagues such as: 'You can throw a real sales professional out the back door and he will come back through the front', 'A sales professional can sell ice to an Eskimo'. The sales experts we will be talking about here behave fundamentally differently.

Advancement of digitalization in e-commerce in particular, have increasingly placed sales under pressure: product data and information are now available to customers in real time and from all suppliers. They must already be of high quality online, for a supplier to even be shortlisted as a deliverer. The contact times with the customer are currently becoming shorter and shorter and I, as a sales representative, have only very limited possibilities to negotiate with the customer at all and to convince him of my services. For this task, well-trained and humanly competent employees are needed who feel called to do an all-around good job. Sales today and in the future means consciously placing the customer even more at the center of the sales negotiation. With his results-oriented advice, the sales representative addresses the customer's interests and needs and creates added value for all parties involved – personally and digitally. Therein lies the chance for sales to completely free themselves from the stereotypical sales representative image and be accepted as a fully-fledged business partner.

Procurement teams of the customers are usually composed of representatives from different departments and with different functions. They can comprehensively illuminate the various facets of a customer's purchasing decision from a technical and business management point of view based on shared knowledge and experience. Its members can be the persons whose specialized department will later work with the product, technicians who are responsible for the support. Or employees from the purchasing department with legal expertise who assess contracts still to be concluded, as well as employees from controlling who keep an eye on the financing of the costs incurred. At this point, it becomes necessary to identify the individual needs of each person involved in the decision and meet these needs, if necessary, with the support of one's own sales team. In addition to technical competence, this requires a high degree of social competence from the sales representative. Because it is his task to work out the individual goals (of all those involved!) in connection with the company's goals and to design his solution to be as compatible as possible. For this, a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of human action in the sales process is indispensable: because this is where technology is sold to people – and technical logic, i.e., technology, meets human reason, i.e., psychology. Those who want to master this balancing act between technology and psychology in the sales process must switch from technical to psychological logic at the right time and vice versa. The interpersonal struggle for the best individual solution often seems unpredictable and arbitrary. Therefore, this change between levels is a point at which many sales staff resign and withdraw out of self-protection. Experienced colleagues know, however, that distribution is a profoundly logical process that follows general structural rules – technological and psychological in equal measure. This is an essential insight that you will come across again and again in this book. It will enable you to shape the interplay between the procurement teams of your target customers and the colleagues of your sales team ever more positively and effectively. I will show you the importance of the mental success factors in the sales process and make the knowledge about them comprehensible, tangible and, above all, applicable. I help you to recognize and understand the different interests of the individual people involved – which, if overlooked, can significantly complicate the realization of your projects.

And I will provide you with tools to analyze these interests, to record them in a structured way and to integrate them promisingly into your sales process. I will also show you how you can draw conclusions about the activities of your competitors from the behavior of your target customers during the sales process.

The formal structure and the rules of the sales process can be acquired in two ways. On the one hand, by 'learning by doing': This will set you on a long and quite rocky path because you don't have clear directions and perhaps nobody to support you. This will cause you to understand your successes and failures only gradually along your way and not make appropriate adjustments. On the other hand, you can also achieve this by familiarizing yourself theoretically with the sales process and learning its procedures and contents. This will make it a little easier for you to identify, qualify and successfully implement result-relevant projects right at the beginning. I want to allow you to do this through a detailed description and breakdown of the individual process steps. You will then be able to confidently identify the purchase decision-makers and the purchase influencers in your priority-projects and understand them both in their function and in their inner motivations and personal goals. This structured approach to the sales profession enables you to work constantly and sustainably with all those involved, both at the client's and in your own company. If you like, you can work with focused action plans that immediately give you and your client significant advantages in terms of your planning reliability, especially when larger teams are working together. This leads to a considerably reduced effort per deal and thus inevitably increases the closing rate.

I would like to convince you to use a 'roadmap' to accompany the implementation of every complex sales project. It will guide you in a structured way through your sales process's individual procedures and represents a control matrix for the entire project. This sales roadmap serves as a basis and guide for the topics dealt with here. Among other benefits, it helps you and your team to keep a detailed overview of critical project data and the people involved, to be clear about open questions, to be able to go into customer meetings together well prepared, and to decide when a project proves to be unprofitable, and the sales team should make a no-go decision. The roadmap aims to provide you with a ubiquitous structure that you can adapt and use individually for yourself and your personal sales channel. Furthermore, the collected data of each roadmap will lead you to your main success factors and thus to a more direct and more manageable selection of projects that are relevant for your success: if used long-term and consistently, you can develop a professional feeling for the realization probability of tasks and you can significantly increase your chances of sales success in an equally long term and consistent manner.

Another important aspect that I encounter again and again and that is often not addressed: Through working with sales representatives, I have come to realize that only authentic sales by authentic people is permanently successful – because that is the only thing customers accept in the long run. Polished rhetoric and sales pitches are a stereotypical image of a salesperson, which hopefully you don't want to be, and most clients don't want you to be either. Learning to be a salesperson is in no way about changing your personality, but on the contrary, it is about retaining your authenticity as much as possible for the sales negotiation: because sales success is based precisely on the individuality and authenticity of the employees, combined with up-to-date knowledge of the sales process. In this combination, there is no more successful method than your own. Manipulation techniques and all kinds of programming would not only rob you of a lot of energy but additionally, take away the power of your personality. However, if you work with your natural strengths, you do not need to reprogram or fundamentally change yourself. You are the way you are – and you should stay that way.

Content structure

Chapter 1 starts with basic terms and background knowledge, the challenges of our time, and factors that determine success and failure in B2B sales. From Lost Order Reports of more than ten years, you will get a detailed analysis of lost projects from the customer and sales perspective, which can provide you with valuable information and approaches for your work. In **chapter 2**, I will introduce you to some common sales methods and the logical structure of the sales process step by step. Starting with the possibilities and limitations of digital customer relationship management systems (CRM systems), I will then briefly introduce my sales roadmap, which can be used to capture complex sales processes in a structured and straightforward way. In **chapter 3** we delve deeper into the sales process and look at the success factors focusing on the personal-individual and interpersonal aspects. With the identification and the qualification of a project, which stand at the beginning of every sales process, two sections are considered that are of great importance for an economical approach to the sales success. With the procurement team, the direct contacts in the client company are identified and analyzed – this takes place in the third phase. The customer benefit is always at the center of the activity. Further success factors are the early and constant view of the target market and the close observation of active and lost projects during a business year, which can be implemented well with the help of a ‘sales funnel’. I will show you how to transfer all the sales process steps into the roadmap and how to apply them concretely in **chapter 4**. Here you will get everything you need to be able to analyze and record basic information, individual motivations and attitudes of each buying influencer and decision-maker, strengths and weaknesses of your own company, the project, and the competition, as well as the customer interests in the respective sales situation. You will also learn how to design appropriate action plans. **Chapter 5** is dedicated to the question: ‘Why do the participants behave the way they do?’ This chapter deals with the basics of human behavior and the central psychological aspects that you will encounter again and again in your sales activities. Keeping this knowledge in mind in your (business) relationships can make many situations easier. The following **conclusion** summarizes some of the central ideas of the book: From sales in an academic context to the fundamentally vital willingness to learn from one's own mistakes and lost orders, which can determine success or failure in projects. To the often-underestimated high complexity of the sales process with its very essential aspect: interpersonal relationships. From the sales roadmap as a recommended and proven application tool to the necessity of staying true to your chosen projects even under sales pressure, to a psychological excursion into the personalities to be able to understand the behavior of those involved better and better.

You will find a small bonus at the end of the book: a video with the topic ‘Review and outlook taking into account the current economic situation’.