

ANDY MALITZ

Executive Director, Taste of Hudson

By Christopher Jones and Amy Wood

We have learned many aspects of personal selling throughout the semester. Whether it was studying for exams, watching videos, or preparing for role plays in front of the class. What better way of taking our education further than to have the opportunity to sit down with a business professional for an interview? We sat down with Andy Malitz, executive director from the taste of Hudson, to learn more about his profession and how he uses personal selling every day. In this interview, we have asked Andy a series of questions that let us get a feel for his style of selling as well as his personality.

Us: Good morning Andy, Thanks for taking time out of your extraordinarily busy schedule to meet with us today.

Andy: Of course! I'm more than happy to help you out.

Us: Yes, with the Taste of Hudson quickly approaching, I imagine you've been extremely busy. You've built this event from scratch. Could you tell me a bit more about this?

Andy: Yes, I started the Taste of Hudson exactly ten years ago in 2004. It has grown to become one of Ohio's premier Labor Day Weekend Events. Ten years ago I had a vision of creating an event that would bring together my loves of food, art, and entertainment. And in the process I've been able to help local businesses, non-profit groups, and civic organizations. It was a matter of taking my existing skill set as a marketer and sales person and selling my dream to the city and everyone who contributes to the success of this event.



Us: So, without your sales and marketing experience, this couldn't have happened?

Andy: Absolutely not. My main job is to sell this event. Without sales none of this would be possible. In a way, everything is selling.

Us: Even the logistics?

Andy: Is that not commerce? Who are my vendors? Who is organizing and running this thing? Resources are limited and access means selling.



“IN A WAY, EVERYTHING IS SELLING”

Us: Could you tell me a bit more about your responsibilities as Executive Director of the Taste of Hudson?

Andy: Yes, being Executive Director means a lot of prospecting for eligible vendors. Once I find these vendors then I have to contact them and try to align their needs with my event. The goal is provide value for the vendor, for the patron, and for the community at large. It extends beyond just selling vendor space. I then have to market this event to provide value in the event itself. Marketing is just selling to a crowd.

Us: I like what you said there. Please, tell me about the experiences that led you to this conclusion.

Andy: I earned my degree in “General Studies” from Kent State University in 1978. During that time I was on the All Campus Programming Board. This is where I first gained experience in organizing large events and the art of sales. From there, my first big job in sales was with the Cleveland Cavaliers where I managed all ticket sales and client services aspects. I had a staff of over twenty employees and a revenue budget of over twenty-eight million dollars. I was with them for twelve years.

Us: Wow, where did you go from there?

Andy: I moved on to a Marketing consulting firm called John Klein & Associates. There I managed a staff of four sales people to sell direct marking programs and services.

Us: So, you were sales people selling your ability to sell. That’s impressive.

Andy: I guess so, but it makes sense if you think about it. Selling is a very specialized function. And sales people are most adept at getting business by doing what they do best. Many other professionals didn’t have the time to invest in developing their ability to sell. So, even someone with the best product or service in the world won’t very much if any without skills in sales. This is where companies like John Klein come in.

Us: That does make sense. But, you seem like a man who follows your passions. Did you enjoy working as a gun for hire?

Andy: It was a valuable experience. But you’re right.
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Andy (cont.): I wanted to be doing what I loved so I signed on with the Cleveland Crunch. I was vice-president of their sales and service force. I stuck around for a couple years. Then moved into a position with Akron General Lifestyle which was a wellness company. I learned a lot in the seven years I spent here. Our goal was to sell fitness memberships, but it’s not as trivial as that sounds. There was a focus on community outreach and managing major events held by our facility.

Us: I’m curious to know more about what sort of challenges you faced here.

Andy: Sure, the big challenge here was selling to people who weren’t necessarily interested in wellness. It was either doctor ordered or otherwise. We had to re-brand fitness into wellness and remove the fear people had of fitness centers as a haven for macho dudes who spend their days flexing in front of mirrors. Our community outreach efforts were a very big part of this. In a culture where a sedentary lifestyle is the norm, diabetes is on the rise, and most people are stuck sitting behind a desk all day it should have been easy to convince people to purchase fitness memberships. However, it seems like people forget they need to move. Exercise is work, which we all have enough of. So, it was a pretty intensive re-branding and outreach program which ultimately proved successful.



“OUR GOAL WAS TO SELL FITNESS MEMBERSHIPS, BUT IT’S NOT AS TRIVIAL AS THAT SOUNDS.”



Us: And then you moved on to the Taste of Hudson?

Andy: (laughs) Yes, but it wasn’t a complete one-eighty from Akron General Lifestyles. If you look at the end result, I’ve found a way to get people out of their houses and into the community. It is one of the regions **best** culinary, lifestyles, and entertainment festivals. This is where my experience and ability to prospect proved invaluable. The Akron Children’s Hospital is one of our largest sponsors. I’ve brought together countless different entities and institutions for the common cause of promoting local businesses, artists, and building community.

Us: I see what you’re saying, it is an amazing event. What would you say is the most difficult part of organizing an event of this magnitude? And the best?

Andy: The most difficult? Making sure everything gets done. So in a sense, the non-sales aspects of the position. I enjoy meeting with people, working with them to create and develop ideas and then planning the entire event. But, then everything has to be overseen. Things don’t always go according to plan. But, I’d say the best part is when they do. There is no better feeling that seeing the finished product come together. When people are enjoying themselves. And there is also pretty good money in it too.

“MARKETING IS JUST SELLING TO A CROWD”

Us: Could you tell me a bit more about the salary for a sales person? What can an imminent grad such as myself expect to make one day?

Andy: I’ll tell you, the sky is the limit. But, on the low-end you could be stuck selling Bibles door-to-door. College should give you the skills, credentials, and network you need to sell yourself to a large company who can pay you a lot to sell their product. Or if you have an entrepreneurial spirit, you can go into business for yourself as a sales consultant or make your own product. Just look at the pet rock. An effective sales person made that a multi-million dollar product. They did nothing more than create added value for a rock and people were only too happy to buy one. So, it’s really up to you to decide how much you want to make.

Us: With companies like Amazon and Google using artificial intelligence to predict what shoppers will want and then automatically promote these products, do you think there is a future in sales?

Andy: Absolutely! The role of a sales person is way more than just putting desirable products in front of people. A full-service sales person prospects for clients who may find some benefit in their product, which a computer can and already does. But the magic comes in when the sales person uses their creativity to find applications or solutions that the client didn’t think of. Even then a computer can suggest applications based on a search history, but it’s just not human. It doesn’t provide the same experience or level of service as an artificial intelligence offers. And it never will.

Us: Now that I think about it, who do you think will be needed to create sales-bot? A sales person. It’s still a sales position but in a very different sense of the word.

Andy: I guess that’s true. But, even they won’t eliminate traditional sales positions. Sales is about building connections, solving problems, and creating value. These are things that computers can’t do as well as people.

Us: I can agree with that. So, what is your advice to a new graduate looking to get into sales?

Andy: Just get out there and do it. Success begets success and no matter where you start, you will begin to meet people and you will be demonstrating your skills as a sales person. You will also get better with experience and that will translate into success and better paying sales positions. Don’t be afraid to use your contacts and don’t be afraid to approach people who aren’t your contacts.



Us: Do you have any tips for closing a sale?

Andy: At the point that you are closing, just keep your end goal in mind and you will subconsciously direct the customer towards a purchase. However, never too soon. Pay attention to the customer for non-verbal cues that signal interest and their desire to buy. And there is nothing wrong with asking if a person is ready to buy. Some people are afraid to take that step and really require you to walk them through it.

Us: That *seems* so common sense.

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Andy: I wish it were. There would be a lot more effective sales people in the world and a lot less idiots making a bad name for sales people.

Us: So then how to you deal with difficult objections?

Andy: Remind the customer in a roundabout way that you are only trying to help them solve their problem. You are no longer then enemy or adversary when you do this. You are their ally in a quest for solutions. Then they will be more likely to work with you and hopefully in understanding the value in your product as a solution.

Us: Sales seems to be about a state of mind. Customer-centric, value creating, and problem-solving. This makes me wonder about the type of person to maintain this attitude. What is your favorite album of all time?

Andy: Ah, well I don’t know if it will make you a better sales person. But, Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon will always stand above the rest in my eyes. It was brilliantly composed, pointed out the fleetingness and depravity of human life, and made me want different for myself. It is the quintessential rock album.



Us: I have to agree with you there. Would sharing your love of Dark Side of the Moon be enough to make you want to hire me as a sales person?

Andy: Ahaha, it wouldn’t hurt. But, if you’re wondering what I’m looking for in a sales person. It’s the ability to get things done, be self-motivated, and to really be able to grasp what is going on and communicate it well.

Us: So a repertoire of sales tricks up my sleeve won’t help?

Andy: It might hurt. People see through insincerity. Now there are tricks and there are techniques. There is nothing wrong with knowing several techniques for introducing yourself to a potential customer. Just make sure you use it sincerely.

Us: I’m really looking forward to applying your advice. I kind of want to go out and sell something right now.

Andy: Go for it. Practice makes perfect. And, as I said before, you may make some valuable contacts in the process.

Us: Thank you so much Andy for your time.

Andy: Glad to help.

This interview was conducted by Amy Wood and Christopher Jones for their Spring 2014 Personal Selling course for Professor Howell.