**Sales Strategy**

If your business involves selling a product, you are probably looking for ways to improve sales. A sales strategy will focus your efforts on your most important customer audiences, existing or potential.

Here are the most important things to keep in mind when designing a sales strategy.

* **Create a sales plan.** Having a document that outlines your sales goals and strategies will help you to stay on track and assess your progress. As you begin to define your sales plan, keep these things in mind:
  + **Sales goals:** These goals should be specific and measurable, not something like selling a million units. Base them on the nature of your product and try to break them down into manageable parts. For example, sell 50 units to end-users in 30 days and sell 100 units to local independent retailers in six months.
  + **Sales activities:** These are your tactics -- how you plan to make the sale. You may say you'll sell direct-to-consumer through a website or via craft shows, for instance. Or this part of the plan may include activities like developing a sell sheet to send to independent retail stores.
  + **Target accounts:** Your sales plan should also include the accounts you want to sell to. If it's end-users, for example, plan how you're going to reach them through eBay, classified ads or your website.
  + **Timelines:** Put dates to all of the above elements so you can define your steps within a realistic timeline. Don't forget that your timelines should be fluid--if you're underachieving, your sales plan can help you figure out why and define the corrective steps you need to take.
* **Expand to new markets.**Once you have established success in your current market, consider expanding to include other markets. This will open doors to bigger buyers.
  + **Get the correct buyer:** One of your biggest challenges is finding the right buyer within a large organization, so do your homework. If you're experiencing roadblocks, consider hiring a distributor or manufacturer's rep who already has established relationships in your industry
  + **Be prepared:** Develop a presentation and have professional-looking sell sheets ready. Your product should also have packaging that's ready to go.
  + **Know your target:** Understand what products they already carry and how yours will fit in. Don't waste your time pitching to a retailer who's unlikely to carry your product.
  + **Take advantage of special programs:** Some mass retailers, such as Wal-Mart, have local purchase programs that give managers authority to try local items. And other retailers may have different initiatives, such as minority business programs.
  + **Be patient:** It can take up to a year or longer before you see your product on store shelves, so don't get frustrated. And if the final answer is no, try to turn it into a learning experience.