

Chapter 7.3

Selling and influencing skills

Benefits of this chapter

Your ability to develop your federation – increase membership, attract more fans, sign more sponsors, etc. – is directly related to your ability to sell to and influence key audiences. Just like a coach has to convince a swimmer that an extra ten laps today will pay off in the future, your federation has to be able to persuade key audiences that being a part of your federation is a win-win situation for all parties involved.

In this chapter, you will learn the fundamentals of effective sales and influencing techniques. These techniques can be used in many facets of your federation, including developing presentations, developing strategic sales and marketing plans and getting elite athletes to help you promote and brand the sport in your country.

The point is not to become a salesperson or “trick” others to do something that is not in their interest. Rather, sales and influencing is about explaining to key audiences how partnering with your federation would be good for you and good for them. With proper planning and execution, you can convey the values of your sport and your federation in a way that grows participation, loyalty and financial support.

Introduction

No new business or non-profit organisation ever became successful without having to sell goods and services and influence important audiences (e.g. investors, consumers, vendors, etc.). The same is true for sports federations. While your organisation may not be primarily focused on generating profit, revenues are still important. Plus, you need to sell and influence in order to drive other growth and productivity markers, including membership, sponsorship and event attendance.

Selling and influencing are distinct yet interrelated concepts. For the purposes of this handbook, we will address each one separately and point out ways that they inform each other.

The following chapter will provide details on the following topics:

- What is the difference between marketing and sales and why are they important?
- How can you market effectively to existing aquatics sports partners?
- How can you market effectively to prospective aquatics sports partners?
- How can you turn good marketing into good sales?
- What are some basic hints to influence people in positive ways?

The key to any good marketing, sales or influencing strategy is to have good products and services and believe in the quality of them. Once others experience the quality of your brand, the power of “word of mouth” can develop your federation further and create a cycle that benefits your federation and those associated with it.

What is the difference between marketing and sales?

Marketing and sales are interrelated, but not entirely the same. They are both focused on your consumer or partner – for a national aquatics federation, consumers and partners include athletes, member clubs, media, sponsors, fans, vendors and other key groups with whom you partner to develop your federation. However, marketing is about understanding what your partners want. Selling is about understanding how your partners choose.

For example, if you know that sponsors want to gain more exposure to young swimmers, then you can market your federation’s service offerings in a way that showcases your activities and events for young swimmers. To convince sponsors to partner with you (thereby “selling” your services), you have to understand what factors will influence their decision making. These factors could include the sponsor’s financial resources, existing partnerships with competitors and who within the sponsor’s organisation will make the final decision.

How can you market effectively to existing aquatics sports partners?

When approaching your federation's marketing strategy, it is important to make adjustments depending on whether you are marketing to a new or existing customer or partner. First, let's consider why marketing to existing partners is important and how your federation can approach it.

Marketing to existing partners is important because your federation can:

1/ Achieve high return on investment.

It is always easier to market and sell to existing partners because both sides have knowledge of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

2/ Access to more senior contacts.

The longer a partnership exists, the deeper your contacts will become with that organisation, which strengthens your federation's network of contacts.

3/ Access to more revenue-producing projects.

Once you have demonstrated the value of your service offerings, partners are more likely to pursue bigger projects and partnerships that can potentially generate more revenue for your federation.

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How you should market your federation to existing partners depends on whether or not the partner is aware of the need for your service offerings. If partners know there is a need, then you should be super-pleasing in your marketing strategy. That means:

1/ Going the extra mile on current engagements.

Show existing partners that you care by doing the best work possible on present projects.

2/ Increasing the amount of client contact.

Make sure the client sees and understands the quality of your brand and your personnel.

3/ Building the business relationship.

Strengthen the business connection between your federation and your partner by showing interest in helping your partner expand their business interests.

4/ Building the personal relationship.

Never underestimate the power of personal relationships. Being likeable and getting along with your customers and partners can go a long way in growing existing partnerships.

If a current partner does not know that a need exists, then your federation should take a nurturing approach to marketing. This means helping your partner discover the need without having to be too aggressive.

A nurturing marketing approach includes:

1/ Creating opportunities to demonstrate competence

Find opportunities as a federation to show your strength in certain areas (e.g. access to certain markets, values of your sport, reputation for excellence, etc.).

2/ Gathering evidence of the new need

Be able to point out examples of areas where the partner could benefit from your service offerings.

3/ Creating awareness of the new need

Once you have the evidence that a need exists, demonstrate to your partner that the need exists.

4/ Asking the right person at the right time

With examples in hand and forward planning, approach the person who can make decisions (or has access to the person who can) and choose your timing carefully – make sure he or she is in the right environment and in the right mood to hear what you have to say.

How can you market effectively to prospective aquatics sports partners?

In addition to deepening your engagement with existing partners, it is also important to consider attracting new partners.

Marketing to new customers and partners is important for your federation because you can:

1/ Become less dependent on each partner

The more diverse your partnerships and sources of revenue, the more freedom and leverage you have to create partnerships that more fully achieve your federation's specific goals.

2/ Develop new contacts

Marketing to new partners leads to more contacts, which are always helpful in developing new opportunities for your federation – even ones you may not have previously considered.

3/ Generate new types of projects

Marketing to new partners can lead to new types of projects for your federation, which can open doors to new markets and also keep your staff engaged in the work of the federation.

So, how can you market your federation to new prospective partners?

The key is to take a courting approach. This includes:

1/ Demonstrating, not asserting

Marketing works best when you use data and examples of the quality of your work to show prospective clients the value of your service – simply telling them will not motivate them to partner with you.

2/ Seducing, not assaulting

Marketing to new clients is an art, so be careful not to overwhelm

prospective clients with constant contact or ultimatums – instead, thoughtfully develop the relationship and find the right opportunities to introduce and promote your service offerings.

3/ Showing up in-person

Only face-to-face, in-person marketing will help you win a new partner. Talk with prospective partners at events and conferences, or set up face-to-face meetings during which you can share the value and quality of your services.

Although it may sound silly, marketing to new partners is actually quite similar to courting someone romantically. Before you can ask a potential mate to marry you (or make the sale), you have to demonstrate and not simply say that you care and would be a good mate, court them not force them into wanting to partner with you, and be available face-to-face to develop the relationship and establish trust.

How can you turn good marketing into good sales?

Good marketing is necessary for sales, but good marketing alone cannot produce any real revenue or solidify new partnerships. Once you have generated interest in partnering with your federation (or broadening an existing partnership), you can focus on finalising partnership agreements.

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To sell effectively, you need to know that someone wants to buy what you are selling. In the case of a national aquatics federation, potential partners want to know two things about you:

1/ Can your federation do what you say you can do?

Potential partners will analyse your technical qualifications, track record of performance and objective documentation (e.g. data, financials, etc.) to answer this question.

2/ If your federation can do what you say you can, then does your potential partner want to work with your federation?

Potential partners will make subjective judgments to answer this question, including references from other partners, your federation's reputation, quality of personal interactions with your federation, etc.

Because the first question is more objective in nature, it is more difficult to influence. However, assuming your federation has the technical ability to provide certain services or opportunities to prospective partners, there are some key elements that a prospective partner may be looking for that could make it more likely that they want to work with your federation.

These include:

1/ Clues

Small actions that are meaningful for their symbolism, including being available at odd hours, returning phone calls quickly and remembering personal details about a person's life.

2/ Tailored preparation

When you interact with a potential partner, make sure your comments and presentation are specific to that partner. If a swimwear company is interested in sponsoring your federation, you may not want to emphasise parts of your general sales strategy that focus on grassroots development programmes or other topics that may not be of interest to your potential partner.

3/ Something new

If there is something new or unique that your federation offers to a prospective partner (e.g. access to new markets, new events, etc.), emphasise it. New opportunities usually spark interest, so they will get prospective partners to listen more carefully.

4/ Evidence of your competence and understanding

Be sure to have practical, tangible examples of the benefits of partnering with your federation.

5/ Focus on their interests, not yours

By making it clear that you understand and care about your partner's interests in a prospective engagement, you show them that you are not making a sale simply for the sake of making a sale.

6/ Help from the beginning

Be useful from the start and show prospective partners how quickly and proactively you can meet their needs.

7/ Sympathetic understanding

When interacting with individuals one-on-one, it is helpful to show the other person that you understand their role in an organisation – emphasise how a potential partnership could help them in their own job and they may be more likely to recommend a partnership with your federation to those who make the final decisions.

What are some basic hints for influencing people in positive ways?

A significant component of marketing and sales is influencing others in positive ways. Some people think that marketing and sales is about “tricking” people or getting them to do something that is not in their interest. However, as a national aquatics federation, influencing others should be seen in more positive terms. You want to influence important audiences – athletes, media, sponsors, fans – in a way that shows them how they can benefit from involvement in and support of aquatics sports. That should be seen as win-win for everyone.

So how can you influence people in positive ways? It all begins with developing trust. The following hints provide some useful strategies that your federation can integrate with its marketing and sales initiatives, as well as other important components of growing your federation.

These hints include:

1/ Talk about them, not you

Good sales people say “you,” not “I.” A key to influencing others is appealing to their interests – they will not be interested in working with you until they know what is in it for them.

2/ Details matter

When marketing to potential partners and building your relationship with them, it is critical to remember the smaller details of interpersonal interactions. Little things like dressing professionally, turning your cell phone off during meetings and sending thank you emails all make important impressions that highlight your professionalism and keep partners focused on the matter at hand.

3/ Timing is everything

It is crucial to approach prospective partners at the right time when proposing new engagements. As a general rule, people are generally more responsive and prepared to listen at the beginning of the day and at the end of the week. So Friday mornings can be a good time to market and sell your service offerings.

4/ Start small

Even though you may see the long-term benefit of an engagement with a new or existing partner, your partner may need more time to see how beneficial the partnership is. So, while it is useful to show prospective partners your vision of the entire engagement “chain,” just focus on selling them the “first link.” Additional links will come when you demonstrate how valuable your services are.

Useful tips

Keys to effective marketing and sales:

- Understand the nature of your relationship with current and prospective partners. By knowing what they want and how they decide how to get it, you can develop strategies that appeal to their needs and influence their decision making.
- Remember that you are trying to influence others because you care about aquatics sports in your country.
- Keep your passion in mind as you work hard to grow your federation. This will help motivate you, even when work gets challenging.