

Successful contracting – the importance of a professional sales approach

Introduction

A career move to go [Contracting in the UK](#) can be extremely rewarding. Contractors have more control over their career direction, typically earn more, and have more [holiday flexibility](#) than permanent employees.

There are many [reasons why permanent employees go contracting](#), but common to achieving any of the rewards is to minimise the downtime between contracts and be in work when *you* want to be in work, *not when the market decides*.

The most successful contractors acknowledge the importance of a professional sales approach, and learn and apply good sales technique and process throughout their career.

Why Learn Sales?

[Keeping your skills current and updated](#) will certainly ensure you can *potentially* command the highest premiums, but certainly doesn't mean you *will* earn the highest premiums.

As a contractor you are selling a product – your knowledge. And despite what some people say, even the best products do not sell themselves.

The contractors who win the contracts are the ones who know best about [finding a contract](#), and not necessarily the ones who are best candidates for the contracts. There are plenty of exceptional contractors out of work, or working for less than they are worth simply because they are unable to successfully sell their product – themselves.

When demand is high even contractors with the worst sales approach find themselves gaining contracts with agents often fighting over them. When demand falls, the contractors with little or no sales knowledge find themselves unable to secure contracts and often head back to permanent employment, or worse, no employment. However, the ones who are best at selling themselves snap up the available contract positions.

Contractors with little or no sales experience often wrongly believe that competitive pricing is the sole key to securing business. This is untrue. Clients will expect to pay market price for the goods they receive. Price is rarely the main issue. As Alan Sugar stated in *The Apprentice*, "...any fool can stand on the street and sell ten pounds notes all day for eight quid."

A failure to [negotiate your contract](#) well will minimise your income from contracts and simply line the pockets of an agent via a large [agency margin](#), which is of course their goal.

An acknowledgment of the importance of professional sales and a commitment to learning and applying sales techniques will ensure you maximise your chances of securing contracts and maximise your revenues.

Some Common Myths About Sales

As a contractor marketing your expertise you are going to have to sell yourself. Unfortunately, sales as a profession gets bad press, particularly in the contracting industry.

Some common myths about sales people are:

They are dishonest.

They succeed by lying through their teeth.

They say absolutely anything to get people to buy.

They manipulate and coerce people.

They force people to buy things they don't want by any means.

They lack any morals or ethics.

It's not in your interests to harbour these prejudices, as they will get in the way of your contracting career. There is a profound difference between a salesman and a con man.

Professional Sales

Sales is in fact a science and follows strict rules and processes. Sales is the method of presenting a product in the most positive light, maintaining control over the 'sales process' and ultimately achieving the highest level of profit together with delivering the highest level of customer satisfaction.

Although this certainly does not mean that sales as an industry necessarily has your 'best interests' at heart, and it is for this reason that it is so important to gain a basic knowledge of what sales is and how it operates.

You cannot run a business without having to persuade somebody somewhere to part with their cash for your services. You have to sell. When you do sell, you are only being dishonest if you choose to be dishonest (not a good idea in the long run). The best approach to sales is to consider it as a service whereby you are helping people by giving them the opportunity to benefit from the product or service you have to offer.

Most contractors avoid professional sales like the plague not because they think selling is evil but because they just don't know how. Most salespeople are not born, they are made. Fortunately, there are techniques to selling which can be learnt and mastered.

Training yourself to use a professional sales approach will ensure you minimise or even eliminate any downtime between contracts regardless of market conditions, and also ensure you maximise your revenue by commanding and securing market rates.

In addition to the advantages of using a professional sales approach to your contract search you will also find sales experience useful for other areas of your contracting career. Being able to formulate and sell a winning argument will prove very useful to get your ideas adopted. In addition your sales knowledge will help you to build a good reputation and a network of contacts - invaluable in the long term for obtaining work directly or via recommendation.

Further Reading

Articles related to contract search:

[Introduction to Effective CV Writing for Contractors](#)
[Determining your contract rate before entering the market](#)
[How to find a contract - Guide for UK Contractors](#)
[The Killer Interview Technique for Contractors](#)
[Negotiating your Initial Contract Rate](#)
[Accepting and Signing a Contract Offer](#)
[Preparing and negotiating a renewal](#)

Sales books (Amazon):

[How I Raised Myself from Failure to Success in Selling](#)

[How to Win Friends and Influence People](#)

[The 25 Sales Habits of Highly Successful Salespeople](#)

[The Greatest Salesman in the World: Vol 2](#)

Published: Monday, August 21, 2006

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