

Essential Hard Skills for Sales: Must-Have Skills

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Do you have the right hard skills to thrive as a sales expert?

While the best salespeople don't necessarily need a degree or specific qualifications to thrive in their role, they do need a variety of different skills and traits. Some of these skills are more innate, and less quantifiable, such as the ability to collaborate well with others or solve problems creatively.

Other abilities are more technical and specific in nature, such as the ability to conduct a strong cold call, research customer pain points, or use different techniques to push customers through the sales funnel. Today, we're taking a closer look at the hard skills crucial to sales professionals.

What are Sales Hard Skills?

When it comes to developing the right abilities as a sales professional, it's important to know the difference between 'hard skills' and 'soft skills'.

While soft skills are extremely important to sales success, they're also easier to cultivate outside of the sales landscape. Soft skills are a little harder to quantify than sales skills, and revolve mainly around your ability to interact with others, maintain the right mindset, and stay organized.

Hard skills, otherwise known as 'technical skills', are cultivated throughout your work experience in the sales landscape. They're quantifiable abilities and knowledge related to the sales landscape, such as the ability to understand the sales cycle, or use the right prospecting technique to find customers.

Crucial Hard Skills for Sales Professionals

The hard skills you'll need to be a 'good fit' for a sales role will vary from one position to the next. If your job relies heavily on prospecting, and qualifying leads, you may need more specific research-oriented skills and an ability to work with social media.

If your role revolves mostly around closing deals, you may need skills that help you to pitch a product or service more effectively to potential buyers. While most hard skills are taught 'on the job', by mentors, and training teams in a business environment, you can also cultivate them yourself.

There are plenty of [online forums](#), webinars, and other platforms you can use to improve your hard skills. If you're just getting started in sales, here are some of the key areas to focus on:

1. Product and Industry Knowledge

Product and industry knowledge is essential to success in the sales landscape. In order to sell solutions using effective sales techniques, you first need to understand your marketplace, and the product or service you're providing. You'll need to be able to pinpoint the benefits of your solution for different customers, and show clients how the offering will address their pain points.

It's also helpful to have a clear understanding of how the sales process works for your business, and how your solution compares to other competing options in the same industry. This will help to streamline the sales journey for customers.

1. **Prospecting**

Most job descriptions for entry-level professionals mention 'prospecting' skills. Prospecting is one of the most important parts of the sales cycle. It involves knowing how to conduct research to find people who are a good fit for your product or service.

The sales prospecting process can include everything from researching customers on social media, to connecting with potential leads through email, or cold calling. More than anything else, good prospecting is about commitment and consistency. The more you commit to finding new prospects, the more your potential revenue will grow.

1. **Qualifying Leads**

Finding prospects is just the first stage of the sales process. To ensure you and your team members aren't wasting time on the wrong people, you also need to be able to qualify each potential lead. This basically means using research, analysis, and questioning to determine whether a customer fits with your ideal customer profile.

A strong approach to qualifying leads ensures you're focusing the right amount of time and attention on the people who are most likely to buy, and benefit from your product or service. It's critical to becoming an efficient salesperson.

1. **Time Management**

Some people see 'time management' as a soft skill, connected with organization. However, there are various hard skills you can use to optimize your time management strategy. Knowing how to use a calendar, or project management tools effectively, can help you to become more efficient.

Understanding how to effectively delegate tasks to other team members, use the right sales techniques during the purchasing cycle, and minimize distractions can be beneficial too. The better your time management skills, the more likely you'll be to reach your sales quotas.

1. **Rapport Building**

Rapport building or relationship building is another hard skill often described as a soft skill. While you will need soft skills like empathy and excellent communication abilities to build rapport with customers, you'll need some technical skills too.

The best salespeople know how to use specific processes to strengthen connections with their prospects, such as open-ended questioning. They also understand when and how often they should follow up with a customer, to preserve the relationship and keep the deal moving forward.

1. **Sales Process Proficiency**

Sales process proficiency is a relatively broad 'hard skill' in the sales landscape. It means being able to develop a strong understanding of how to use different sales techniques throughout the sales cycle. The sales process in any business can vary, but it often involves a series of repeatable steps, used to drive a prospect from the point of 'early stage lead' to loyal customer.

To be proficient with sales processes, you'll need to have a strong understanding of prospecting techniques and lead qualification, as well as how to write and deliver sales pitches. You'll also need to hone your skills when it comes to objection handling.

1. **Presentation Skills**

Often included in a broad list of essential 'business communication skills' for sales people, presentation skills are essential for a variety of reasons. As a sales professional, you'll need to be able to present your pitches and products to customers in an engaging and emotionally evocative way, to capture their attention and boost conversions.

Depending on the nature of the business you work with, you may also be required to present information to other members of staff or business leaders. For instance, you might be asked to share a presentation covering all the recent research you did into an important prospect.

1. **Sales Territory Management**

The art of sales territory management can be important to professionals throughout the entire sales landscape. If you're working as a sales manager or supervisor, then you may be responsible for assigning other members of staff to specific territories, based on your knowledge of the opportunities available to your company, and your team's skills.

If you're an individual employee, you'll need to know how to manage your time between sales territories effectively, and balance workloads with delegation.

1. **Software and Tech Skills**

Software and technology are quickly becoming more common parts of the sales landscape. The chances are in any role you'll use a variety of tools to help you through the sales cycle. You might use automation tools to follow up with leads, analysis tools for qualifying leads, and research systems to help you detect new prospects.

Making sure you're comfortable with these tools, and being open to experimenting with different types of technology could help you to become more productive in your role.

1. **Closing Techniques**

Finally, being able to close deals is an essential skill for any salesperson. However, learning how to close consistent deals is something that can take a lot of time and commitment. There are various methods professionals use to 'close deals', and you'll need to be able to recognize when you should be leveraging each different strategy.

As you progress throughout your career, experimenting with different closing methods and strategies should provide you with a clearer insight into which methods work best for your customers.

Invest in the Right Hard Skills for Sales

Hard skills aren't the only talents worth pursuing in a sales career. To be a successful sales person, you'll need a range of hard and soft skills, as well as a commitment to constantly learning and improving your abilities over time.

However, investing in the right hard skills from day one can give you an edge over the competition, accelerate your path towards a high income, and impress future employers. Start building the hard skills you need to thrive in sales today, at the [Hard Skill Exchange](#)??

HSE Team