Chapter 43
Marketing in SMEs: The Sales Process of SMEs on the Food and Drink Industry

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ABSTRACT
There would appear to be varied approaches to the sales process practiced by SMEs in how they go about locating target customers, interfacing with prospects and new customers, presenting the benefits and features of their products and services, closing sales deals and building relationships, and an understanding of what the buyers needs are in the seller-buyer process. Recent research has revealed that while entrepreneurs and small business owners rely upon networking as an important source of sales, they lack marketing competencies, including personal selling skills and knowledge of what is involved in the sales process to close sales deals and build relationships. Small companies and start-ups with innovative products and services often find it difficult to persuade potential buyers of the merits of their offerings because, while the products and services may be excellent, they have not sufficiently well-developed selling skills necessary to persuade their target customers.

INTRODUCTION
There is growing recognition of the importance of personal selling skills and sales process knowledge in small, medium-sized businesses (SMEs) (Rutterford, 2011; McCourt 2011). Researchers focus upon large organisations and highlight the importance of the steps in the sales process used to professionally engage in B2B/ trade selling activities (Dubinsky, 1980/81; Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Marshall et al., 1999; Moncrief and Marshall, 2005; Moncrief et al., 2006; Ingram et al., 2010). They claim that sales process knowledge will assist firms in the delivery of strategic sales objectives. In SMEs, Carson (1985), Carson et al., (1995) and Hill (2001) have explored the importance of networking as a
marketing interface Rouzies (2005) selecting and developing sales personnel (Cron et al., 2005); leadership; motivation, compensation and control (Brown et al., 2005); technology and customer relationship management (CRM) (Tanner et al., 2005); and key accounts and team selling (Jones et al., 2005). The tracking and updating of research in this discipline together with the inherent complexities are reviewed regularly in the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (Gordon and Howell 1959; Pierson 1959; Swan et al., 1991; Moncrief et al., 2000; Marshall and Michaels, 2001; Weitz et al., 2005). The state of selling and sales management research is documented as being healthy, vibrant, and evolving. It is important to note, that the majority of the current literature is USA-based though over the last ten years there has been a considerable increase in non-US authored articles (Richards et al., 2010).

In the UK, research into personal selling and sales-related topics is very scarce and limited to a few academics. For many the focus is general selling and sales management textbooks (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009; Donaldson, 2007; Blythe, 2005). A number of articles have been published over the last 15-20 years on selective aspects e.g. the role of selling in marketing strategy, the selling and marketing interface; relations between marketing and selling and sales and marketing integration (Lyus et al., 2011), integrative selling devices (Jobber and Dewsnop, 2009), key account management and trade fairs (Blythe, 1996; 1999; 2002; 2010), sales operations, CRM and sales force automation (Donaldson, 2007; 2004; 2008). The focus is primarily on larger organisations and not SMEs/ small businesses.

Generally available, are a myriad of paperbacks on every conceivable selling topic, but with little or no academic underpinning (Lennon, 2010). These are practical, instructive and useful guides packed with anecdotes but with little or no theoretical credentials. To the best of my knowledge there is no peer reviewed academic literature from the selling discipline stream that focuses specifically on SMEs.

BACKGROUND

There are a number of key areas that are currently being debated and researched within the selling and sales management discipline: - the sales and