

A How-to Guide

Achieve
Greater
Sales Success
in the Events Industry

Steven Robert Young

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By Steven Robert Young

Some Background

I've had the privilege of selling to top agencies and some of the most recognizable companies globally. Many of my most significant sales achievements occurred during my tenure in the events industry. One standout example is the management of a \$3,000,000 opportunity: a multi-city fashion show led by Saks Fifth Avenue (SFA) and sponsored by Mercedes Benz. In addition to SFA, I've participated in design meetings with esteemed companies such as Viacom, IMG, Ferrari, Condé Nast, Estee Lauder, Calvin Klein, and others, alongside some of the most prestigious PR firms in New York.

I've overseen load-in and strike operations for events across diverse locations like Miami, Beverly Hills, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Las Vegas. These projects encompassed a wide range, including the MTV Holiday Party, The Video Game Awards, Fashion Week, corporate events, and product launches.

The event production firms I've represented housed a talented team of designers, architects, and craftsmen who produced uniquely designed elements – tables, chairs, sofas, bars, stage elements, wall treatments, chandeliers, ceiling treatments, centerpieces, product displays, and intricate design elements. My years in the events industry were among the most exhausting of my career!

Since 2008, I've led my own sales consultancy, assisting businesses in various industries, from Los Angeles to New York City, in achieving sales success and connecting with their most desired clients. Success in the events industry hinges on three key elements: **creative capability** (the ability to bring a vision to life), **methodical persistence**, and a **well-executed strategy**. In other words, **event companies lacking any of these cornerstones will likely face challenges in growing their sales**. Once these cornerstones are in place, you can explore sales optimization.

Achieving Success

Success often involves a discovery process, and my journey in the events industry was no exception. When I was hired as Sales Director for a prestigious event firm based in Los Angeles, I entered the industry with no prior experience. My value to the company lies in my ability to sell effectively. So, as I set out to learn the industry and what it required for success, I took a strategic approach to secure my first few sales.

My initial focus was on securing meetings. Obtaining meetings with high-profile clients didn't necessitate knowledge of the event industry but rather relied on the sales skill of creating intrigue. Since I excelled here, I was able to consistently secure meetings with decision-makers at large companies. I attended these meetings alongside the company's Creative Director, who led the discussions. This provided me with the opportunity to learn the intricacies of the industry, from the initial concept to the final execution of event production.

This approach proved highly effective. Those early face-to-face meetings led to engagements with notable clients such as Intel, Nestle, Viacom, IMG, General Mills, Publicis, Motorola, Revlon, Ferrari, Absolut, Time Inc., Hearst Publication, Conde Nast, Kenneth Cole, and several others. Of course, given the complexity of event production, mastering the event industry didn't happen overnight. Learning how to sell and manage event projects took time, but eventually, a clear methodology emerged.

Now, when asked about what success in the events industry requires, my answer covers seven points. The first of these addresses the importance of having assets.

1. Leverage Relevant Assets

Assets are foundational for success in the events industry, and certainly include *talent*. Talent in the events industry involves having an extraordinary creative vision. **You—the one who sells event services—must have reason to believe in the firm.** The value of the firm is, firstly, its talent and capabilities for event production. You should not merely see yourself as an option among other providers of event services, but as a leading resource for these services. Otherwise, you're a commodity. **Talent is not a commodity; it's your unique point of differentiation from your competition** – the reason that your company should be selected for event projects.

Recognize and believe in the assets that you—your firm—offer, which, as mentioned, begins with the talent that distinguishes your company. Other assets you should leverage may include your:

- resourcefulness, which may include any strategic partners;
- client list / portfolio—actual projects and conceptual renderings;
- web presence, which can include your company's social media following;
- capabilities, in-house assets, and production advantages);
- tangible samples;

- awards and reviews, press coverage; and
- team—designers, project managers, strategic partners, etc.

Try to identify other and unique assets of your firm. **Understand how these assets compare with those of your competitors, and, at minimum, be on par with them.** Or, alternatively, identify advantages that you have over your competitors, so that any evaluation of your firm against another firm either shows you as clearly superior or simply incomparable—too different—, but not inferior.

An often overlooked asset is: professional standards. You won't, nor should you want to, work with everyone. There are difficult clients whose business is not worth the trouble of having. **Standards are an asset to your company that keeps you focused on worthwhile business—business that is worthwhile for you and those you serve.** Standards add prestige to your company. (Remember: what makes a client difficult is a person, not the company. Companies are comprised of people who come and go in their positions. So, whose business you don't want today, may be worth having tomorrow, as people change companies.)

2. Prepare for the Long-term

Since events can involve months of planning, be prepared for long sales cycles and to **build sales momentum over several months.** Dedicate yourself to persistent and methodical work that, first, establishes you—your firm—in the industry and minds of prospective clients. Eventually, you'll become a known and trusted resource. Along the way, you'll learn where and how to connect with various types of opportunities—one-time, seasonal, and occasional (other than seasonal) events. In order to compete for specific types of events—such as corporate holiday parties, brand launches, weddings, conferences—, learn when and where planning begins, and about the venues that host them. In order to “be in the game,” you've got to know when and how the game unfolds.

It is strategically wise to see your “success” as a part of a long-term game plan, and to expect being ignored until you've demonstrated some staying power or have something notable to tout. Until then, continue to, and repeatedly, promote the wonders of your firm. Having an appropriate attitude about your situation—your course to success, or greater success—is important. If your expectations are unrealistic, you set yourself up for disillusionment and disappointment. If you expect, and are prepared, to go the distance, you may be pleasantly surprised by unexpected successes. Earn your places in the industry by building on successes over the long run. Depending on your efforts, it could take six to eighteen months of announcements, advertisements, networking, and fostering rapport to build a wave of new business.

Being prepared for the long-term doesn't end with your resolve to be patient; **it's about the ability to sustain proactive work that leads to sales opportunities**. During this time of being optimistically persistent, maintain records. Document the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *where* of event opportunities, as you learn about them through conversations, research, nurturing business, and just "being out there" to generate sales.

Note: earlier, I mentioned the importance of having the appropriate attitude. While cultivating new business relationships, be perceived as someone with a generous attitude, and of wanting to create something special for someone's event. Avoid being seen as "pretentious," "cocky," or "arrogant." These characterizations are off-putting to prospects. Be sincere and generous in your eagerness to demonstrate how a client will be completely—throughout the entire project (not merely by your firm's talent and initial presentation)—thrilled to work with you. After all, **how you and your firm treat others along the course of working together is how you'll achieve a loyal clientele**.

3. Intrigue

When it comes to selling event services, your ability to intrigue prospective clients is essential. Intrigue drives engagement with prospects, and allows you to lead prospects across each step of your sales process. Intrigue inspires, creates **interest to know more and experience work with you**, which is why it is an essential sales strategy and skill.

As a strategy, intrigue requires preparation. This preparation involves research to identify "links" or leverage points, which, when put to use, can compel a prospect to meet with you. When properly applied, intrigue stirs curiosity and **creates alignment between you and your prospects** that will have them agreeing with you and asking questions that seek your valuable experience and expertise. When you intrigue, you gain a powerful advantage in a conversation, which is the chance to create rapport with a prospective client.

Intrigue as a skill involves three abilities: (1) the ability to **assess** a personality type and situation; (2) the ability to **accommodate** different personalities and situations; and (3) the ability to **create an impression**, which is achieved through **what** you say (your message) and **how** you speak—your verbal presentation (rate of speech, articulation, affectation, and inflection). Meaning is not merely communicated by the words of a message, but, also, how those words are spoken (or written). The ability to **intrigue, therefore, is a balancing act between knowing what to say, what not to say, and how to speak**.

It's important to note that intrigue functions through brevity (your message must quickly gain interest), importance, and relevance. Note: **importance and relevance are determined by the**

prospect, not you, which is why you should learn about your prospects – their companies, their buying process, their events, and service providers, their interests, etc

When thinking about how to use an intrigue strategy, consider how to put one or more of the following to use:

- Know what matters to your prospects
- Share results achieved for your clients, but...
- Save the “secret” or “keys” for the meeting
- Position yourself in the “blue ocean”
- Use storytelling (but keep it short!)
- Share preview, limited opportunity, or special invitation
- Highlight testimonials without boasting
- Leverage social proof without boasting
- Create mystery or a cliffhanger (to be resolved during meeting)
- Leverage your mastery of new or emerging technology
- Position yourself as in-demand in their industry
- Provide value – offer yourself as a resource

4. Create a Revenue Calendar

When I managed sales in the events industry, I developed a report that I called a Revenue Calendar. This color-coded calendar reflected an at-a-glance picture of sales potential across an 18-24 month period. These events were profiled by details—values, venues, hosts, dates, size, themes, and other important information. The opportunities included all kinds of events—fundraisers, product launches, holiday parties, corporate meetings, celebrations, etc.—and their occurrence type—seasonally, annually, occasionally, one-time.

As I learned of events, I added them to the Calendar and assigned them to salespeople to pursue. The report was used during team meetings to identify next steps, which could include discussions about where to strategize, approaches to follow-up, and whatever else was appropriate.

By seeing a spectrum of events, we were better able to plan wisely, develop engagement strategies, and be prepared to make our best effort to contend for opportunities.

The calendar was maintained in a document and updated on a whiteboard in the Sales office. If you don't know where the opportunities are, you cannot plan your time investments most effectively. The revenue calendar is essential for long-term planning. It should grow year after year in your event business.

In addition to providing the company with forecasting information, the Revenue Calendar can be used to assess individual sales reps, the progress of an organization, and help identify where information is needed to help advance development. Assessment of the Revenue Calendar might begin with looking at what opportunities are confirmed and which are of most valuable.

Note, the value of an opportunity is not necessarily limited to the potential revenue it represents; winning certain business, such as work with particular brand or in a particular industry, might be strategically useful for creating new sales opportunities.

A Revenue Calendar allows for more effective sales and marketing strategy development. This tool can also aid in resource allocation, ensuring that salespeople, budgets, and planning efforts align with each opportunity, thus maximizing the potential for profitable contracts. Additionally, the calendar empowers informed decision-making by helping you prioritize opportunities, decline less suitable ones, and refine your service positioning.

Creating a Revenue Calendar can be an invaluable tool. Here are a few tips:

- 1. Collect Event Information**

Gather all relevant details about potential events. This includes event value, venues, hosts, dates, expected audience sizes, themes, and occurrence—seasonal, annual, occasional, or one-time. Include type, such as fundraisers, product launches, corporate meetings, etc.

- 2. Color Code**

Use a color-coded system to differentiate between various types of events or to indicate the stage of the sales process. For example, you might use one color for high-value events and another for events in the negotiation stage.

- 3. Choose Tools**

Decide on the tools you will use to create and maintain the Revenue Calendar. This could be a shared document on cloud-based platform, project management software, or a dedicated calendar tool.

- 4. Maintain**

Assign responsibility for updating the calendar. Whenever new events are identified or details change, ensure they are promptly added or modified in the calendar. This should be a collaborative effort involving your sales team.

- 5. Display**

As mentioned, maintaining a physical whiteboard version of the calendar in the sales office can be very helpful for real-time visualization. Use magnets or sticky notes to easily move and update events.

6. Integrate with Sales Strategy

The Revenue Calendar should integrate seamlessly with your sales strategy. For each event, outline the corresponding sales tactics, goals, and responsibilities of the sales team.

7. Use in Long-Term Planning

Over time, the Revenue Calendar will become a historical record of your business's growth and patterns. Use this data for long-term planning, such as forecasting revenue trends and identifying emerging opportunities.

A Revenue Calendar is a dynamic tool that not only helps you manage your sales pipeline but also supports your event business's strategic growth. By systematically organizing and planning around upcoming events, you can increase your chances for greater sales success!

5. Use Account Acquisition Campaigns

Pursuits that require greater persistence bring salespeople face to face with an endurance test that many salespeople fail. Yes, persistence can feel uncomfortable, but why should you bear the discomfort? After all, your job is to develop sales opportunities, which requires you to persist in efforts to connect. And you don't know that the person you're calling doesn't want to speak with you.

Don't act on negative assumptions. Persist with a positive point of view, one that assumes a scenario that your prospect will thank you for your persistence, once you're connected. This does happen! Additionally, ease the work to nurture sales opportunities: create an Account Acquisition Campaign (AAC).

Another solution I created during my years in the events industry is the Account Acquisition Campaign. As noted by its name, the campaign consisted of a series of several outreach strategies designed to engage and intrigue prospects over a long sales cycle. In order to meet the objective of the campaign—to sustain engagement and intrigue—I used a variety of engagement types – email, phone calls, delivery, each of which had a different purposes, all geared to sustain rapport with prospective clients, and make nurturing sales opportunities a creative activity that was enjoyable.

Typically, salespeople pursue prospective clients with one message and a single purpose, which centers on the salesperson's interest to meet. When persistence is necessary, the ACC can keep the pursuit fresh, support its longevity, and increase chances for a sale. Since the AAC is a series of engagements, creating a campaign can, initially, take some time, but the return is worth the investment. Once in place, you have an AAC template that can be used by each rep in your sales operation.

An ACC can provide several reasons for a prospective client to meet with you, and offers a higher rate of success for meetings than outreach and follow-up calls alone. Why? Simply put, a diverse approach is superior to a single approach for generating engagement. Over the duration of the campaign, the motivation of the salesperson is sustained, which leads to increased success from their efforts to connect.

Here are a few considerations for the creation of your own AAC:

- (1) Identify the amount of **time** that could be required to connect with a prospective client—several weeks, a few months, a year?
- (2) Consider what **types** of engagements could be occasioned throughout a year, during the various seasons. Also, be mindful of what length of time an engagement could be used.

Note: your choice of engagement might factor-in what may be leveraged at certain times in a year—the seasons, annual events—holidays, sports—, city functions, etc.—, and the possible **length of time** for your campaign.

- (3) Decide what **profile data** may be useful in development of engagements
- (4) As appropriate, think about a **tandem approach**, such as a voice message or email being followed-up on by something else—maybe a delivery.

The point of the AAC is to be creative, outside of the box, in your outreach efforts. Design campaigns that logically link your engagements and schedule their release. **The purpose of the campaign is not to overwhelm a prospect with an array of outreach messages, but, rather, to have an array of outreaches ready to sustain your long-term and steady efforts to connect and create a relationship.**

Need suggestions for creating your AAC? Contact me for a free consultation.

6. Work Systematically

I advise all of my clients—not just those in the events industry—to take a systematic approach to sales. **Sales activity should make sense!** There is a time to follow-up, nurture, prospect, and engage other work essential to sales. This work should be organized.

In the events industry, long sales cycles are common and demand creative solutions. This further necessitates a place for systemization. I covered the importance of a Revenue Calendar and Account Acquisition Campaign. Both of these, along with the activities in your sales process (prospecting, presentations, research, etc.), should be coordinated with schedules, reporting, and management efforts. **If sales work is not buttoned up, you are at risk of having unbalanced and inconsistent sales activity, which interferes with your improving sales.**

At the heart of a systematic approach to sales is management of information. After all, attaining reliable sales success is based on knowing the status of sales opportunities and when what action is required. This, therefore, requires you having information about the stage sales opportunities, their value or projected value, and other vital information—type, date, location, etc.—in order to determine their priority and the next appropriate action to bring those opportunities to fruition.

Systemization is best managed in a CRM that has been configured to develop sales opportunities. Don't merely use your CRM as a glorified Rolodex; put it to use to support the greater success of your sales operation. When properly configured, your CRM will allow you to generate reports that will inform you of details about your prospective sales. Given the value of these reports, it is imperative that information be accurate and up-to-date. Upholding systemization should, therefore, be made part of your daily practices.

As previously mentioned, your system should coordinate all sales activity including nurturing business, engaging inactive clients, requesting referrals, building your prospect list, follow-up on proposals, etc. There should be no question about what needs to be done on any given day. Systemization should yield a list of tasks, calendar activities, and alerts.

Among the benefits of having a system:

- Sales opportunities are well-managed
- Sales reps are focused and more productive
- Reports are more insightful and better aid decision-making
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Enhanced team collaboration

- Greater accountability
- Streamlined reporting
- Scalability
- Improved forecasting
- Increased sales!

7. Exceed Expectations

Work in the events industry aims to inspire and engage through memorable experiences. To achieve consistent sales success, it's crucial to instill confidence in your clients by understanding their needs and consistently delivering beyond their expectations. Event professionals must consistently go above and beyond while upholding high professional standards. This commitment to excellence should be your primary goal, driving excellence across all facets of your event company—from ideation to execution

There's only one standard that sales professionals should aim for: excellence. In the events industry, this standard should apply universally—from the first point of contact throughout the project. Exceptional project management is a fundamental aspect of achieving this standard. By embracing a philosophy of going above and beyond, you're setting the stage for achieving remarkable outcomes in your event services business.

To grasp the importance of providing exceptional service, consider some of the related benefits:

1. Enhanced Reputation

Going above and beyond client expectations helps build a strong reputation for your company. Satisfied clients are more likely to recommend your services to others and leave positive reviews, which can attract new clients and improve your brand image.

2. Client Loyalty

When clients receive more value than they anticipated, they are more likely to become loyal, long-term customers. This loyalty can lead to repeat business, ongoing contracts, and a stable revenue stream.

3. Competitive Advantage

Over-delivering can set your company apart from competitors. Clients are more likely to choose a service provider that consistently exceeds expectations, even if it means paying a slightly higher price.

4. **Referral Business**

Satisfied clients are often willing to refer your company to their network. Word-of-mouth referrals can be a powerful source of new clients and can lead to organic growth without extensive marketing efforts.

5. **Positive Client Relationships**

Over-delivering fosters strong client relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Clients appreciate your commitment to their success, which can lead to smoother collaboration and effective communication.

6. **Reduced Churn**

Clients who receive exceptional service are less likely to switch to another provider. This reduces client churn rates and the associated costs of acquiring new clients to replace those who leave.

7. **Increased Profits**

While over-delivering may require additional resources in the short term, it can result in increased profitability in the long run. Loyal clients are often willing to pay premium prices for quality service.

8. **Continuous Improvement**

Striving to over-deliver encourages your company to continually improve its services and processes. This commitment to excellence can lead to innovation and efficiency gains.

9. **Client Feedback**

Going the extra mile provides opportunities to gather valuable client feedback. You can learn more about their needs, preferences, and pain points, enabling you to tailor your services more effectively.

10. **Personal Satisfaction**

Providing exceptional service can be personally satisfying for employees and business owners. Knowing that you've made a positive impact on clients' lives or businesses can be a strong motivator.

11. **Risk Mitigation**

Over-delivering can help mitigate potential issues or setbacks in client relationships. Clients may be more forgiving of occasional mistakes if they believe you are genuinely committed to their success.

12. **Stronger Partnerships**

In B2B relationships, over-delivering can lead to stronger partnerships with clients. They may view your company as an extension of their own team.

Over-delivering on service is a strategic approach that can yield numerous benefits, including improved reputation, client loyalty, competitive advantage, and increased profitability. It's a win-win situation where clients receive exceptional value, and your company enjoys the rewards of long-term success and growth.

If you need help in any these areas, contact me for a free consultation. Get a strategic sales plan to reengage lost or inactive clients and acquire your dream accounts! Have questions? [Get answers](#). Consider a free no obligation phone or Zoom visit with me. Contact me through my website.



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