

August 30, 2021
Volume XXII, Issue 40
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Feature Article

Do You Know How To Load Your Sales Pipelines?

By Jim Blasingame

Here's an ancient marketplace maxim: Selling is a numbers game.

A maxim is a generally accepted truth and this is one because of two realities:

1. There are hundreds – if not thousands – of things that can cause a fully qualified prospect to not complete a transaction, at least not on your time parameters.
2. Regardless of how many bumps you encounter on the path to a signed contract, it's still your job to produce enough gross profit from sales revenue to stay in business.



Enter the sales pipeline: a planning concept that helps managers and salespeople forecast sales for any given period – week, month, quarter, or year. Think of your sales pipeline as overhead plumbing with faucets positioned at the time intervals your operation requires. And from these faucets, you draw the mother's milk of any business – sales revenue.

But there's one pesky thing about sales pipeline faucets: they all come with screens that only

allow sales from qualified prospects to pass through, while poorly developed prospects are blocked. So, if you're counting on revenue pouring out of a faucet when you turn the handle on the day you need sales, you must load only qualified prospects into your pipeline to begin with.

A qualified prospect has answered enough questions – directly or through research – to allow you to determine that they will likely purchase what you sell from someone in the forecastable future. Before you place a qualified prospect in the pipeline, you must know at a minimum:

- What's left to do for them – demonstration, trial, proposal, final close, etc.;
- Anything else that has to be done to move them to customer status.

Your appraisal of all of this information will help you forecast which faucet you should expect a particular sale to pour out of this Friday, next week, next month, next quarter. Once in the pipeline, a prospect is either on track to become a sale, a lost sale, or a forecasting mistake to be removed.

Alas, in the absence of professional sales management, poorly trained salespeople will try to forecast low-quality prospects. And any company that counts on such practices is headed for a cash flow crisis and ultimate business failure. Not because the product wasn't good, or the price was too high, or because of Amazon. But because the sales team didn't load the sales pipeline with enough qualified prospects.

At this point, let's refer to The Bard. In Act I, Scene III, of Hamlet, arguably Shakespeare's most important work, Polonius famously says to his son, Laertes, "This above all, to thine own self be true." If your sales team is honest with each other and management about a prospect's qualified progress to faucet-conformity, you're setting yourself up for success. If not, well, you know.

Sales has been and always will be a numbers game. But in the Age of the Customer, it's increasingly becoming more of a quality prospecting game. Consequently, how much revenue you draw from your sales pipeline depends on the two elements of the 21st-century sales success calculus: quantity x quality = your ultimate sales performance.

Here's Blasingame's Law of Sales Pipeline Success: Load the pipeline with enough (quantity) qualified prospects (quality) to flow through the faucets of your sales pipeline whenever you need them (success).

Write this on a rock ... Load your sales pipeline with quantity and quality, and to thine own self be true.

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Until Next Time

The Entrepreneurial Certainty Scale

As we conduct the due diligence on what's next for our business, we seek the information that will help us acquire knowledge and create conditions that minimize the risks and maximize the opportunity. After all, we want to be as certain as possible that our next step is the right one, don't we?

That's an interesting word, certain. Webster says it means fixed, settled, determined, not to be doubted. But it's a word that isn't often found in business plans.



The 19th-century president of Harvard University, Charles W. Eliot, said, "All business proceeds on beliefs, or judgment of probabilities, and not on certainties."

What do you think the marketplace – indeed, the world – would look like if business had been built more on certainties than beliefs? I think we would probably be closer to wearing a stone axe on our belt instead of a magic-wand smartphone in our pocket.

It's important to understand that on the entrepreneurial scale, each of us resides somewhere between the foolhardy and seekers of certainty. The challenge for entrepreneurs is to know when to seek certainty and when to move forward with our beliefs.

No position on this scale is better than another – the world needs all kinds of entrepreneurs. But understanding where we reside on the entrepreneurial scale helps us make better business plans.

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Small Business Advocate Poll

Results of Last Week's Poll

Question: With almost two-thirds of the year behind us, how is your business year shaping up?

42%: We're having a very good year and expect it to continue.

42%: Our year has improved gradually and we expect this to continue.

5%: We're struggling to recover and get our footing in the post-pandemic economy.

11%: Our year has been a bust and it doesn't look like that will change.



Jim's Comments:

Well, I was pleasantly surprised to see that such a large percentage of our respondents are doing pretty well as we continue to operate on the Covid continuum between a mid- and post-pandemic economy. With the expanding variant infections, continuing supply chain challenges, and incredible worker shortages, keeping momentum going for the final push to the end of the year will take something small business owners have in reserve – grit and determination. That's also why you're the heroes of the marketplace and Wall Street sucks.

Thanks for your participation this week. Please take our new poll below.

This Week's Poll

[Where are you in an appraisal of Biden and his administration's](#)

[performance so far?](#)

Click on the statement above to give us your opinion – it will just take a few seconds and you'll immediately see the current results of the poll.

Jim Blasingame on Pocket Sized Pep Talk Podcast

Rob Jolles, master corporate trainer, business speaker, and fellow Xerox alumni, was a guest many times on Jim's long-running radio program, The Small Business Advocate Show.

Recently, Rob asked Jim to share some stories for entrepreneurs on his podcast, "Pocket Sized Pep Talk." They discuss the secrets to Jim's entrepreneurial success, classic mistakes and how to avoid them, and the future of entrepreneurship.

[Click here to listen.](#)



Jim Blasingame on The Anderson Files Podcast

The Anderson Files podcast, with host Mike Anderson, looks at commerce, investment, economics, and retirement issues that affect all of us. Mike recently talk with Jim Blasingame to discuss the efforts, struggles, and resiliency of small businesses as they continue to dig out of the worst pandemic in 100 years.

[Click here to listen.](#)



Best of the Best Interviews

Click links below to listen or download.



[What burden will you carry around today?](#) with Sarah Hiner, President and CEO of Bottom Line Publications

Sarah joins Jim Blasingame to discuss the way most of us load ourselves up with unreasonable expectations for ourselves and how to set yourself on a path toward expectations that that lead to a happier life.



[How to connect to the “above-the-line” decision-maker \(the one with the money\)](#) with Skip Miller, President and founder of M3 Learning, and author of *ProActive Sales Management* and *ProActive Selling*

Skip joins Jim Blasingame to offer suggestions on how to make sure you're getting through to the financial decision-maker – the above-the-line buyer – who has the budget and different ideas on relevance.

[How to establish relevance with the below and above-the-line prospects](#)

Skip Miller joins Jim Blasingame to reveal that today there are two kinds of decision-makers – above and below the line – and how to establish relevance with both of them.



[How Big Tech controls the technology of the Internet backbone](#) with Martin Avila, CEO of RightForge

Martin joins Jim Blasingame to report on the level of control Big Tech has on the technology that powers the Internet backbone around the world.

[Why the world needs an alternative non-political Internet backbone](#)

Martin joins Jim Blasingame to discuss the decision to begin building an alternative Internet backbone that is powered by entities that will operate it without threatening the liberty of Americans.

[How to support efforts to build a non-political Internet backbone](#)

Martin joins Jim Blasingame to reveal how we can support his organization's plan to create a global, non-political alternative to the current Big Tech-controlled Internet backbone.



[Toward building better relationships, virtual or face-to-face](#) with Kita Szpak, author of *The SIMPLE Life: Shiny Objects Not Required*

Kita joins Jim Blasingame to discuss some of the elements that are common to relationship building – of any kind – and why it should be more than just about business.

[The power of trust in building any kind of relationship](#)

Kita Szpak joins Jim Blasingame to discuss how to build long-lasting, high-quality relationships, personal and professional, and the role that trust plays as the foundational element.



[This veteran is singlehandedly helping other vets find tech jobs](#) with iAsia Brown, U.S. Army and Marine veteran, and Data & AI Specialist at Microsoft

iAsia joins Jim Blasingame to tell her story about helping military veterans rethink their professional future by preparing for jobs in the tech industry.

[Why military veterans have much to offer the tech industry](#)

iAsia Brown joins Jim Blasingame to reveal some of the reasons why the training, experience and bearing of military veterans has prepared them to be high-functioning members of the tech industry.



[How to manage the qualified employee prospect shortage](#) with Jim Schreier, Director of Training for Joel Barker's Strategic Exploration Tools and author of *Audition for Your Next Job*

Jim joins Jim Blasingame to report on the impact of the worker shortage on companies training their own people from scratch, and whether the shortage will become an economic headwind.



[Baby Boomers becoming social media influencers? Who knew?](#) with Kathy Perry, social media expert

Kathy joins Jim Blasingame to report on why there is opportunity for Baby Boomers to become product and industry influencers within their own demographic.



[Reconciling an analog legal system with manifestations of digital leverage](#) with Dr. Ryan Abbott, author of *The Reasonable Robot: Artificial Intelligence and the Law*

Ryan joins Jim Blasingame to discuss how our analog legal systems were never designed to deal with the issues created by the products of digital leverage that's disconnected from its creator.

[Do we need to create a body of law for digital leverage?](#)

Ryan joins Jim Blasingame to discuss the challenges we're increasingly having with the implications of digital leverage in society and the marketplace being governed by an analog legal system.

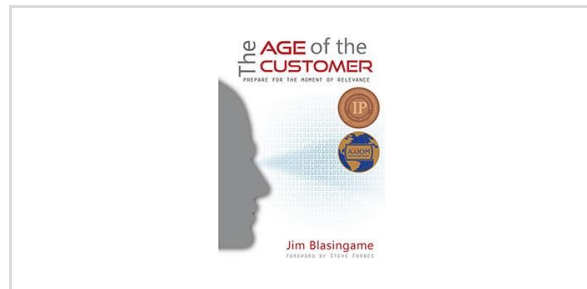
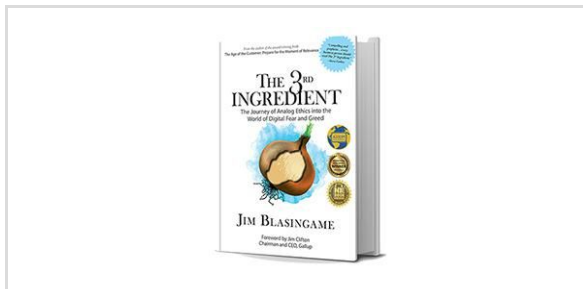
[Why digital leverage laws won't work without digital ethics](#)

Ryan joins Jim Blasingame to discuss how any development of a body of laws focused on digital leverage and artificial intelligence won't work if we don't create and subscribe to a parallel body of digital ethics.

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Jim's Multiple-Award-Winning Books

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