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Personal Selling in the Service Sector as One Marketing Promotional Tool

2.1 The Essence of Promotion, Its Functions and Goals

Building effective customer relationships is not an easy task, and it is certainly a long-term process in which successful communication plays a very important role (sometimes even constituting the competitive advantage of the company). Promotion comprises all activities connected with communication techniques aimed at informing, influencing and persuading customers to buy or use a particular product or service. Promotion involves various activities of the company aimed at ensuring that customers are aware of the product's existence as well as its positioning and persuading customers that the product is better than the competing one and reminding them why they may want to buy it. Promotion can also be understood as a set of means by which the company communicates with the market, and provides information about its activities and products (including services). Its task is therefore to strengthen the impact of each element of the marketing mix, reflecting the unique features of the product (including quality), packaging, price, appearance, availability, etc.

Currently, the marketing communication mix consists of eight tools: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations and publicity, personal selling, events and experiences, online and social media marketing, and mobile marketing (Kotler and Keller 2016). Clearly, the communication mix has to be blended according to the purpose of communication and the objectives the company has set (McDonald and Wilson 2012). Of course, it is also related to many other factors such as the product itself and its life cycle, competition, market segmentation, marketing strategy and budget, target market, customer preferences, etc.

The process of developing effective communications consists of certain stages, namely: identification of target audience, determination of objectives, designing communications, selecting channels, establishing budget, deciding on media mix, measuring results and managing integrated marketing communications (IMC). Identification of target audiences is a crucial starting point for promotional activities. Communication will differ with respect to the target audience, which is why this step is so important. The next phase is identification of objectives, in other words, it is necessary to answer the following question: why are we undertaking these communication activities; in order to achieve what? Once the answer is clear, it is possible to move forward to the very design phase. Here, according to Kotler and Keller (2016), there is a need to formulate message strategy (what to say), creative strategy (how to say it) and message source (who should say it). The next step is to establish communication channels and here the choice is between personal and non-personal (mass) channels. Equally important is a proper integration of communication channels. Then, one of the most difficult decisions has to be made, namely establishing budget. Decision-makers can choose to use a number of methods to set the budget: the method of affordability (what we think is affordable and ignoring marketing as an investment tool), the percentage-of-sales method (justification for the actual percentage), the competitive-parity method (achieving share-of-voice parity with customers, but do they know better?), or the objective-and-task method (estimating the cost based on objectives and tasks which have to be performed in order to achieve these goals) (Kotler and Keller 2016). Once the budget is set, the next phase relates to the selection of tools, in other words designing the

communication mix. It has to be appropriately adapted to the target audience, the product itself, reflect the communication objectives and fit the budget. Once the communication campaign is over, there is a need to measure its results (impact), i.e. to assess awareness of the existence of the product, and the success of encouragement to trial and purchase. Finally, according to the American Marketing Association, managing the IMC process is “a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time” in which media coordination and the very implementation of the IMC play an important role.

The core of promotion is marketing communication in order to:

- increase sales;
- attract new customers;
- encourage new customer loyalty;
- encourage trial;
- create awareness;
- inform about the product and/or company;
- remind potential customers;
- reassure new customers;
- change attitudes;
- create an image;
- position a product;
- encourage brand switching;
- support a distribution channel.

Promotion solves problems involved in reaching a group of potential customers through product information, and creating a climate conducive to the transaction at the same time. In practice, it is possible to divide marketing communication tools into two basic categories (Rydel 2001): image building and referring to emotions (mainly advertising and public relations) or activities affecting the direct response (sales promotion, some forms of direct marketing and personal selling). These tools affect buyers with different strength in different phases. The ones which refer to emotions influence customers more before and after purchase,

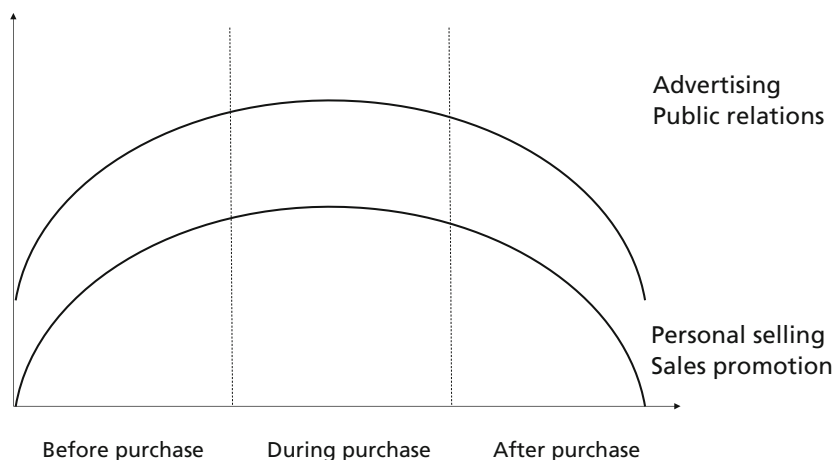


Fig. 2.1 Relative impact of promotion activities. *Source* Adapted from Langeard and Mayer (1975: 255)

while sales promotions and personal selling are most effective during the purchase (Fig. 2.1).

The use of promotional tools is also related to the stage of the product life cycle. At launching and in early stages of the product life cycle, public relations and advertisement are used. In maturity and in the decline phase, it is useful to add sales promotion, while personal selling is appropriate regardless of the product life cycle; however, the objectives and the approach to the client will be different.

Taking into account the definitions of promotion and its two basic kinds, it is possible to distinguish its functions' structure: main function, basic functions and specific functions with basic functions being the core ones:

- informative—to inform;
- stimulating (persuasive)—to shape behaviors and motivation;
- competitive—to be effective through product attractiveness.

All these functions have one overriding task—communication leading to a company's permanent market presence. Of course, there are also

special functions played by particular promotion tools. The informational function aims at making the company, brand and product known to the customer, thus it educates the customer and builds brand consciousness. Stimulation or persuasion is designed to evoke certain actions of customers through revealing deficiencies and shaping their needs, presenting how these needs can be satisfied, modeling preferences and building customer loyalty. The competitive function's role is to establish the non-price instruments of market rivalry (attractiveness of own promotional activities and the ability to disrupt the promotional campaigns of the competitor). In order to be able to fulfill its functions, promotion activities have to fulfill certain criteria (Ace 2002). First, they must be physically seen as well as noticed (attention must be given to them). They also have to be interesting and relevant to the customer, and appealing (positive attitude towards the conveyed message and its object). Finally, promotion should make the customer undertake some action.

The purpose of promotion is to increase sales by increasing the number of consumers or increasing the amount of money left by one consumer in the shop. Before starting the promotional activities, it is important to fix the overall goal, target market, to decide whether to include the most essential information in advertising or to give only the price of the product, to select the media and to set the budget to be spent on a promotional campaign. When selecting the media, the choice is between internal and external forms. Internal media include: shop decoration, product presentation, shop windows, labels, posters and demonstrations. External media are for example: press, radio, television, cinema, Internet, brochures, catalogs and stadiums. When taking decisions, it is important to consider which audience we want to reach, what are the costs, at what time and how often they will be applied. This depends on the industry, range and financial resources which are available.

One intention of promotional activities is setting the brand in the mind of the buyer (a set of visible and invisible values that distinguish the product from others). Brand is a legal, economic and intellectual value of the company, as well as a part of the market value. Brand protects the product against competition, enhances customer loyalty, and symbolizes the quality of the whole company. The customer is often convinced that

branded products are of high quality, which means they are purchased more eagerly.¹ Promotion is also needed while launching a new product (to convey basic information about the product), gaining new customers, maintaining and increasing sales as well as the market share and obtaining competitive advantage (Sztucki 1999).

2.2 Personal Selling as a Promotional Tool

Personal selling is one of the basic sales and promotional tools, being a part of integrated (carefully coordinated) marketing communications (IMC), which are nowadays shifting away from mass marketing (Armstrong and Kotler 2013). The simplest definition is given by Armstrong and Kotler (2013: 385), which defines personal selling as “personal presentation by the firm’s sales force for the purpose of making sales and building customer relationships”, which includes “sales presentations, trade shows and incentive programs”. In other words, this instrument is about presenting the company’s offer directly to the customer during conversation in order to conclude the transaction. Such contact may take place at the initiative of the company or the client. Personal interaction may be realized on a face-to-face basis, by telephone, e-mail, video or online conference, or any other means (channels). It is usually of an informative character and its aim is to persuade the client to buy, solve different types of problems or sustain the relationship. The main features differentiating personal selling from other forms of promotional activities are personal confrontation, maintaining relationships and feedback (Kotler 1984).

The role of personal selling as one promotional tool from the whole marketing point of view is also quite significant. Due to the two-way communication model used in the personal selling process, it requires direct marketing information delivery and creates immediate feedback for marketing-mix activities as a whole, which constitutes its uniqueness (Fig. 2.2).

The scope of personal selling in marketing is relatively large (compared with traditional sales), as it covers not only retail sales, catering or service, but also other forms of direct interpersonal contacts. Since the buyer

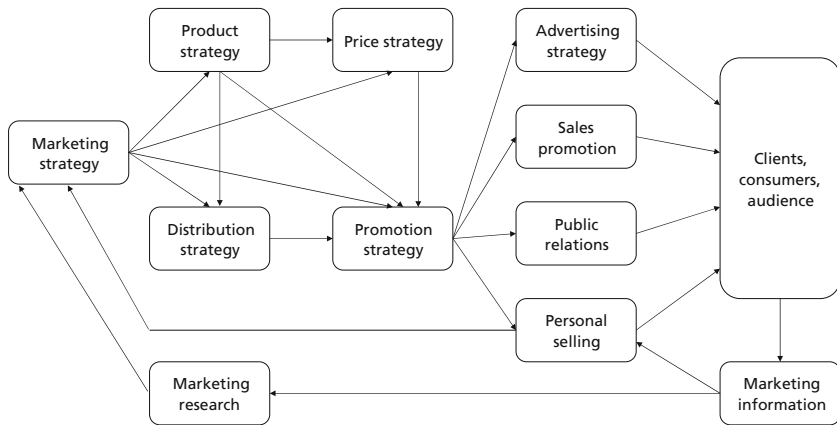


Fig. 2.2 The role of personal selling in the overall marketing process. *Source* Own elaboration based on Blythe (2000: 260)

contacts the seller face-to-face, it allows the production of a friendly atmosphere, appropriate to convince customers about the advantages of the product and the benefits they can gain by buying it. Thus, personal selling must be characterized not only by grace and kindness, but also organization and professionalism. In a way, it is used by various communication senders—vendors, politicians in the fight for voters, doctors to patients, students during exams. It has particular application in the market for intermediate goods and some services (e.g. bank and insurance sectors, but also tourism and education). Other indications for the use of personal selling are when there is a small number of buyers and large geographical spread of buyers. This tool is applied when the product is complicated and learning its operation requires professional help, when the price of the product is not constant but negotiated, or in the case of elective and rare purchase products. Recipients of personal selling activities can be very different, from brokers through clients of the industrial market and professionals ending up with consumers.

The main goals of personal selling are as follows: drawing attention to the product, maintaining interest and arousing desire to possess and purchase the product. It relates to the AIDA model² illustrating the way the customer reacts to promotional activities and what is the

psychological basis for it. AIDA is the acronym standing for: attention, interest, desire and action.

Personal selling is useful especially at the stage of shaping the buyer's preferences, convictions, desires and actions (purchase) due to the interaction process present between the seller and the buyer allowing for quick adjustments (Armstrong and Kotler 2013). The active engagement of the buyer is greater in personal selling than in any other promotional tool, which is achieved through a longer-term commitment.

Personal selling performs the following functions:

1. Providing information about the product, its properties, cost of use, conditions of purchase, etc.
2. Gathering information about the demand as well as the needs and preferences of the customers.
3. Obtaining feedback.
4. Winning over buyers for the company (submission of tenders, taking orders, networking).
5. Convincing customers and supporting sales through help, advice, instructions, explanations, presentations and minimizing the risks associated with the purchase, etc.
6. Creating the image of the company and a positive attitude in customers towards the enterprise (the style of interpersonal relations, service quality, etc.).
7. Organizing logistics activities—warehousing, transportation, etc.

Personal selling often constitutes a link between the company and the customer enhancing customer loyalty (which is often called salesperson-owned loyalty, which means that the customer is loyal to the company due to and through the salesperson). Salespeople also represent the company to the customer as well as the other way around through managing the relationship and introducing customers to the company. All these activities are of course linked to the coordination of marketing and sales, and management of the sales force, which can be defined as “planning, organizing, leading and controlling personal contact programs designed to achieve profitable customer relationships” (Armstrong and Kotler 2013: 423). The process includes designing sales force strategy

and structure which is in turn linked with recruiting, selecting, training, compensating, supervising and evaluating salespeople.

Personal selling has certain attributes compared to other promotional tools. It is the only marketing communication tool which requires personal contact making it a two-way communication model. Thus, personal selling is sometimes called “the interpersonal arm of the promotion mix” (Armstrong and Kotler 2013: 421). This in turn allows for fast feedback on the one hand and it is easy to measure the effectiveness of undertaken actions on the other. Finally, it results in a direct increase in sales. The obvious advantage of personal selling is high flexibility and easy adaptation to different situations, two-way communication (feedback), customization of the message as well as a positive atmosphere, suitable to convince the customer about the benefits of a product or service (the impact of sales staff in bringing about a purchase). It also gains high customer attention: unlike the other promotional tools, it has persuasive impact and contains interactivity. The added value with respect to personal selling is the possibility of reaching out to different and less accessible market segments and potentially more powerful persuasion. It also brings in specific knowledge—direct interaction ensures better transmission of knowledge than mass advertising. In specific situations, it gives the possibility of trial-use, while the consumer’s contact with the company (through the seller) should facilitate a decision on purchase (Prymon 2010: 37–38). It also enables the client’s problem to be solved. Finally, “personal selling can also be persuasive in translating positive attitudes into a concrete forward plan, through the consultative problem-solving process which is difficult to achieve by other means” (McDonald and Wilson 2012: 265). Salespeople can use their deep and specific knowledge about the product, but also about the customer to achieve their goal or help in tailoring the product specifically to the customer’s needs. Moreover, they can also negotiate price, delivery details or special requirements for the customer. All the above shows that personal selling can play an important strategic role in the communication process between the company and its customers (McDonald and Wilson 2012). However, personal selling is expensive, as it requires professional training for the sales personnel and the costs of maintaining and updating customer databases are high. It is also labor

intensive and can reach only a limited number of customers. Personal selling is also often perceived as unwanted acquisition, which in turn can influence negatively the company's image and reputation, especially when performed improperly.

Summing up this part, it is worth reiterating Kotler's (2013) six types of activities carried out within personal selling: searching for new customers; communication with an existing or potential client to provide information about the product or service; sale—contact with the customer, which aims at closing the transaction; customer service before buying, during and after purchase; the collection of feedback, which is later used in the process of marketing planning; and deciding on allocation of available supplies of goods or resources to provide the services. It is important to remember that in personal selling continuous training and effective methods of motivation play a very important role not only for the implementation of ongoing quantitative sales targets, but also for marketing and strategic business. Vendors, to be able to successfully perform all the above-mentioned tasks, apart from the training and motivation, also need to possess certain qualifications, skills, abilities and competences.

The personal selling process is composed of seven steps (Fig. 2.3):

1. Prospecting and qualifying is the process of choosing the appropriate (i.e. those who are most likely to respond positively to a salesperson's undertakings) potential customers and their relevant qualification.
2. Preapproach in which salespeople want to get to know as much as possible about potential prospective customers (likes and dislikes, preferences, buying styles, etc.) in order to be able to prepare themselves properly and make the next steps easier.
3. Approach, which is a meeting of the salesperson with the customer in which the most important part is the successful opening of the relationship while the most important action undertaken by the salesperson is listening to the customer.
4. Presentation and demonstration is based on the salesperson telling the "value story", i.e. showing the reasons and ways in which the product may solve the customer's problems and the most important element at this stage is the idea of helping the customer by providing professional

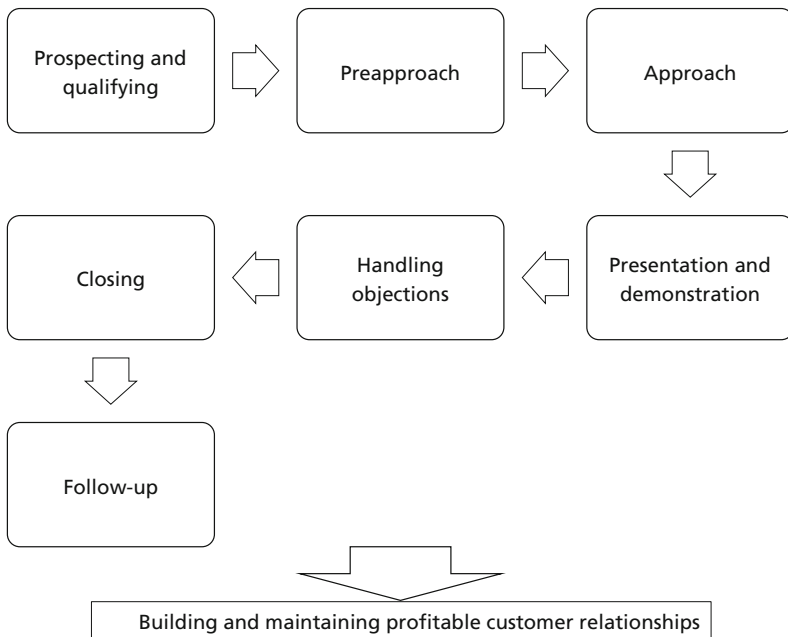


Fig. 2.3 Steps in the personal selling process. *Source* Own elaboration based on Armstrong and Kotler (2013: 434)

and concrete information combined with good interpersonal communication skills.

5. Handling objections is a step in which the salesperson in the most positive way is trying to seek for objections, clarify them and overcome them turning them into possible opportunities (reasons to buy).
6. Closing is encouraging the customer to place an order and closing the sale.
7. Follow-up is a very important step in building further relationship and loyalty; its aim is to check up on the customer's satisfaction and clarify all the concerns the customer may have, which also serves the future facilitation of the repeat purchase.

In this respect, if performed properly, personal selling delivers a unique customer value and builds a mutually valuable and long-term

relationship. Thus, Armstrong and Kotler (2013: 437) rightly claim that “value setting requires listening to customers, understanding their needs, and carefully coordinating the whole company’s efforts to create lasting relationships based on customer value”.

The sales process through personal selling has changed profoundly with the flow of time. The old approach assumed that most effort should be put to the closing of the transaction following the presentation of the product while evoking the customer’s interest was marginalized. In the new approach, it is the other way around, the greatest role being played by gaining the customer’s trust and the identification of his or her needs (Fig. 2.4). This well illustrates the shift from the sales and product marketing orientations towards market and customer orientations.

This issue is also connected with the styles of sales approaches. Nowadays, the most desired style is the one set for solving the customer’s problems and is perceived to be most effective (focus on how the product may solve these problems). Other styles may be either ineffective (customer orientation) or show too little interest in the customer (displaying the product) or both (buy or leave). It is also dependent on customer’s preferences (types) and the product itself.

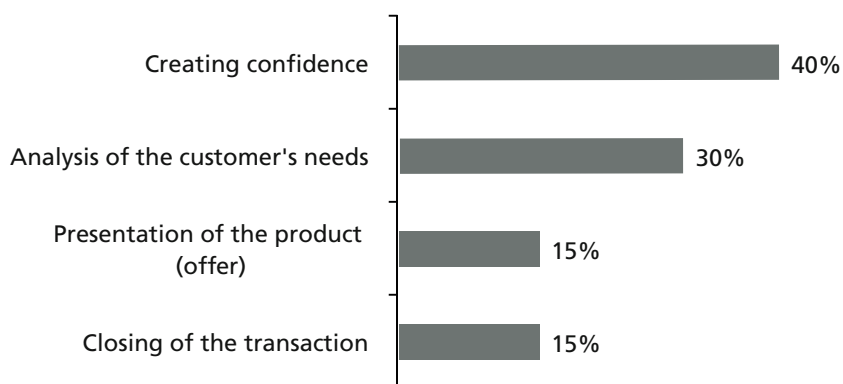


Fig. 2.4 Contemporary sales process elements importance. *Source* Own elaboration based on the literature analysis

2.3 Personal Selling: Special Application in Services

At the very beginning, it is worth asking: what is a service? Surprisingly, it is not easy to provide a definition which would distinguish properly between goods and services. Nevertheless, it is possible to claim that services relate to deeds, efforts and performances (Hoffman and Bateson 1997). Marketing of services³ has become an issue of interest relatively late—in the 1980s. This is very surprising as the services sector is the basis of the gross domestic product (GDP) in most countries. Marketing of services does not differ substantially from the “classical” approach to the marketing of goods. However, the service, being a specific product, requires a slightly different approach to certain elements, particularly the marketing mix (Antczak 2011). The classic four P’s of the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, place) are no longer sufficient to approach services adequately. In time, this formula was improved, based on the recognition that it did not contain all the relevant elements from the marketing point of view. This is how the five P’s and later the seven P’s formula were established. The other elements of the “extended” marketing mix are: people, process and physical evidence. People deliver services, they promote and sell products. Service quality is a key source of customer retention and brand differentiation. Skills, manner and appearance are important, especially in the marketing of services. Process is how customers are handled from first to last point of contact. It deals with: procedures, controls, accessibility, information flows, payments, booking, speed and timing of delivery, etc. Physical evidence is: form of the service, place of availability, facilities, ambience, layout, etc.

It is also necessary to pay special attention to the specific characteristics of services, namely: intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability, inseparability (of the service with the service provider as well as the service “creation” process with consumption) and temporary ownership (non-ownership). Intangibility of services relates to their non-material character; they cannot be touched. We buy someone’s experience (e.g. advisory services), skills (maintenance services), knowledge (e.g. education services), impressions (e.g. entertainment services) or emotions (e.g. tourism services), which

become ours for a moment. Perishability is connected with the impossibility of storage: services frequently “exhaust” with the process of “production” which is also simultaneous to the process of consumption (e.g. a meal in a restaurant, legal advice or education). Variability (heterogeneity) is characterized by a desire to offer the same quality every time, which supports the process of building and strengthening the image and brand. Standardization in the case of services is difficult and may concern only certain areas, since the human factor has a huge impact on the whole process of delivering services (services’ providers and recipients), and it includes such aspects as humor, mood, reaction to environment, experience, etc., which are rather immeasurable, difficult to predict or define. However, quality control (its level) in the case of services plays an extremely important role. Inseparability is based on the close relationship between the service itself and the service provider. It mainly depends on the service provider how the service will be “executed” and delivered, decides the level of the recipient’s satisfaction, as well as the quality of the product. Furthermore, services are usually “produced” and “consumed” at the same time, which creates a kind of a bond between the service provider and the recipient causing their inseparability. Non-ownership (or temporary ownership) refers to the fact that in buying a service the customer does not buy the right to own it (as in the case of goods). Typically, the customer gains access only to the knowledge, skill or item that is lent him for a certain time, when the service is performed.

In the case of services, promotional mix functions in a slightly different way to the case of goods. It is important to pay attention to physical evidence elements and to turn the intangible—images—into more tangible elements—concretes (Hutt and Speh 1998). Undoubtedly, selling services uses the same tools, namely advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling and public relations, but there is a growing importance of other tools, such as sharing of experiences and organization of events, as well as the element of so-called word of mouth. A well-chosen event of a promotional nature combined with the sharing of experience is often one of the most effective ways to promote services, because the consumer is personally involved in some activity and can experience it, feel a bit of what he could get (gain) by buying the service.

This is also why personal selling plays a special and specific role in the services communication mix. Here, building a relationship based on trust is crucial, as the customer cannot see, feel or touch the service in advance. The advice, knowledge and professionalism of the salesperson are of even greater value than with respect to goods.

Personal selling consists of certain stages or phases (as discussed in the previous section) only named differently here: attracting buyers, conducting a meeting/conversation, presentation of the product, convincing about the reasons to purchase, transaction and maintaining the contact, which are supposed to translate into (result in) support in branding efforts as well as building and enhancing customer loyalty (leading in the end also to recommendation according to the brand pyramid developed by Ronald Luskin (1997)). At each stage sellers need to present different skills to be able to approach the potential customer effectively.

In prospecting and qualifying (attracting buyers) the most important features of personality, character and skills will be those which are linked to the abilities of strategic thinking, entrepreneurship, analytical thinking and experience. Similar competences will be needed in the preapproach phase, but they have to be accompanied by client orientation (defining customers' needs). In the approach (conducting a meeting/conversation), presentation and demonstration, as well as handling objectives (persuading about the reasons to purchase), entrepreneurship, client orientation and proper stress handling will be important with communication skills, knowledge, professionalism, experience and proactiveness being crucial at this point. In closing the transaction most important is entrepreneurship (ability to control and to take risk), client orientation (cooperation, building relations and identification of needs and a sense of the right time), communication skills (persuasion, verbal and non-verbal elements) as well as experience, proper stress handling and strategic thinking. Finally, during the follow-up (maintaining the contact) the leading role will be played by strategic thinking, customer orientation and communication skills, sometimes followed by knowledge and experience, as this stage is directed at reinforcement.

Some marketing specialists claim that it is possible to find replacements for all the functions performed by personal selling and salespeople (Table 2.1). Some of them can be truly effective, especially when

Table 2.1 Personal selling functions and possibilities of their replacement

Function	Replacement
Search for potential clients	Database or databases system
Evaluation of potential customers	Data analysis, credit references, reaction to direct communication
Preparation to approach	Development of effective client approach techniques based on information from various databases
Contact with the client	Correspondence, advertisement on the Internet, direct response advertisement
Presentation of the offer	Individualized correspondence, negotiations through e-mail
Reaction to objections and answering questions	Online information system
Transaction	Online contract, electronic payment, electronic order form
After purchase service	Direct correspondence

Source Adapted from Blythe (2000: 261)

customers have less time and do not want to be so much engaged by the process of buying. Nevertheless, in case of more sensitive products, where personal contact is crucial for making the final decision, replacement will simply not work. There are specific products (e.g. Hi-Fi, automotive branch or educational sector) for which nothing can replace personal selling at almost any step. It is the salesperson, his or her competences in approaching the client, presenting the offer, professionalism and reliability in answering questions and solving customer's problems, that plays the key role. Also, the search for prospective customers seems to be more effective and efficient when done by salespeople than through the analysis of data (which is also very often collected using secondary sources which are not necessarily the most relevant for a given company).

Nowadays, marketing starts where customer needs appear (shift from supply to demand focus). Thus, the customer constitutes both the beginning and termination of the selling process. Especially with respect to services, we can observe a shift towards solutions-focused selling (also called customer-focused selling or consultative selling; Arnett and Badrinarayanan (2005)). As Sharma et al. (2008) claim, "solutions are customized and integrated offerings of goods and services that are

designed to solve a particular customer need/want or problem”. Thus, here the most important issue is that salespeople are about to offer solutions to customers (through offered goods or services). The process of solution selling involves the definition of the customer’s requirement, the requisition of the goods/service, the customized integration of goods and services, goods/service deployment and any possible post-purchase support (Sharma et al. 2008). It means that a lot of attention is paid to preparing a customized offer which meets the buyer’s needs, requirements and preferences in order to satisfy them. More emphasis is also placed on the two-way communication (Vargo and Lusch 2004) and dialogue with the customer (with a special focus on asking and answering questions and solving problems).

There are some fundamental premises (Vargo and Lusch 2006: 44) suggested as being relevant to personal selling with special attention paid to services: the application of specialized skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange; goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision; knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage; the customer is always a co-creator of value; a service-centered view is customer oriented and relational. In this respect, it is worth noticing that specialized skills and knowledge are becoming more and more important to customers, so there is a need for companies to employ highly skilled people to perform personal selling effectively and efficiently. Salespeople, on the other hand, are becoming more information agents than persuasion agents (shift in preferred skills).

While considering services, relationship selling, being a sales tactic in which the seller works on building relationships with people instead of using traditional sales tactics, is a very important approach, also used in personal selling. The aim is to be recognized in the marketplace, liked and perceived as reliable. This makes the environment in which sales are the natural result. Relationship selling is based on authenticity, genuine concern and honesty. It is not a sales technique that can be simulated without possessing those basic qualities. The goal of relationship selling is to know a large group of prospective people and to possess as many as possible repeat customers who are essential to the longevity of a firm in today’s competing markets (Boundless Marketing 2015).

Relationship selling is effective when the following requirements are met (Boundless Marketing 2015):

- You like the people you want to sell your service or good to.
- Caring about their problems is essential. When you tell them how your product will solve those problems, you are helping them, not selling to them.
- You have to be reliable and evoke trust, so first of all you have to fully believe in your good or service and be honest.
- You must be patient. Relationships take time to grow, and cannot be rushed.
- You need to have a plan. Building the right relationships will not happen by accident.

It also means that salespeople have to possess certain competences, slightly different from those which were important while performing the traditional personal selling activities.

2.4 Usefulness of Personal Selling in Promoting Higher Education Services

Personal selling is a very important element of the promotional mix with respect to educational services. People who have direct contact with consumers create imaginary ideas about the product and have often a significant impact on buyers through their appearance, speech, manners, charisma or the ability to establish relations. Salespeople have a significant role to play (Pietraszek 2014). It is their level of knowledge, manners and professionalism in the approach to solve the customer's problem which determines whether the customer establishes a bond with the brand (cooperation or recommendation). In practice, this means the necessity of careful selection of salespeople and the range of their training. With respect to higher education services, these people are either external agents knowing the company's offer or representatives of the university or institution (specially trained academic staff and/or

admission officers with marketing background). Thus, the importance of human factors in making contacts cannot be overestimated.

A significant difficulty in promoting educational units is to convince consumers that they will lead in the future to personal benefits—in this case intellectual benefits, resulting later in further development and the realization of aspirations and goals at the educational unit. This is all associated with honesty and moral responsibility of those people who are involved in marketing activities in educational institutions. Simple attributes characteristic for the given educational unit are identified most frequently (the equipment, professionalism of the academic staff, international cooperation, position in rankings, well-known alumni, recognition on the labor market, etc.). The most essential characteristics of the actual product such as acquired knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes are not taken into consideration as they are perceived to be non-marketing ones. Nevertheless, the very educational offer is more and more often a subject of detailed questions from the future students while they have contact with agents or university representatives. With respect to educational services, the creation of a false image is hard to expose in a short time, which is why the reliability and professionalism of salespeople dealing with education are so important (Antczak 2011).

As was already mentioned, the educational product is a very specific one. Firstly, it is probably the most intangible service. Secondly, its structure with respect to higher (academic) education (Fig. 2.5) consists of the core product, actual product (basic and expected product) and augmented product together with the potential one (Kotler and Keller 2016). Level one is the most basic level and simply consists of what people set out to buy and what benefits the producer would like their product to offer to the buyers. Levels two and three are about translating the list of core product benefits into a product that people will buy. There may be competitor products offering the same benefits, so the aim at this stage is to design a product that will persuade people to purchase your product (competitive advantage). The fourth and fifth levels involve identifying the additional non-tangible benefits that the product can offer and prospects for future development of the product. These are very important levels which often distinguish the product from that of competitors and make the customer decide about the purchase. As

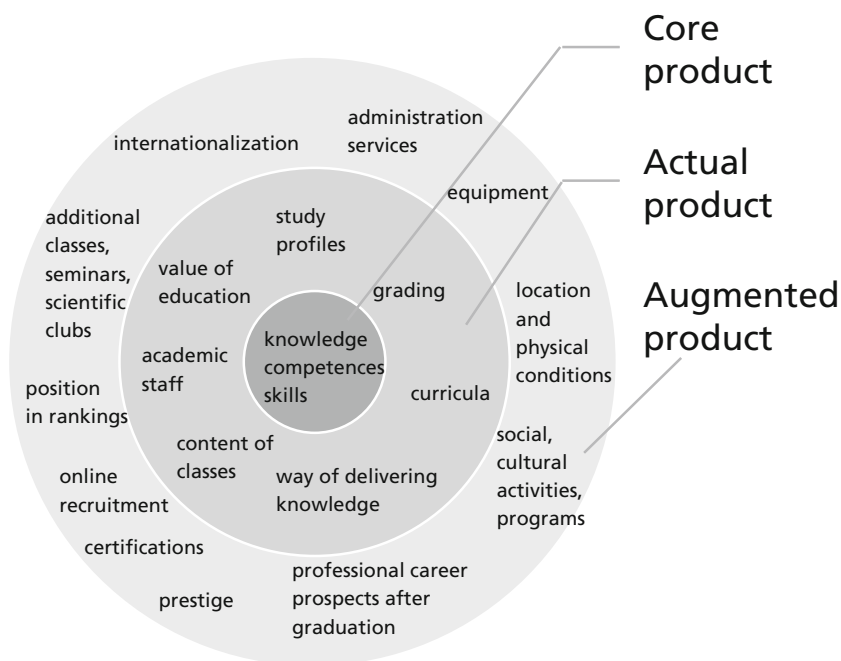


Fig. 2.5 The structure (levels) of the educational product at university level.
Source Own elaboration

presented in Fig. 2.5, the augmented product is the most complex one with respect to the educational product, which makes it even more important. This should not be surprising, as the future expectations and non-tangible elements of educational products are the crucial ones.

Personal selling in the educational sector is most often realized by presentation of the offer to potential clients by the unit's representatives or agents, participation in educational fairs or visits in lower level schools (Krzyżak 2000). In the case of universities while recruiting students from abroad the process involves either visiting high schools or colleges. Presentation of the offer may also relate to the sample of the educational product in the form of a lecture, case study, workshop, simulation game, etc. (Hall 2007) which are aimed at encouragement and evoking the “wow!” reaction (positive emotions and impressions) leading towards stimulating a desire to be a part of the project. Taking all the above into

consideration, the skills, competences and knowledge of salespeople with respect to personal selling of educational services are crucial and cannot be overestimated.

Notes

1. This section is partly based on Antczak-Barzan and Antczak (2014: 40–43).
2. Other, more recent models include: AIDAS (AIDA plus satisfaction); AIDCAS (AIDAS and added “c” standing for confidence); DAGMAR (unawareness, awareness, comprehension, conviction, action); hierarchy of effects (awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, purchase); AISDALSLove (with new elements being: search, like, share and love); CAB (cognition, affect, behavior); TIREA (thought, interest, risk, engagement, action); REAN (reach, engage, activate, nurture); and NAITDASE (need, attention, interest, trust, desire, action, satisfaction, evaluation).
3. The discussion of the specificity of services is based on Antczak-Barzan and Antczak (2014: 21–22 and 85–87).

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