Selling Consulting Services Report

A RainToday.com Special Report
By Mike Schultz

The New Rules of Selling Consulting Services in 2011

SellingConsultingServices
with RAIN Selling

The New Rules of Selling Consulting Services in 2011

Think back to December 2006. The economy was cruising along. Most businesses were brisk, and the only reason someone would be twittering is if they drank too much coffee. Bear Stearns had total capital of approximately $66.7 billion and total assets of $350.4 billion.

Now recall December 2008. The Dow lost more than 40% of its value, and it was still sinking fast. Bear Stearns was kaput. The hot book in the airport bookstores was *The Great Depression Ahead*, with a prediction of the Dow dropping to about 3,800.

Now it's…now. 2011 is upon us. Signs of an economic turnaround are everywhere. Its arrival is in the womb of time.

Still, business leaders and consumers alike bear the scars from the last three years of economic turmoil. But more and more they are looking to the future, planning their new empires, and actively planting the seeds of a better tomorrow.

Perhaps the only constant: This is the fastest-changing business environment we have ever known.

Of its nature, change is uncertain. This can be scary. Yet change is good for at least one reason:

With change comes opportunity.

It's time to step up and take control of your success.

While everyone else is lamenting how it's not as good as it used to be, **you can make 2011 a year of tremendous growth and prosperity.**

If this is what you're looking to do, keep reading *The New Rules for Selling Consulting Services in 2011*.

The Old Rules of Selling Consulting Services

In the old days…

- Repeat business and referrals were the rule of the day. For many consulting firms, it was plenty enough to drive the growth they desired.
- LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, webinars, podcasts, blogs…didn't even exist.
- Providing great service and results led to more business and new business.
- Buyers came to consultants with needs. Consultants followed a traditional consultative selling approach (after all, they are consultants). Consultants asked questions, prospects shared needs, consultants proposed a solution, and off they went together to new engagement honeymoon bliss.
- 'Sales' was a dirty word. Consultants didn't need to do much selling to win clients. Indeed, consultants didn't think selling was a part of their job. Or they didn't admit it.
- Practices were packed with business. It wasn't uncommon for a buyer to have to wait a while for a consultant to free up resources to work with them, or for the buyer to check with several firms and get the "we're not accepting new clients right now" message. (This was common in the "old" old days…before 2007.)

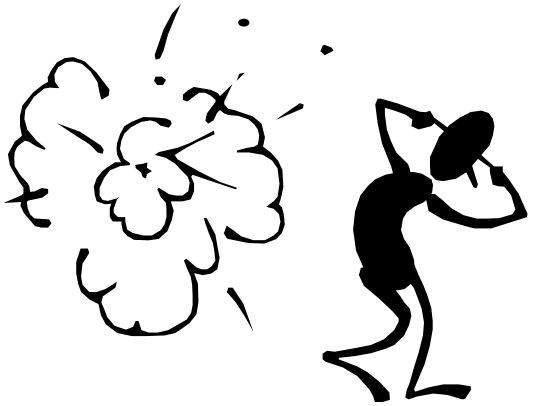
Then…

- Practices were scrambling to survive. Clients were going out of business or cutting back. No buyers were signing new contracts. Price pressure was rampant. (This is in the "new" old days. Think March 2009. Unless, of course, you're a turnaround consultant. If so, you were really busy.)

Add it All Together…

The economy ups and downs and ups, changes in buyer behavior, the web, social media, sales enablement tools, and increased competition have transformed how and why clients buy.

You must transform the way you sell to keep up and to help buyers buy from *you*.



The New Rules of Selling Consulting Services in 2011

- **Rule #1**: The Bad Economy Was So 2008
- **Rule #2**: Play to Win-Win
- **Rule #3**: Set the Agenda – Be a Change Agent
- **Rule #4**: Think Buying First, Selling Second
- **Rule #5**: Create New Conversations Everyday
- **Rule #6**: Re-examine Your Value Proposition
- **Rule #7**: Embrace Your Sales Role
- **Bonus Rule**: Get Help

Rule #1: The Bad Economy Was So 2008

"It's impossible to get prospects to buy in this economy."

"Prospects view me as a commodity."

"I get so much price pressure from clients and prospects and it keeps driving down my margins."

I've been hearing these laments regularly since the economy tanked in 2008.

The fact is there's plenty of opportunity out there, and it's getting better every day.

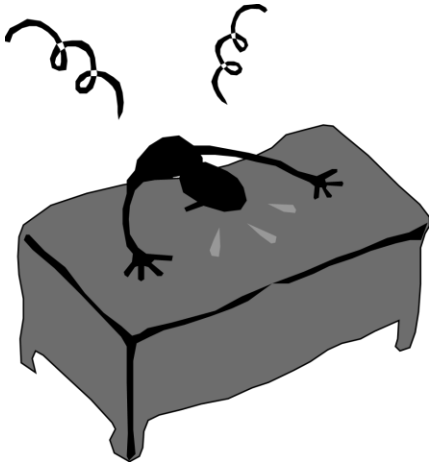
Prospects have money to buy, they're accepting sales conversations, and they're out there making decisions to drive their businesses forward.

As long as you believe the economy is terrible, as long as you keep telling yourself how difficult it is, as long as you think that buyers aren't buying…you're right!

Until you change your mind, you won't change your business fortunes.

Click here and take a piece of advice from Cher. Then come back and keep reading.

2011 is upon us, and it's the year of growth and prosperity. Start believing it.



Rule #2: Play to Win-Win

Win-win is a common negotiating philosophy. The idea is to find solutions that satisfy the interests of both parties. For consultants, since repeat business and referrals are so important, employing win-win as a selling philosophy should be a foregone conclusion.

However in the name of "win-win" many consultants get so tied up in wanting to provide value during the sales process that they…

- Give too much away for free
- Work too hard for too little money
- Spend too much time selling to organizations that are not the best targets, or sell to people at prospect organizations that are too low on the totem pole to make decisions.

As you're doing this, you may be thinking "win-win," but what actually happens is the client wins, but not you. You're hoping that by working for low fees or giving away the store that you are positioning yourself to win "someday." As John Fogarty says, "Someday never comes."

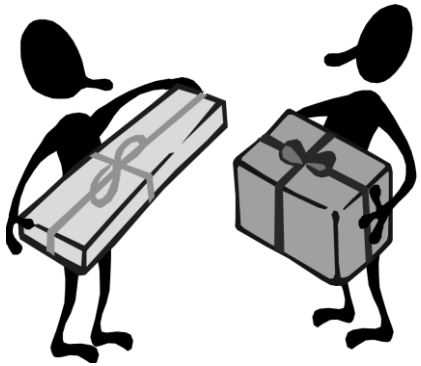
You're in business so that you can make money, live a great life, and have the freedom to do all that you want to do.

You're not in business to make too little money and give away free services.

If you want your clients to win, you have to remember to play to win yourself. In other words, play to win-win.

If you are *too* service-oriented and focused on providing value during the sales process, there's a tendency to forget that you're actually supposed to get paid for what you do.

When selling your services, your goal is to **find a solution that delivers value to the buyer and delivers value to you.**



Rule #3: Set the Agenda – Be a Change Agent

The old rules and consultative selling methodologies will teach you that sales success depends on your ability to ask great questions. The old process looked something like this:

- Consultant meets prospect.
- Consultant asks open ended questions such as, “What keeps you up at night?” and “What are your challenges?” to uncover needs.
- Consultant listens intently, nods with interest, and asks clarifying questions to dig deeper into needs.
- Consultant goes back to office, crafts solution, and delivers to prospect a week later.

In 2011, buyers don’t want to have to tell their service providers what to do.

They’re busier than ever, and they want your advice *immediately*.

They want advisors who will recommend, not just salute and execute. And they want you to bring ideas to the table that they *don’t already know*.

You have to be able to say, “This is where I think you should go. This is what I think you should do.” Don’t be afraid to say it.

Share Your Advice During the Sales Process

- Be proactive in giving recommendations
- Show decision makers the path they need to take to alleviate their afflictions and reach their aspirations
- Articulate how you are the one best suited to help them

Real-Life Challenge

I was coaching one consultant and I attended one of his sales meetings with him. The prospect was sharing certain things about the direction he was heading and a few key actions he was looking to take.

As we left the meeting the consultant turned to me and said:

> **Consultant:** "Oh, my. If he makes those changes to the manufacturing process he's going to get pummeled. The additional overhead costs alone are going to tear into his profit margins without much return."
>
> **Me:** "Why didn't you say that?"
>
> **Consultant:** "Well, it's not my place and he wasn't asking for my advice on that. I didn't want to rock the boat when what we're talking about doing is totally unrelated to that particular area."

What the consultant missed is that buyers are looking for someone to help them make smarter decisions. I told him, "Next time you feel this way, bring it up. Buyers hire you for your insight and advice. You'll build a tremendous amount of credibility and the client will thank you for it."

Sure enough, a short while later we were in a meeting with a different prospect and this time the consultant did jump in with advice, "Ideas number one and two are great, but I've seen a bunch of companies bark up tree number three and it never turns out well. You really should consider that. I don't know if I'd head down that path if I were in your shoes and here's why..."

He ended up winning the business, and the decision maker told him, "I brought up what you said to my staff and they all agreed. I asked them why they didn't mention it to me earlier and no one wanted to rock the boat, even though they thought it was a bad idea. Good thing we talked when we did. See you next week for the kickoff meeting."

The best consultants, regardless of what it is that they do, are change agents. They are not afraid to push when it's in the best interest of the client, and they are not afraid to make recommendations that alter their clients' destinies.

Set the agenda and be a change agent, and your clients' businesses and your practice will be better for it.

Rule #4: Think Buying First, Selling Second

As a consultant you are client-focused. The client always comes first.

Yet when you start to talk about marketing and selling, you focus on your own sales process, what you can do, and how to communicate that to prospects.

What you don't think about is the buying process and what's going on behind closed doors at your prospects' organizations.

You need to think buying first and selling second, and to map your selling process to your prospects' buying process.

Here are just a few questions you should consider asking:

1. **Who else is involved in the decision-making process?** I can't tell you how many times consultants have shared stories with me about how they got a deal squashed in the 11th hour when a new decision maker entered on the scene. You need to know early on in the conversation who is involved in the decision-making process, and make connections with every one of them.

2. **What's the timeframe for making this decision and getting started?** For reasons like not wanting to be pushy, or because they simply don't think of it, consultants don't ask about decision-making timeframes. They assume that if the prospect asks for a proposal they're ready to move the project forward. This is often not the case. Before sending a proposal you need to gain commitment from the prospect that they are ready to roll. As well, asking about decision timeframes is often the impetus buyers need for setting a timeframe.

3. **What's your decision-making process?** What are the stages and expected timeframes for each stage? Who's involved? What are the decision criteria? How would you say your culture and personalities drive your decision making process? Once you know how the organization buys you can then align your selling process accordingly.

4. **What's important to the buyer (beyond ROI)?** ROI is important – that's a given. Especially with organizations trying to do more with less, your ability to quantify the ROI of your solution is a must. But what else? For example, is it important to work with a consultant with whom they can have a really strong relationship? Is creative? Gives back to the community? Who has worked with others in similar situations?

   It's been true forever, and it's still true today: People buy with their hearts and justify with their heads.

   If you only satisfy the head, you leave the heart to chance.

If you don't have the answers to all of these questions, you leave winning to chance. Think buying first and selling second.

You need to ask yourself why the buyer wants to buy. Sure, they want to grow their business from $5 million to $10 million, but is it because they want to retire and spend more time with the grandchildren? So they can make money and buy their own plane? So they can be seen in the community and by their family as a success?

Rule #5: Create New Conversations Every Day

If you've been around for a while, you know: The phone doesn't ring like it used to. If you're new at consulting, and you expect to hang a shingle over the door that says "open for business" and the phone is going to ring, you're in for an unpleasant surprise.

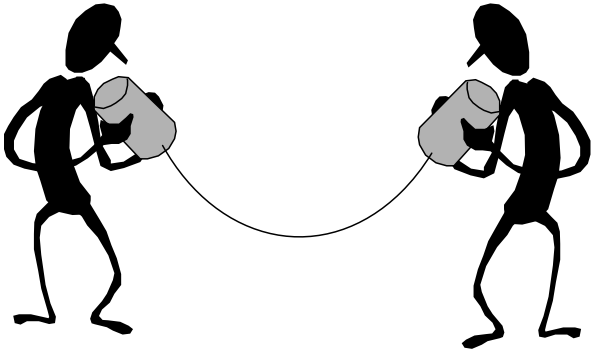
It takes a lot more work to keep the pipeline full with qualified prospects. You have to create new conversations every day.

Some of you might be thinking, "I'm not going to prospect every day and I don't have to."

That isn't what I mean. While reaching out to new prospects is an essential part of most consultants' practices, there's so much more to it besides cold prospecting. As a consultant you already have a treasure trove of qualified prospects just waiting to be tapped. These include:

- **Past clients:** Reach back out to past clients with whom you haven't worked with for a while.

  Almost every consultant that I know who's done this with any sort of regularity and energy has said, "Wow. I reached out to 10 previous clients and 3 of them actually said, 'Good timing. We have X, Y and Z going on. Let's talk.'" When I ask them, "How many of them do you think would have just called you if you didn't reach out?" by and large the answer is none.



- **Lost proposals:** A lost proposal is not the end of a relationship. Even when you lose a proposal, you should make a point to stay in touch. Plan to reconnect with the prospect. Keep the conversation alive. Just because they didn't choose you for this one doesn't mean they will not choose you for the next one. Keep in touch and up-to-date with what is going on. If you do this, next time around you'll have the inside track.

- **Current clients:** Call your current clients to see how things are going. Share a new insight. Invite them to lunch.

  Too many consultants neglect their current client base *as a source of new business*. Just because you work with a client doesn't mean they know all about you and the various ways you can help. Just because you work with them now doesn't mean they have you top of mind or know how and when to refer you to their colleagues.

  And just because you work with them now doesn't mean you're doing all you could for them.

- **Referral sources:** Who else works with the types of clients you work with? Who has sent referrals to you in the past? Reach out to potential referral sources and build that relationship. Ask for introductions in general and to specific people. Make sure your referral sources know the type of client that's a good fit for you. And, most importantly, send referrals their way. Givers gain. If you're a connector for others, it's more likely people will want to reciprocate and make connections for you.

In 2011 you can't sit back and wait for the phone to ring. **When you create new conversations every day, you make your own luck.**

Rule #6: Re-examine Your Value Proposition

For many firms, business was cruising along before the recession hit.

When the recession hit you had to adjust to new needs, a new buying environment, and new competition.

Now, with dawn breaking on the economic horizon, it's time to take a hard look at yourself, your services, and your value to see if it's time to adjust again.

With increased competition and an ever-evolving climate, it's essential that you stand out from the pack. You have to know what's important to your buyers, why clients buy (or should buy) from you, and why you're the best choice.

The reasons why clients buy typically fall into three major buckets:

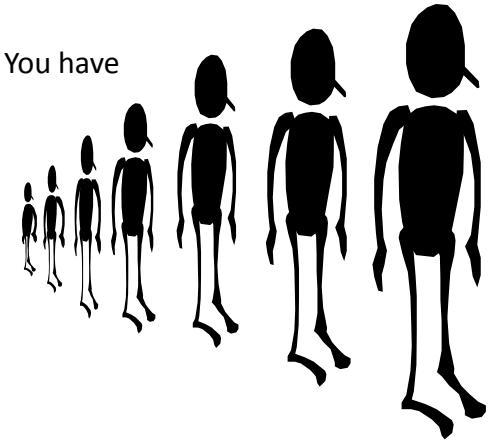
1. Potential clients must want or need what you're selling. Your services must ***resonate*** with them.

2. Potential clients have to see why you stand out from the other available options. You have to ***differentiate*.**

3. Potential clients have to believe that you can deliver on your promises. You have to ***substantiate*.**

You Have To:

- Resonate
- Differentiate
- Substantiate



So what happens when you don't do all three?

- If your services don't resonate with buyers they won't perceive the need. They'll view it as "not important enough" and just won't buy what you're selling.

- If you don't differentiate, buyers will pressure you on price and attempt to get your service (which they perceive as the same as others) from you or a competitor for as little as they can pay for it.

- If you can't substantiate your claims, buyers won't believe that you can (or will) do what you say you can. While they may want what you sell (you resonate), and may perceive you to be the only people on the planet that do what you do (you differentiate), they perceive too much risk in moving forward with you. So they don't.

If you resonate, differentiate, and substantiate, you'll be well on your way to not only getting the attention of buyers, but to winning their business at favorable pricing.

Rule #7: Embrace Your Sales Role

It's 2011 and it's time for you to make the transition from service provider to rainmaker.

You're reading this report because you know you need to sell. You may want to sell. But have you fully embraced your role as a rainmaker?

If you're still thinking, "Selling isn't for me," here are five ideas to help you think of selling in new light:

- **Much of what makes a good consultant makes a good sales person.** Think about how you deliver your services to your clients. You ask questions, extend expert opinions, are accessible when the client needs you, bring forth creative solutions to tough problems, and deliver what you say you're going to.

  This is exactly what you need to do to become successful in sales. It's not about persuading someone to buy something they don't need. It's about helping them find solutions when they realize they don't have the expertise, experience, or team to get something done that they need to get done.

- **Your prospects and clients actually want you to sell to them**. Clients and prospects want to solve problems they're currently not solving, and they want to achieve success they're currently not achieving. If you can show them how they can, and how you're essential to getting them where they want to go, they'll be grateful. The act of selling itself, when done well, adds a significant amount of value. A well-planned sales conversation can help even sophisticated buyers make smarter decisions (see rule #3: Set the Agenda).

Think the big gun rainmakers were born with a telephone in one hand and a contract in the other? Not even close. Most rainmakers from large and small firms alike thought at one point, "Selling isn't for me."

Then they got good at it and sold millions of dollars worth of consulting services.

What did they do first to create their selling success? They believed! They embraced! They stopped resisting their role in sales, and accepted it as their new quest and ultimate destiny.

- **You are most successful when you aren't "salesy."** The best rainmakers don't use cheap tricks or try to win deals with unsavory tactics. They don't do anything that will hinder the success of their clients. They don't sound contrived when they ask questions or give advice. They're not walking clichés. You don't have to be either. If you're worried that you will need to do anything cheesy to succeed in selling, let that worry end here. You don't. You shouldn't. The most successful rainmakers don't just sound sincere. They *are* sincere. They sell with high integrity and with their very own personality..

- **Selling is rewarding**. Bringing in new clients is a thrill. Bringing in more dollars means more career success and financial reward for you. But for many consultants, the greatest reward is being able to find new companies and new people for whom to make a difference and to create success. Think of all of the companies that could benefit from working with you and your firm. If you don't find them and then win them as clients, you can't help them.

- **Selling is enjoyable**. Selling is enjoyable for many people who never thought they'd believe it would be! Start to succeed at anything, and it will start to become more fun. Selling is no different.

Changed your mind yet?

Maybe so, maybe not, but don't forget: As long as you believe you can't sell, won't sell, and won't like it, you're right.

If you believe you can sell, will sell, and might just like it, you're also right.

Embrace your selling role.

Bonus Rule: Get Help

Once you start thinking that you can sell, will sell, and just might like it, you're already halfway to selling success. The right attitude will take you far.

But the right attitude paired with the right skills, desire, commitment, and support will make you a star.

The best rainmakers are students of sales. They are constantly learning, growing, and changing for the better. They read about sales. They get coaching to improve. They are not afraid to ask for help.

Boosting your selling skills does not have to happen through years of trial and error. You can take a cue from the best rainmakers and speed up the process by learning from others' successes and missteps.

Over the next couple of weeks I'm going to introduce you to an educational resource that will help you do just that:

SellingConsultingServices
with RAIN Selling

The world of consulting, and *selling* consulting, has changed. We're here to be your guides to help you be more successful.

It bears repeating: **You can make 2011 a year of tremendous growth and prosperity**.

It's time to step up and take control of your business' success. It's time to embrace the new economy and new world of selling.

Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling is an intensive online training program designed to walk you step-by-step through all facets of selling consulting – from building a value proposition that sells, to leading masterful sales conversations, to filling the pipeline with qualified leads, to closing the deal.

You'll become more confident and comfortable with your selling role and learn the skills necessary for success.

We'll share learnings from mistakes we've seen thousands of consultants make. We will share the best of what we've learned in our decades of experience in the field of sales, our research, our own successes in selling consulting services that propelled us to win a spot on *Inc.* magazine's list of the fastest growing companies in the U.S.A, and our struggles along the way.

Plus with expert forums and monthly Q&A coaching calls, you'll get all the support you need from experts who've been there.

"Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling has given me greater confidence and comfort with selling my services.

The program structure and tools are logical and practical, and have helped me learn how selling can be a natural extension of who I am and what I have to offer."

- Jeremy Bromberg, Bromberg LLC

Over the course of the program we'll give you all the pieces of the puzzle you need to:

- **Develop a winning value proposition** and describe complex services in a way that gets prospects excited about you and your services
- **Keep the front end of the pipeline full** with qualified prospects while maintaining your practice with active clients
- **Position yourself as a trusted advisor** during the sales process, building strong, trusting relationships from the get go, making the sale smoother and faster
- **Lead masterful sales conversations** in any situation
- **Overcome objections** and get closer to the close
- **Follow up with prospects** in a way that deepens your relationship over time
- **Get premium fees for your services** even when clients pressure you for lower fees
- **Make the business impact of your services clear** so you can sell more with less buyer resistance
- **Increase profits** by charging (and getting) premium fees for your services
- **Create proposals that win** at full price

What Can You Expect With Selling Consulting Services?

In the program, we'll equip you with the practical, how-to information and tools you need to fill the pipeline, command higher fees for your services, and bring in a predictable flow of profitable new clients so you can **have a banner year in 2011.**

What's Next?

Over the coming weeks, I'll be sending you additional free content with tips and strategies you can use to be more successful with your selling efforts. Plus we'll give you a complete run-down of what's included in the Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling program and the details on how to enroll (enrollment is only opening for a limited time, so keep an eye out for these emails).

We've got a lot more free content coming your way, so stay tuned. In the meantime, you can learn more about the core modules in Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling and what you can look forward to learning in each one here.

Best regards,

Mike Schultz
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Co-author, *Professional Services Marketing* and *Rainmaking Conversations* (forthcoming)
Adjunct Professor, Marketing Division, Babson College
Instructor, Selling Consulting Services with RAIN Selling

P.S. Stay tuned over the coming weeks and look for emails from me. You don't want to miss the valuable tips I'm about to share with you. To be sure you receive these emails, please add mschultz@raintoday.com to your safe sender list.