

Case Title: <b>Say Less Sell More: How to get prospects ..</b>		Author: J., Sheldon Snodgrass, MBA
Project: Interview Transcription		Date: October 15, 2012
Subject: Lou Davis case study		Version: 1.0

**Sheldon:** This is Sheldon Snodgrass, The Steady Sales Coach and I am honored to have an old friend and a client of mine, Lou Davis, on the phone, The focus of today is to revisit a case study that I entitled, "Say Less-Sell More, How to Get People to Buy From You One Small Step at a Time.: So I am really delighted to have Lou on the call. He is in a different career now, so we are going to hear a little bit about that momentarily but what I would like first of all to do is to welcome you and thank you so much for being on the call Lou.

**Lou** Oh my pleasure, I am really glad to be here. It feels good to be able to give back a little bit too, you have helped me so much over the years and I happy to participate.

**Sheldon** Great. Why don't you just take back a few years and the people that are on the line right now, most of whom, I assume, but if not that is ok, have already downloaded and read the case study about which we are going to be speaking today. But for those of us who like a little refresher, could I just ask you to do a quick recap of the company that you are working for and what your role was and then we will move into what we did and how that worked.

**Lou** Sure, I was the Vice President of Marketing & Sales for Marketing Street Research, which had a long and prosperous history in the world of marketing research, working for hospitals, healthcare providers, banks and companies large and small across the country. It started in 1978 really had a unique way of approaching marketing research by offering a very comprehensive approach to conducting research with a strong emphasis on doing everything right so that there was real statistical validity to the quantitative work and with the highest quality control protocols used in both qualitative and quantitative work. We really did the kind of marketing research that couldn't be questioned. It provided very good direction because we were on the cutting edge of the science and applied it in ways that hadn't been done before. And we had done so for some really big names in the industries that we were working with.

So when I first got there I was tasked with bringing in new business and so I went about it in a way that seemed to come naturally to me. I would pick the phone and try to make phone calls to VPs of marketing in hospitals or banks. Those were the two market segments that were kind of low hanging fruit for us and easily identifiable and segmentable and approachable. I would leave tons of voicemails and nothing was getting through and I would send emails and I would send these kind of long rumbling emails telling all about the virtues of our company and all the ways we are different from our competitors and all the great things that we have done for our clients in all these different industries and across some verticals and for all different kinds of problems and I would attach a brochure as well to these emails and nobody would write



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me back, it was really frustrating.

Sheldon: Now Lou, I am going to jump in right here and interrupt you because you said something that was important as you were describing the rigor with which Market Street approached its work. You said that, in addition to being very scientifically defensibly, it provided solid direction or good direction, what do you mean by that?

Lou: We would really work on understanding an organization's goal for their marketing, what their business goals were and work with them and to help them first understand how they were positioned in a market and work with them to figure out what people thought of them now and what those people needed from the organization in order to choose them versus their competitors.

Sheldon: Got you. I just really want to reiterate the point that the research doesn't exist in the vacuum. It is not something that a bunch of bean-counters or number crunchers or satisfaction consultants are paying attention to but, rather, it informed corporate decision making. So your research provided input for the strategic direction and the strategic investments that your clients, in this case healthcare clients, were making.

Lou: That is exactly right.

Sheldon: Ok, I got you. So that is really the benefit of the services delivered. I interrupted you but I just wanted to make this clear to everybody. Please continue.

Lou: The struggle came in that I was doing what I thought was right, you know. I was making the phone calls, I was sending the emails, I was attending the conferences, I was doing everything I needed to do but I was struggling to make contact. So that is where I was having a problem, I was not getting through, I was not getting through the gatekeepers and I was not getting emails returned and that is when I called you.

Sheldon: Okay, so just a quick recap. Lou had a great product, a stellar name, a recognizable name proven in the industry, a very clearly defined, identifiable market niche, a great story to tell and proceeded with all the standard outreach that one could. Essentially a combination of voicemail, snail mail and email with the emphasis on the email and the voicemail but the results weren't there. And what Lou mentioned a moment ago is one of the things that he would do was attach a brochure and proceed to tell a long story in the email. Of course you weren't so crazy to go on and on in voicemail but what you did do is not tell a consistent story in the voicemail however brief they were.

Lou That is absolutely true. They were all over the place and weren't systematic.

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Sheldon: So you talked about the messaging and you talked about the message. What would happen after you would leave a message or leave an email? Let us talk for a moment about the follow-up. What was your follow-up process.

Lou: My follow up process was scattershot at best. I didn't have a system in place that was really reminding me, there was no consistency whatsoever. I would sometimes send emails, I would sometimes send voicemails. I would often, if I had sent an email originally, follow it up with a voicemail. If I started with a voicemail, I would send an email and follow up. There was no consistency around the time that happened and it was done on impulse and it was not done consistently. It started to feel very feeble and futile.

Sheldon: Some of us on the call and those people listening to this recording in the future may think, "Well of course, you know, you have got to follow up consistently, you have got to have a tight message, you have got to have some systematic approach." What is important to know is Lou is as solid a professional as anybody and when someone of Lou's caliber starts to confess to things like a lack of systemization or employing a scattershot approach. I think it is an important reality check to remind us that often our best intentions lay dormant, or at best sometimes they happen inconsistently. I know that there are some callers on the phone who are automation fiends. I think automation can support what we do in large measure, particularly when it comes to follow up, but there is no amount of automation that can substitute for the kind of mental discipline that says either (a) I have to set these systems up or (b) more importantly I have to use them.

One of the callers on the phone in our preliminary roundup was talking about good systems that have been in place for a long time that are solid and proven but just maybe not putting them out as frequently or using them in disciplined a manner as they could. So I just want to say that I think that that is almost a universal problem except for the great Buddhist masters and probably even they have trouble. Consistently doing those things that we know we should in a manner that we should, but don't, is an easy hole to get into.

Lou Especially when you are not getting the results that you want.

Sheldon: Yeah, it sort of feeds a cycle of low level confidence drain or it casts a depressive pall over what we are doing. And so sometimes it is useful to have a call like this or a coach like me, or to have a case study in your hand that you are reading and say, 'okay, how am I doing these three things'? Because what we have talked about is essentially three things, we have talked about tight messaging, tight outreach protocol and tight follow

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up, right? I am paraphrasing, so let us just go back to Lou, what are the changes that you made with respect to tight messaging?

Lou: The aha moment came when working with you when you asked me ‘what are you trying to sell here?’ I said, well we do all these things, I want to sell all these things that we do because you never know what these people are going to need, you know. This is not selling, it is very likely that today when I email somebody or call somebody they are not going to need what it is that I do. But I want them to know about me so that when they do have that need they will think of me. So you said ‘what will make them think about you over everything else?’ It was having a conversation, they won’t know me until they actually have a chance to talk to me and for me to be able to ask them questions that then fit my expertise, that showed them that I understood what kind of problems they are facing in their professional life and how we could address them and help make their professional lives easier and solve their problems and help them achieve their goals.

So that was the big aha, sell the meetings, sell the phone calls, sell the introduction because that is really what is going to get me the sale no matter what, every sale has to start with that.

Sheldon: I am glad you called that an aha moment because when we have a complex, not even complex but a sophisticated or powerful offering, we often want to present that and say ‘hey, here is this great thing that can help you’ forgetting that there is that important first step of trust building, of confidence building, of permission gaining and then all of a sudden you are into selling your product as opposed to selling the package. In this case the package is a meeting you.

Lou: So our challenge was to take what we did, all of our value proposition and all our differentiation, and synthesis it or distil it into a sound byte that could then provide the context for having a conversation. And so that is what we spent most our time together doing, working on honing the messaging so that my emails went from a huge page, you know, kind of a scrolling page of email text, down to eight sentences that would provide a sense of our gravitas and a unique differentiator and a clear call to action. Those were the four paragraphs we put together that really changed everything that we did. That and a subject line for the emails was the key. So what it ended up as was: the intro of our emails talked about who I was, what I did and a one line about what the company did and who we did it for. So these were targeted just to hospitals. Other efforts were directed for each individual vertical. I had a message that was crafted for hospitals and one for banks and one for startups and one for whoever else I was targeting.

So the first line was just ‘my name is Lou Davis, Vice President Market Street Research. Market Street Research has been providing customers marketing research and analysis

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services to top hospitals and health systems for the past thirty years. Among our clients are Mass General, Cleveland Clinic and John Hopkins. These are extraordinarily aspirational market segments. They all want to work with people who have worked with the best so we happen to have worked with some of the best hospitals in the world. So right of the top we established our levels of expertise and the level of service that we provided.

Sheldon: So bring it home, so you have a solid opening, you have your value proposition in the way you just couched it and then the final part of the message was what?

Lou: Our clients turn to us because we give specific recommendations for action and consistently help them achieve their goals. We manage and drive the entire process they never had to waste their time managing us. So there is the value. That is why they decide to work with us. Then the next sentence was, my hope is to schedule a ten minutes with you to discuss how our unique approach to conducting healthcare marketing research will serve you better than the vendors you have worked with in the past.

Sheldon: Oh, that is a pretty brave statement. And you finished with?

Lou: Would you please ring me be back with some times that work for us to get acquainted. However, if there is someone else in your organization to whom I might direct this request please let me know how I may get in touch with them. And that was it, those were eight sentences and the subject line read 'request for a brief phone conversation'

Sheldon: Ok let us stop there Lou, I am looking at the time and I would like to keep this to thirty minutes and we have got ten minutes left. What I would like to do is ask those of you who have muted your phone to hit star six to unmute your phone and feel free to share a comment or better yet a question for either Lou or for me. So please let us open it up, don't be shy.

John: Hi this is John Smith, I have got a quick question about your email giving people a chance to transfer your invitation to someone like a gatekeeper. I am not sure I would have said, "Is there is someone else in your organization who I should be talking to and please pass me on", because they might as well pass it on. Are you trying to reach decision makers? Or where are you starting?

Lou: Yeah, I did that because the list that I was mailing to included everybody from a hospital's marketing department so very often, and this happened more than I can even recall, my message would get sent to somebody who wasn't the right person at the

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organization and they would send it right away to the person that was and that person then contacted me.

Sheldon: A point of clarification John, I think that is a very good catch on your part. It sounds as if Lou set himself up to get shunted to a secretary but I think it was more about another executive or a different department because the marketing office might say, "You know, this has to do more with CFOs or another executive."

John: I would prefer to use something like, 'please let me know how you recommend we proceed' or something like that. That kind of keeps the action with the person you are speaking with and doesn't let them just shuffle you off to somebody else.

Lou The line was, 'however, if there is someone else in your organization to whom I might direct this request please let me know how I may get in touch with them'.

John Sounds great.

Lou: So that is the line that I used and it worked and they would send it and those people would call me.

Sheldon: Here is something else I want to say because John I absolutely like what you said and agree first of all that saying what Lou said poses a potential risk. You are committed to keeping the conversation alive with the person you are talking to, right so, I am asking you for your next action. What were your words exactly?

John: For me - Please let me know how you would like to proceed or something like that. I am not pursuing like Lou. I am very small, it is just me so I don't want to get sort of lumped in with all the other potential vendors. My goal is to speak with economic buyers and so I like to target the exact person I will be talking to and not make it too easy to say let my secretary get to HR and let them deal with him.

Sheldon: Absolutely right, and here is the thing about being right and this is a very important point that Lou came to on our preparation of today's call which was you are allowed, am saying that word allowed, to tweak things, to make changes as you go. It is almost like going off on a jazz riff you get a theme that you come back to but you can improvise around it, as long as you don't go so far away that the theme has become an entirely new song. So for instance, the theme might be 'highly targeted niche focus with a concise and compelling value offer followed up three times in three weeks'. Let us say that is your theme. Well, maybe the value proposition isn't what it needs to be, maybe some of your messaging in your email is a long to a super exhaustive story, you still want to keep things short but maybe it is time to mix things up. Once you have a system in place it is easier to do that because you can hold yourself to a level of discipline in the

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execution and it no longer becomes a question of, 'oh maybe the message is good but I should just start following up more.' I think John what you just described is a very good point and it goes to the language and if you find something that works for you and Lou ultimately did then we can stick with that. I appreciate the comment.

In five minutes we have left we have time for a couple of other comments or questions if anybody wants to join in. I know there are a few late arrivers to this call so please feel free to jump in.

**Rob** Well, I just want to add something, this is Rob from 2Disc.com, first of all the script thing I have to say is really important in sharing your value proposition. My situation is we had a couple of huge a hundred thousand dollars jobs that got delayed and suddenly I had to fill in the gap. One actually gave us a big down payment but they got hit with a lawsuit. So anyway, I swung into sales and remembered your advice and just disciplined myself to script, writing them out, sticking with them, then follow up phone calls, then engaged with them and that was great and it really got great results. But the big thing that bedevils me most about the sales process is deciding when to keep following up or just dropping them, even though you know they need it. I mean, I can run reports now that can tell me a lot, quickly, about how much damage is done to their website search engine status and I know they could use the benefit, we have done business with them, they have money. Maybe I should contact them six times, follow up six times but maybe three is just the number that sales people use. That is what baffles me is how many follow ups?

**Sheldon** Right, how many licks to get to the center of Tootsie-Roll Tootsie-Pop? So I would like to hear from people on the line. Mark if you are back and engaged it would be great to hear from you, do you have any opinion? Or Lou, in your new career which we haven't had a chance to talk about yet, Or John, do you have any comment about the ideal number of follow ups?

**John** I am happy to hear from whoever has experience being successful. I think three is comfortable, beyond that and I start to really question myself. Did I understand what they wanted? Did I really have a decision maker as well? Is this the best I can do? Maybe I should just move on. Not proud of that but that is kind of how I take it after about three attempts.

**Rob** I struggle with that. I have stopped at the three number but I have also gone on to do many more when I really couldn't understand why I wasn't getting a response after having an initial meeting with somebody or multiple conversations and then they just dropped off the face of the earth and when do you stop?

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John: Right, one thing I like to do every so often is, if a few months later there is an opportunity I have to email them and just share something of value, perhaps in an article I read or ask the follow up question. But I wouldn't really consider that part of my initial follow up. Maybe it is part of selling after the initial push. But I just try to keep my name in front of them in some small way.

Sheldon: That is a very important point. I think it is important to distinguish between the close follow up designed to capitalize on our initial outreach to seek an appointment, and then long term marketing follow up that goes on as you just said, to keep you name in front of people, John. That is the subject for another call that is 'how do we stay in front of prospects over the long haul' and I think that goes back to a system, a file system where you have a database where you collecting names and contact information and you have valuable content that you drip out. One of the methods that I employ is this very call. Like every month for the most part I try to host a free sales training call. I am going to distribute these case studies in the coming months and use these as a platform for discussion. So I think you hit on a very critical element John, if you are going to do that long range follow up instead of ringing the bell again and saying, "Hi, are you ready to do business?" Say, "Hey I read this article... I came across this story... I thought you would find this of interest...or Here is some development that I have uncovered that could be useful to you. I think that is very powerful.

John Thank. I just try to be part of the conversation.

Sheldon So let me answer your question from my point of view and what I learned through a combination of my own experience and client evidence. I generally do four touches within four weeks and then I roll them to - if I like the smell of them, they are in my niche, I have heard their name, it has been referred to me and they are just not getting back in touch - I roll them over into quarterly. I just set a quarterly tickler for myself that automatically comes up. And if I have that article, if I have their invitation sometimes I will make the call and say 'hey, happy winter, happy spring', I open with some nice greeting. That is how I stay in touch. But early on, I like a lot of touches in close succession so my four touches are, I always begin with the phone and now if I have email I do both simultaneously. So phone and email simultaneously, almost the exact replicas of each other. The voice message mirrors the email with the exception of something like 'Hi Mr. Prospect just a quick email to follow up on the voice message I left a moment ago...' That would be my introductory sentence and might be all I change. I diary forward usually no fewer than seven days or one full calendar week and no more than ten days. I really try not to go more than ten days beyond that first message. I do the same thing again, I do that two more times. So really if I do email and voicemail three times, that is actually six touches, if you count both touches simultaneously. I

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believe that professional persistence pays off and you have to account for the fact that sometimes your messages get lost, you are reaching people at the time when they are busy or distracted or it is after another voicemail. A third voice message in as many weeks, from someone is courteously reaching out to you to request ten minutes for an appointment will often get a response. They will call back or not, and if they don't, John, I do what you do. I say 'ok, time to move on, I have got other prospects, I am not going just keep hammering this person week after week after week. I have got a system they are going to roll over into the quarterly touch and then I move on.

John I am good

Sheldon Did anybody else have some questions or comments about Say Less Sell More, this case study? Ok if there are no questions coming through I think what we will do given that we have slightly passed the thirty minute mark we won't have time for discussion about how you have taken this in your new career. I mean, and you are in a new career, you have gotten out of the market research business, gotten into the family business and in many respects starting from scratch but bringing many of these lessons to bear as you have explained to me. So I am pleased for you for making that move and wish you lots of luck. I am going to allow you the final farewell before we sign off and say goodbye. Lou, you can take the parting words.

Lou Thanks you everybody, I hope I was helpful today. Please feel free to give me a call if you want to talk it over in any way. Sheldon can give you my information. This work really helped me so much and it just changed the way I think about just doing business in general and I encourage you then to focus this way as well.