

Sometimes finding a customer can be a bit like solving a crime. The detective starts with a crime or suspected crime and possibly a crime scene. The entrepreneur starts with a product and/or service that solves a need and possibly a market where people with that need congregate.



Sherlock Holmes sifts the details for clues and his main job at this stage is to eliminate everything not relevant to the case and retain everything that is. The sales prospecting process is designed to identify potential buyers or have prospects identify themselves.

At completion of this stage, the detective has a collection of clues and a list of possible suspects. The entrepreneur has a list of leads.

In the discovery phase, our sleuth focuses on matching clues to facts and candidates, sorting truth from lies, verifying alibis, looking to eliminate non-viable suspects and narrow down the list down to only those who had motive, means and opportunity.

Our sales superstar works on qualifying the leads, narrowing the field down to prospects who have a need/desire for what's on offer, who can buy now and who have the means (money).

At this point each of our two heroes has a smaller, highly qualified pool of suspects/prospects and the challenge is to pick the right one.

The consequences in the criminal case may be far reaching - accusing the correct suspect and presenting enough evidence to support an arrest and charge may take the criminal off the streets, prevent further crimes and protect the innocent from further hurt and harm. Making the wrong choice can have life altering negative consequences for the wrongly accused, may leave the real culprit free to commit more crimes and expose the innocent to more injury and damage. And may damage or end the gumshoe's career.

The commercial ramifications are unlikely to be so dramatic but may be equally profound. Making the right offer to the right prospect at the right time can transform the business and life of both buyer and seller. Getting it wrong can be equally transformative in a negative direction. More usually though getting it wrong means not making the sale or making a sale that isn't profitable.


It is tempting to jump to conclusions about why something succeeds or fails. We do this all the time. I was looking at a client's customer profile and saw that 75%+ were international and more than 60% of the rest were national, non-local. The reason I was told was lack of local interest.

☒ So I went around the local town, just talking to people on the street, in shops and in cafés/restaurants. Asking were they aware of this business, did they know what they offered, had they ever gone there/been a customer, what they thought if they did. And if they hadn't been a customer, why not. The most common answer I got was people didn't go there because they "never answer the phone".

Back with my client I shared my findings and we made some small changes, the first of which was the landline was diverted to mobile and that cellphone was carried at all times by the manager was on duty.

This led to an increase in local business. Which then drove development of new products and services specifically for that market. Within 2 years, sales to local customers had increased

by more than 500%. But it didn't stop there – national non-local business also grew very strongly, simply because while the core offering hadn't changed substantially, the overall offering was attractive to a much wider audience with broader interests.


One of my traits that some people love and some hate is I do my homework. Clients tend  to love it, even when it's extremely uncomfortable for them because I ask deep, probing questions and am relentless.

Lazy people, and those who don't know their onions, aren't so keen – for exactly the same reasons.

It pays to do your homework. If you're considering getting into something, doing your research and due diligence can only help. Sometimes it can even save you from disaster.

If you're already involved in something that isn't working out the way you thought it should or would, testing and validating your assumptions goes a long way and can save you from going down the right road.

We often ascribe big effects to big causes when it's just a likely that a very small action can have enormous consequences. The domino effect demonstrates that a single domino holds enough potential energy to knock over another one 1.5 times as tall as it falls – line up 11 and the final one could be almost 58 times the height of the first! The Pareto Principle teaches us that a majority of effects can be rooted in a small minority of causes.

 Sherlock Holmes solved the case in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* because he reasoned that if the facts as presented were true, the hound should have barked. Because it didn't, he knew the 'facts' were deficient. – turning Silence into Sales. So next time you're inclined to start or change something, pause a moment and ask yourself, do I have the necessary facts to support a decision? Am I missing something that should be here? Or am I jumping to conclusions?

What do you think? Comment below if you agree...or disagree.