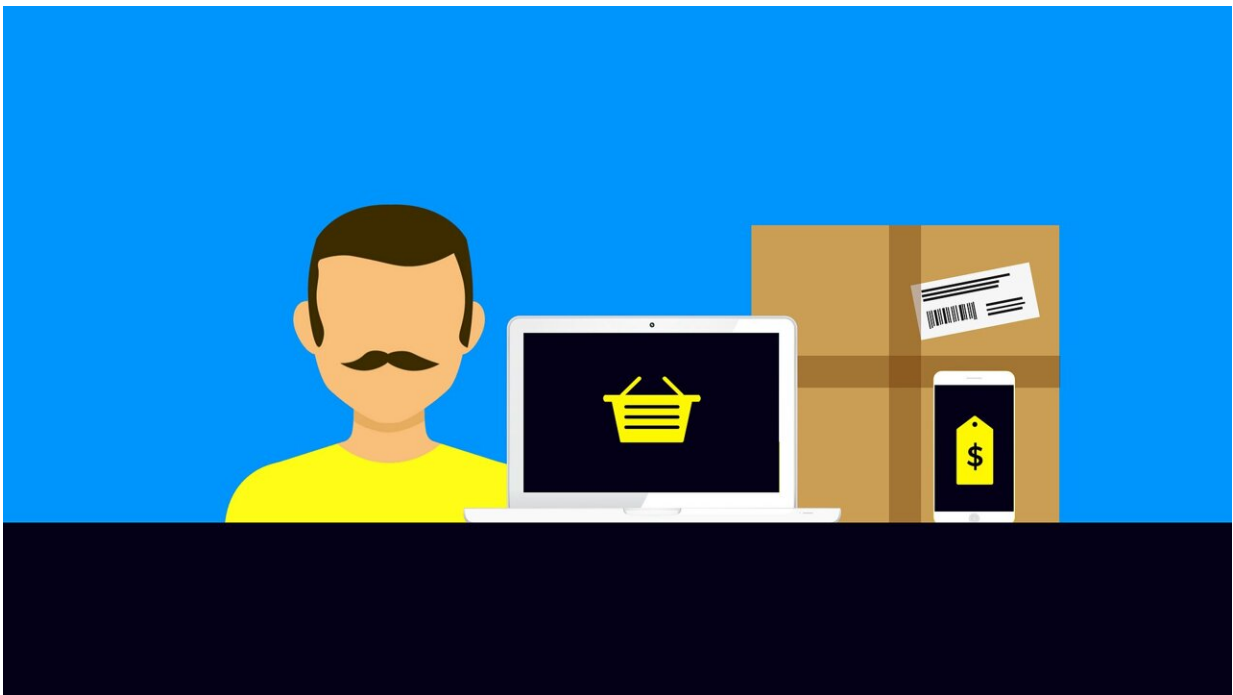


How salesperson behavior beyond the salesperson-customer dyad increases sales revenues and customer satisfaction

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Researchers from University of Wyoming, University of Kentucky, and Georgia Institute of Technology published a new *Journal of Marketing* article that investigates how secondary selling can boost sales revenues and customer satisfaction.

The study is authored by Molly R. Burchett, Brian Murtha, and Ajay K. Kohli.

What can salespeople do to simultaneously increase sales revenues and [customer satisfaction](#), something that is especially challenging when cross-selling and up-selling?

This new study reveals a novel insight: A [salesperson's](#) selling effectiveness with a customer may be enhanced by the way the salesperson interacts with secondary entities; i.e., objects and people outside the core salesperson–customer relationship. "Secondary selling" refers to a salesperson behaving in a considerate, respectful, and patient manner with secondary entities such as other customers and company property (e.g., display products, point-of-sales systems).

Secondary selling is unique among selling behaviors in that other constructs such as customer orientation, adaptive selling, ingratiation, impression management, cognitive empathy, and agreeableness all pertain to salesperson behaviors within a core salesperson-customer dyad.

The concept of secondary selling emerges from analysis of fly-on-the-wall video-recordings of real-world salesperson–customer exchanges. Across four additional studies, the research shows secondary selling's important role in a variety of B2C sales contexts, such automotive services centers and clothing, electronics, and furniture stores.

"Our study shows that secondary selling reduces a customer's rejection of (or reactance to) the salesperson's recommendations. This in turn helps the salesperson generate higher sales revenues and customer satisfaction than can be obtained by focusing only on the focal customer," explains Burchett.

Results indicate that secondary selling accounts for 22.9% of the variance in customer reactance, which is more than the combined variance in customer reactance explained by well-known selling behaviors like identifying customer needs, adapting to a customer's selling situation, or engaging in impression management.

The practical value of secondary selling

What is the practical value of employing secondary selling? Results demonstrate that when customers experience low rather than high reactance to sales recommendations, they have greater satisfaction and increase their cross-buying. Murtha says, "These results suggest that secondary selling can help address a classic conundrum—how one may cross-sell additional products to customers without upsetting them."

The findings have direct implications for sales management activities related to hiring, training, coaching, performance evaluation, and reward recognition. The study suggests several initiatives such as:

1) Training initiatives

Customers frequently notice salespeople's interactions with objects, such as whether a salesperson "manhandles" display computers, slams display cabinets, or carelessly tosses products around. Customers also pay attention to salespeople's disrespectful behaviors toward others, such as when a salesperson becomes impatient with, frequently interrupts, or stands uncomfortably close to other customers.

Training initiatives should sensitize salespeople to the importance of their behaviors with people and objects outside of a focal salesperson–customer dyad, such as with company tools, displays, and inventory, coworkers, and other customers. Managers may also

incorporate our "reactance" measure in customer satisfaction surveys to identify salespeople who may benefit from secondary selling training initiatives, says Kohli.

2) Increase visibility of secondary selling behaviors

Managers may also consider making salespeople's secondary selling behaviors more visible to customers. For example, managers may design product demonstration areas in a way that prospective customers can readily see from a distance how well salespersons treat other customers, co-workers, and objects. This would be analogous to many service providers (e.g., restaurants) that intentionally make their internal operations visible to customers to instill greater confidence.

Overall, the studies' results indicate that practitioners should broaden their view of sales behaviors. The research demonstrates that secondary selling outside a salesperson–customer dyad influences how a customer within the dyad reacts to the salesperson's selling efforts. These [customer](#) reactions, in turn, impact customers' purchases and satisfaction.

More information: Molly R. Burchett et al, EXPRESS: Secondary Selling: Beyond the Salesperson-Customer Dyad, *Journal of Marketing* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429221138302](https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221138302)

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