

Death Knell For Door to Door Sales:

August 06, 2012

Cody James thought it would be an easy way to make money during the summer before his first year of college. What he didn't realize is that all the footwork going door-to-door to sell high-end knives would be the most humbling experience he's yet to face.

When asked how the knife business was going, James' only response was, "It's not."

Despite his innocent looks and kind demeanor, James found himself with doors shut in his face and those few customers that allowed him to go through his sales pitch laughed wildly when he asked for the sale. At \$2,500, the knives were well above the budget for most, if not all, of the homeowners in his suburban Philadelphia neighborhood.

An Endangered Species

James isn't alone in his struggle to succeed as a door-to-door salesman. In fact, it seems as if the craft is going the way of the dinosaurs.

For decades, many industries relied on door-to-door sales, both direct-to-consumer and business-to-business. Now, unsolicited solicitations are not only unwanted, but in some areas are illegal unless a hard-to-come-by permit is obtained. And, in light of the surge of social media and e-commerce, door-to-door sales is simply unwarranted.

In fact, door-to-door sales has been listed by Forbes as one of the [10 Top Dead or Dying Career Paths](#), with an 18 percent decline in positions expected by 2018.

Why the Decline

Randy Tivens, vice president of marketing and communications for [Forecast Land Corporation](#)

, a land investment firm, said society no longer permits such a practice. "I like to tell my newer sales trainees, the only folks who go door to door anymore with any amount of success are either poor kids selling candy from a large box or general real estate folk who are giving out pads of paper with their pictures on them to remind homeowners to use them if/when they decide to sell their house," Tivens says.

There are various factors that have led to the demise of door-to-door sales, including:

Rise in reported scams. The average consumer is becoming more and more skeptical when it comes to anyone peddling his wares door-to-door. There have been numerous reports of scammers meeting their victims during sales visits. Every summer it seems there are news stories of people, especially the elderly, who have fallen victim to a variety of schemes.

This trend has contributed to a sense of hyper-vigilance, with many Americans becoming very cautious about allowing strangers into their homes.

Changing technologies. Long gone are the days of the encyclopedia salesman. With the advent of the Internet, people stopped turning to the yearly books to do research. Google and Bing are the 21st-century equivalent of the books, taking up much less space and providing more information than the books ever could.

“I think people have found it’s much more efficient to seek out information online and on their own terms for potential products they may be interested in, rather than listen to sales pitches that can be long and uncomfortable at times,” explained Jeremy Schaedler, president of

CaliforniaContractorBonds.com

Increase in retail. Today it’s not a big deal to walk into nearly any big-box retail store and find a state-of-the-art vacuum cleaner. Knife sets like James sold can be found in boutique kitchen stores, with sales personnel trained to answer even the toughest of questions about the products.

In addition, consumers can easily research nearly any product online and compare sites for the best deals.

The biggest downside to purchasing products online, or even in a retail store, is that they do not get to see the demonstrations that made door-to-door sales so successful.

Character-Building Experience

If your business is still forging ahead with door-to-door sales, your employees may be still gaining valuable experience. Schaedler credits much of sales resilience, a trait he says is essential in sales, to his beginning days knocking on doors. But, he doesn’t believe it is an effective sales tactic in the modern age. “I don’t think the practice is still effective today. People in today’s society are more and more sensitive to being disrupted in their homes, either by phone or by unsolicited visitors,” he says. Schaedler points to do-not-call lists and other laws that have greatly accelerated this trend over the past several years by raising awareness of harassing marketing tactics.

Businesses that are currently selling door-to-door will most likely need to transition their marketing efforts, if not now, soon. Or, at the very least, consider incorporating other tactics to their sales plan.

Both Tivens and Schaedler have turned to digital media to manage their efforts. Websites full of beneficial resources, blogs, YouTube videos demonstrating the products and social networking sites have all stolen the limelight from the door-to-door salesman.

Some sales forces still make house calls, but they do so via scheduled appointments, rather than the chance knock on the door.

Death of the Salesman?

No longer is it just a play. Death of the salesman, or at least the door-to-door salesman isn't far from reality. Although there may always be select industries that succeed by knocking on doors, there are more effective and efficient ways to grow and cultivate qualified business leads.

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Consumer Comments on the Blog:

• Posted March 01

I would like to echo the comments already made here that door to door sales is DEFINITELY not dead. A lot of guys make good money (like 6-figures+) selling pest control, home security systems, lawn care services, construction services, real estate, insurance and food routes. And technology has not rendered it dead either. Solar panel companies are the latest industry to go big in door to door sales, and home security companies, like Vivint, use home automation technology as part of their service and pitch. And due to increases in technology, d2d sales is increasingly effective. There are various apps, like this one: <https://www.salesrabbit.com/a-door-to-door-sales-app-for-any-industry> . You can download data to pick the best prospects.

Posted Mar 11

I have to be honest that this article is wrong on so many levels. Door to door and sales is on of the most lucrative and expanding industries globally. The reason for the decline in numbers has more to do with the quality of those doing door to door compared with 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Consumers are more educated and have access to mountains of information. Most sales positions have a low barrier of entry, especially door to door. To be successful at door to door, you can't be junior sales. You need to be polished, educated, quick on your feet, great with people, understand that you need to work referrals and follow up with appointments and have super thick skin.

Posted Jan 21

- Sorry I had a typo saying he instead of she in my last comment. I also wanted to add that door to door sales will be difficult for the majority when getting started. This initial frustration and long hours working causes a lot of door knockers to get desperate at the doors. Not all but some. Proper management and guidance from a strong company shall guide the sales rep in the right direction and give them the motivation to do what is right and ethical. My advise is, if your going to get a better deal and you can build trust with a door to door salesperson then why not do

business with that person. I never had a problem with a client checking up on my company or my credentials. Habe ID on you.

Posted Jan 26

Ok I have to say this article has some truth to it and many things I really disagree with based on the reality of door to door companies I know who are still doing large numbers. The sales reps on average are seeing tremendous results. As a teacher of door to door sales over at <http://DoorToDoorMastery.com> I see and hear success stories and failures. Door to door sales is not for everyone however if you have the personality to build a relationship with a random stranger and you don't sound like your their to just sell the potential client, with a little practice and dedication you can really drive a ton of sales. He's hes right about scams and terrible people scamming seniors. It's terrible. This does not mean everyone is.

Posted Jun 01

I agree with Chase and Matthew, I disagree on the decline of of d2d sales. I too am from Utah and d2d sales is what we do best and for the ones that stick with it you can make a substantial amount of money in just a summer. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicted that door-to-door sales jobs would decline 15% by 2018, but the current trends don't seem to point in this direction. According to the same organization, 2010 saw direct sales—80% of which are door-to-door sales—was a \$28.6 billion industry. That's up from \$28.3 in 2009, with no sign of a downward spiral. But I do have to disagree with Matthew on going to Moxie, Precise Pest control is hands down the best pest control service to work for.

Posted Aug 15

I would take a close look at companies like Vivint and True Green. Door to door is very much alive for some companies. Vivint had a record breaking summer in the middle of the 2008 recession. thats the power of d2d. It may not be pupular, but properly applied it is very effective.