

 Cover Feature - Sean McPheat

A professional portrait of Sean McPheat, a bald man with a goatee, smiling and wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket over a light blue shirt. He has his arms crossed and is standing in what appears to be an office or training environment.

MTD Training has just celebrated training it's 20,000th delegate in a little over 5 years. Founder and Managing Director Sean McPheat talks to Mind Your Business about how it all began and how you can actually thrive in a recession.

SEAN MCPHEAT

THE SALES JEDI

How Sales Guru Sean McPheat went from cricket bats and betting slips to creating one of the most successful sales and management training firms in the UK.

You've built one of the most successful training organisations in the UK in a very short space of time. Have you always been Entrepreneurial Sean?

I guess so although at the time I didn't see it as such. In my teens I would put together ideas and inventions all the time and send them off to manufacturers to see if they would be interested in taking my ideas up. Some of them were ridiculous and ranged from board games through to revolutionary washing up bowls! If Dragons Den would have been around then I'm sure I would have been their youngest entrant! When I was 15 I sent off a project proposal to Richard Branson and the Virgin group with my idea to set up discount stores in inner-city deprived areas of the UK and I received a lovely letter back, I'm sure my parents have still got the proposal document. 4 or 5 years later and all of the pound shops sprouted up all over the place! Whilst none of my ideas paid off, I never got disheartened or ever thought of giving up - this is probably one of my biggest strengths and is something that has kept me going so well.

So you went to school in Coventry then Sean? Did you want to become a businessman "when you grew up?"

Oh no, I wanted to be either be a professional cricketer or snooker player! I captained Coventry schools and Warwickshire at cricket and had a top break of 64 aged 8 at snooker. I wished I'd have pursued the snooker more but that probably would have meant playing truant and going down the snooker hall all day! That was never going to happen! I'd get plenty of runs as an opening batsman but wasn't a great fielder so that was always against me. Yes, I was schooled in Coventry. I went to Gosford Park and Coundon Court.

What was your first ever job?

I lasted 2 days in my first ever job! After leaving school I took some accountancy exams at Coventry University which I sailed through winning the course tutors prize for outstanding student and started working at an Accountancy practice in Coventry. I lasted 2 days! I remember coming home in tears and thinking that I'd need to start all over again. I just did not want to do that kind of work day in and day out (sorry Accountants!) After 6 months on the dole, I ended up working in a bookies for the next 2 years to get some money and I was being turned down left, right and centre for the jobs I was going for. No-one wanted to give



me a chance. And then Barclays Bank opened up their telephone banking centre in Walsgrave and they gave me my break. Having said that, they offered me a 3pm-11pm shift managing 20 part time mums so it was baptism of fire! But I loved it at Barclays and I worked really hard there gaining 3 promotions in 5 years and ended up planning out all of their contact centres.

So how did you start your own business?

MTD Training was formed back in 2001 working from my bedroom in my little flat based at the Canal Basin in Coventry. After deliberating for many years I decided to take the plunge and gave up my £70,000 a year job to see if I had what it took. I was closing deals wearing my shorts and a t-shirt and I would meet clients at a hotel or business meeting centre (I'd wear a suit for those meetings though!)

How did you build up the business from a "one man band" to an International Training firm?

At the time I knew that I needed to become an expert in 2 fields: internet marketing and sales. I predicted that a lot of business would be done on the internet and hence I studied intensely and learned from the best. But here's a great lesson for your readers and it's an obvious one but you've got to take massive action. Don't wait for things to be perfect. Instead you've got to dive in and make things happen and then learn from your experiences. As a natural planner, I had to have a plan in place and then a plan for the plan and another plan for that etc. I'm not saying that you shouldn't plan. Far from it. But you need to take action on the plan. I always thought that the next piece of information that I learned would have the

answers in it - but that never materialised! Once my savings had run out and there was more month left at the end of the money then I was forced into taking massive action and to make things happen. Everything took off from there. I'd make cold calls all day long, I'd send out direct mailings, I started to advertise on the internet and I started to generate my own PR. I'd be up at 5:30am and would go to bed at 1:00am. The thing is, I didn't see this as work at all. In fact I loved every second of it. I hated going to bed because it was an interruption to my work.

How did your wife feel about this?

Donna was 100% behind me. We were together when I had nothing. I remember sitting with her on the steps of Coventry Cathedral and we were discussing the plans I had to get us the house of our dreams. The thing is, I was on dole money at the time! Donna believed in my dream from day 1 and stuck by me in a time when all of her friend's boyfriends had decent jobs and cars! Today I've got staff so my days are not as frantic or as long as they used to be! Well almost!

Do you have an approach or a philosophy to what you do?

Yes I do. To succeed in today's competitive business world to be "good" at what you do is not "good enough" any longer. You need to be outstanding and you need to provide more value to your clients than they could ever expect. I believe in business relationships rather than business transactions. A business transaction is an exchange of money for a service or product whereas a business relationship is more like an ongoing partnership. We look to partner with all of our clients helping them whether we get paid for it or not and being there at the end of the telephone for a chat.

My philosophy is that when a business decides to use MTD Training it's as though we become part of their business and it's MTD and our client against the competition - simple as that. We'll do everything in our power to provide them with the skills, the tools and the knowledge to outwit, outsmart and outmanoeuvre their rivals.

Your media profile has helped with the expansion of your business. How did that all come about?

I suppose I'm a bit different to the "normal" business owner and perhaps the media like that! I know I don't hold back any punches when giving any interviews or speaking at a

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a conference and I'm good value so perhaps it's good viewing or good listening! I've had a lot of media enquiries for requests for TV work, radio, national and local newspapers, magazines and also speaking opportunities at conferences too. Live interviews on CNN, ITV and other work for the BBC added to being in over 200 other publications has meant that I've kept a high profile in the sales and management training industry. I've been approached by and spoken to 7 TV production companies about various TV programmes that they wanted me to feature in but some of the ideas would have crippled my reputation! They've ranged from wanting me to be the Gordon Ramsay of the sales world through to "sales makeovers" for geeks!

So where is MTD Training today and where are you going to take it?

Well, we've now trained over 20,000 people from over 800 different companies. It's something that I am very proud of but me being me I'm still not 100% happy and I want to strive for more! We've got a team of 20 trainers based around the country supported by 6 admin staff. We're currently talking to a number of interested parties to enable MTD to also have a base in mainland Europe, the US and the Middle East so it's exciting times! More and more of my time is now being spent speaking at conferences and events and developing new products and services so I'm always kept busy. I've just completed a book deal and also a sales improvement CD too so both of those will be out in the stores soon.

Where did the term "The Sales Jedi" come from?

I get asked that a lot and I wish I'd have been that creative to come out with it myself but it's a term that's stuck with me for the past year or so. I was referred to in the media as "The UK's Leading Authority On Modern Day Selling" and when I was introduced when speaking at a conference the master of ceremonies called me a "Sales Jedi" and that I was "The Master Of The Sales Force" so I thought "I like that! I'm having it" I'm always predicting future sales trends and coming out with new ways to sell to the modern day buyer so "Sales Jedi" works well. It's something different too. I can't read minds yet though!

Sean McPheat's Recession Busting Top Tips



Whether we've talked ourselves into the recession or not, I'm finding that companies are falling into two camps.

The first group are what I call "THE SURVIVERS"

These companies just want to get through these tough times in one piece. They are cutting costs left, right and centre and have even reduced their budgets on advertising and marketing. It's a "suck it and see" mentality and they do not want to take any risks.

Then there are what I call "THE THRIVERS!"

They are the companies that are using the current economic climate to really hit home their marketing messages and they are upping their sales efforts. It's a mentality of "The business is out there so let's make sure it comes to us" They love it when other companies are cutting back on their advertising because that means more exposure for them. This group appreciate that there are "Survivors" and "Thrivers" out there and they know how to sell to each type of company.

So which camp do you fall into?

Do you want to thrive or do you just want to survive?

Well, probably a mixture of both is a prudent approach but I can't stress how important it is for you to keep on doing your marketing and selling efforts. Sure, cut costs if you have to but find it from somewhere else.

So here on the next page are 7 ways on how to tackle the recession head on that will improve the leads coming into your business and will enable you to close more deals.

5 Ways To Market And Sell Your Way Out Of The Recession

RECESSION BUSTER No:1 – Increase Your Marketing Budget

I know some of you have just taken a big gasp of air but if you think of the logic it makes sense to increase your advertising and marketing spend. In a market where most of your competitors are battering down the hatches and removing adverts it makes sense that you up the ante because your business will be more exposed to the marketplace.

You'll be viewed as a successful business especially if your prospects and clients notice that your competition have all of a sudden disappeared into the ether!

RECESSION BUSTER No: 2 – Look Where Other Salespeople Are Not Looking!

I get asked a lot where to get more sales leads from. While there are plenty of standard answers - mine is typically "Where other salespeople aren't looking." Here are two quick examples.

For example, what industry do you sell into? Let's say that it is in novel materials for semi-conductors. Why not monitor the semi-conductor patents that get issued and contact each and every author to pick their brain and see if they know who you should be talking to.

Staying on the same general sales lead path - get your hands on all the technical articles you can and call up all the authors. Typically these more technically-oriented people will talk to you and provide you with great insight and sales leads as well.

Of course the pool will not be overflowing with fish but then again there will hardly be any fishing going on in the first place!

RECESSION BUSTER No: 3 – If You Are Going To Jump On The 2.0 Bandwagon Then...

Social media this, Twitter that, Web 2.0, what's it all about Alfie?!

Everyman and his dog is now waking up to

fact that they can improve their standing within their industry and the number of leads into their business via social networking.

Not a day goes past without reports in the papers or on business websites about the use of Twitter, Digg, Facebook, the use of blogs, LinkedIn and a million and one other social media sites.

I am a big fan of using social media to generate leads into your business so if you are not currently using social media I recommend that you find out all about it.

Having said that 95% of the businesses what we work with are using social media in the wrong way with no specific plan of action or objectives which just leads to the whole thing being a complete of waste.

My advice? Get involved!

Hunt out relevant discussion groups, social media sites and blogs where your target prospects "hang out" and then demonstrate your expertise to the group without any hard sell. You'll soon become an authority in your industry, if you know what you're talking about that is, and no matter what you sell or market there is always some kind of group or forum online that you can participate in.

But have a plan of action and stick to it, that is the key to success.

RECESSION BUSTER No: 4 - "You don't have to be better, just be different"

A superior product with inferior marketing will not out perform an inferior product with superior marketing. It's a harsh thing to say but it's true.

If someone out markets you then you are dead in the water.

You don't have to be better you just need to be different, so try:

- Sending out postcard campaigns instead of letters (hardly anyone sends out postcards and they are much more cost effective)
- Frequency trumps reach: if you are going to send direct mail, I'd rather send 1,000 pieces to the same list 5 times as opposed to a one time mailing of 5,000 contacts. Frequency and "in front of mind" value is better than a one hit wonder approach
- In your direct mailings send out a chocolate foot and put "Now that we've

got our foot in the door..." Be different! And stand out.

RECESSION BUSTER No: 5 – "Existing Supplier Syndrome"

You'll come up against a lot of prospects who will say "Oh, we're very happy with the suppliers that we've already got" And I bet this is very frustrating for you. You see, you can't question them because it actually questions the decision they made in the first place and to go with you they would have to actually admit that they were wrong so you do not want to do that.

Instead, be different by following a different approach. The words below are not to be used verbatim, they are to just give you an idea of what the approach is.

"I've got an idea Brian, let's place this small order with me today just to get us started. Then, give your XYZ rep a call. Let them know that you're giving us a try with something very small. Tell them that we are offering to give you two more deliveries a month and that we will sharpen your tools for free for life and let them know that we are going to give you a free online ordering system. Now, Brian, if XYZ decides to come up to the level of service that we offer—then by all means, I think they deserve to keep your business. However, if they do not or will not meet our level of excellence—then you did your job by giving them a chance and I would think that we'd have earned some of your business. What do you think?"

Once again, it's not the words that are important. It's the approach.

FREE SALES TRAINING OFFER

Sean is offering a **FREE SALES TRAINING** programme for small businesses at:

www.mtdsalestraining.com

Please visit the site to download the audios and special reports.