

# Three Ways Creative Brands Self-Sabotage Their Sales

By Maha Mamish

One of the things I get asked to do often is help people design their sales organization. Invariably they've jumped on some representation relationships that haven't panned out despite a great product, or they can't get a handle on all the client chaos and need to know if there's a better way to structure how they take in and process orders. Something's just not working. Every business is unique in its own way, and each entrepreneur creates their own universe in their image. At the same time, there seem to be patterns that play out again and again. Everyone's operating from the best of intentions. **Nonetheless avoiding some classic pitfalls below will help you avoid unnecessary stalling of your brand's growth.**

## 1. Handing over your business to sales reps and showrooms as the solution to your sales allergy.

"Sales on the side, please?" Yes, yes I know you hate sales. Most artistic creatives do.



And I understand how alluring it is to think a social media algorithm, well-heeled design showroom, or experienced industry salesperson could save your life; bringing all the business you'll need so you never have to deal with any of this.

I've seen this fatal mistake countless times. Why fatal? A few reasons. First off, it's a fallacy that there's a way to be successful and not deal with sales as an owner. Money is the food feeding your brainchild and keeping it alive. If you don't understand good nutrition and habits yourself, then how can you ever know how well someone else is doing it or not on your behalf? You won't.

**For example, let's say you get a request that seems slightly outrageous. How do you qualify whether it's A: actually a justified client need or B: a red flag, requiring you to establish a boundary, when you've never experienced the ins and outs of clients' needs yourself?**

A few smart creatives immerse themselves in the scary world of sales early on, and always keep an eye on it even after they pass the task off to others. The rest of the contenders waste months or years trying out showrooms that don't sell enough, see in-house sales reps come and go, and struggle to make a foothold in the industry or survive exhaustively managing untenable chaos the whole way through. You deserve better.

The second reason why passing the sales arm over in full is not a good idea is that no one will ever love your product as you do. Nor will anyone care about your business 'making it' as you do. It is a fallacy that experienced salespeople can sell your creation better than you. Even the best of the best sales persona out there can't hold a candle to the power of authenticity and sacred connection that transpires when the client gets to talk to "the artist" about their work.

**I always thought to myself "YESSSS!!!!" when the maker agreed to come to sales meetings with me early on in my sales career because of how impactful I**

**knew it would be. The clients always ALWAYS want to see you, connect with you creatively, and feel that they've walked away with something beyond the material product they're buying.**

Lastly, how can you dependably rely on a showroom or an outside rep's loyal community to stay loyal to you indefinitely? Their clients actually buying and living with your work don't know you since you never interface with them. All they know is your product. It's about the connection, not just the product. When you exit your seller contract, their client, i.e. your buyer, stays with the relationship, which is with the gallery or rep, not necessarily with the product. Let me be clear that sales reps, outside reps, and showrooms/galleries are integral to your sales success and play vital roles in the industry, offering clients and creative brand owners a great deal of value. I help place brands in showrooms nationwide on a regular basis.

Instead, I'm referring to the hazard of putting all your eggs in the baskets of others before you deeply understand how your designer clients work or what they need. Add to that, no ongoing, direct line of communication with your buying community, and you're in danger of being distant or cut off from your most valuable resource for growth. Getting representation is not a lottery win out of being involved in arguably the most vital part of keeping your business going. Do right by your work and make friends with the sales side of your business.

## 2. Poor resource planning for growth

It's critical to plan for overhead and resource drain during the ramp-up months or years, irrespective of who is doing the sales. Understandably, we don't all have a massive stash of hoarded cash to endlessly dip into as we're getting a business or new phase of growth off the ground. But you do have control over your budget, and how much you allocate where.



Getting representation does not decrease your resource burden, it simply shifts it. (More on that later.) Nor does it mean you've cut the line and are on a fast track to growth. Whether you make meetings yourself, you hire an experienced rep, or you have an entire staff at showrooms showing your product; there is no quick path to growing your sales. Even the juiciest contact list won't be able to make a project appear instantly with the exact needs and timing that match what you offer. There's often a time-heavy process for sales in interiors, and it's a bit of an uphill climb. Luxury clients require a more elaborated, high-touch approach. Make sure you're allocating enough money and anticipating time that comes with demands streaming in before the orders lock in, because that's required in order for them to lock in at all.

## What should you be factoring in? Some possibilities:

Sales partners need you to be quick to meet their needs, regardless of your cash flow. Salespeople prioritize selling things that are easy to sell, meaning from responsive businesses.....not the best designs. What this amounts to is you've essentially replaced the neediness and demands of "annoying clients" you don't want to deal with, with the justifiable neediness and demands of the sales reps or galleries selling for you.

There will be lots of urgent emails containing repetitive inane questions to reply to with outside representation, sometimes more, because they can't retain as much information about your line as you can. After all, they've got 10 other lines, each with just as many details to remember.

Showroom partners need you to train their sales staff ongoing and need training literature or your 1:1 time to keep abreast of everything you're doing and stand out in the crowd. People skills and investment are both still on the table.

Showrooms need lots and lots of material samples, just like if you were selling direct. Except they lose them at 10 times the rate you do and need constant replacing, or clarification on what's what, leading to urgent last minute requests.

To be really successful you'll need to find ways to make their lives easier as a showroom or rep, just like you'd have to do if you were speaking directly to clients. The "I'm special and need X" phenomenon will still feature in your life because the showrooms understand from years of doing sales that it's just the cost of doing business. Those same requests just get passed right along back to your desk one way or another. Flexibility and the occasional exception are required.

Outside reps sometimes don't process their own paperwork and they need responses triple ASAP, meaning you'll be pulled away from whatever you're doing regularly to play admin support.

You are even more under the gun to deliver on time and live up to any other promises made than even when selling direct. Your direct clients who know you and love you will forgive you. Start selling via someone else and it's their relationship you've put on the line. There's less wiggle room for error.

Showrooms can't absorb all the cost of doing business. Clients will make requests (e.g. 3d drawings, rushed material samples, last minute proposals that require research, loaning of product, the list goes on) and your ability to meet those needs quickly makes all the difference.

All this and more has to be accounted for when you decide what kind of sales structure and growth plan works for you—one that harmonizes with your preferred way of working and your goals. Like in life, a good partnership can take off certain kinds of burdens and offer a collaborative experience towards growth. It will also demand new things from you that challenge you. They're selling with you, not for you. Make sure your values and practices are aligned before you sign on the dotted line. Ask a lot of



questions of what is expected of your side of the deal. After the fact, have check-ins once or twice a year to inquire how they feel the relationship is going (not just where the numbers are) and really listen to ways they need you to improve. They are in the trenches, they know things you don't know. They're goal is your goal, everyone's on the same team.

When you don't do and plan for the above, then you end up stressed out and acting perpetually unprofessional in the eyes of your partners, ultimately alienating relationships and opportunities you need to thrive.

In case you're like "ugh"! reading that, here's the truth nugget that will set you free. You are already the root of your sales success, not some super senior sales force out there you need to slay for you. It's about your response times, your adaptability, your ability to deliver on promises, your collaborative nature, your consistency, and your integrity—that's what will make the sales happen quicker—whether it's you or someone else actually selling. The rest is just having the foresight to ask questions to make sound choices with your budget and deciding on a sales structure that works best for you interpersonally. It's helpful to remember that YOU are the one in control here. The main resources required are already in you.

And how many people get to say they're pursuing their passion and making a living and life around it? It's a blessing and worth fighting and digging deep for. So instead of trying to skirt around it, own it. Own your growth and all that it demands of you proudly and with verve.

### 3. Acting out of a “lack” mindset.

There's nothing more crippling to your P&L than deciding that your moments of success are a scarce resource. I see this play out in two main ways. First, owners who hold on too tightly to their proprietary info. Being stingy about sharing helpful or necessary info



your client needs, based on the fear they have nefarious intentions with your IP, is a misplaced reaction. Let's skip straight past the part about learning to trust and ascend to a total bird's eye view here: It doesn't matter if someone copies you. In fact, it's a compliment that you know what the hell you're doing, and is only an incentive to keep going. Remember, people buy based on value, and you're offering them way more than just a product, right? Value can't be copied.

What you designed is already in the past. Don't worry about keeping the past alive forever. Think to the future and what you'll do next. You are innately creative, and the creative mind never stops producing. Innovation is the antidote to being copied, not being stingy or litigious. Unless you're looking to piss off your clients and kill your sales growth by having to reinvent your list of accounts on a perpetual basis, try to avoid this tendency.

The second way this plays out is a general lack of openness. Don't get me wrong, the word 'NO' can be a powerful tool for positive transformation, and I encourage my clients to practice saying 'no' when it comes from a place of creativity and self-love. At the same time, 'no' can be a destructive blockade we build in our minds and hearts to protect ourselves, and that's when its use is super unhelpful. If you find yourself saying no to a lot of things like entertaining outside-of-the-box requests, adapting designs, or taking to heart clients' or partners' feedback in the name of "creative integrity" – it might be a red flag worth exploring.

Do these things to showroom sales staff repeatedly or to your reps and watch them slowly stop caring about selling your product. Business owners do not get to be divas. At least not if they want a business that stays open.

Flexibility is one of the key traits needed in successful entrepreneurship, and there's a huge space between slight to extreme flexibility in the full spectrum to play around with and explore before deciding what's best for your business. Being fiercely inflexible in the face of the market telling you what it wants from you is—brace yourself—deep

down a sign that you don't feel you're good enough unless the externally projected "you" lives up to some inner constructed concept. This would be a good time to do inner work and discover why you're pushing away opportunities you say you want, in the name of perfection or pride.

## In Summary:

1. Learn to love being at least casually engaged with the sales side of your business. No one cares like you do. Plus, it will give you ongoing perspective as you grow.
2. Prepare yourself for the time and expenses involved in operating the business when you're trying to grow new business before you see results. Learn from your sales partners, and offer value by partnering with them on sales, instead of passively expecting results and thinking the product alone is your part of the deal.
3. Stay generous and trust in others who have given you no reason otherwise. Focus your energy on new creativity and opportunities instead of holding on too tightly to what got you business in the past. As a highly creative being, trust you will always have access to original solutions for any obstacle.

### About Maha Mamish

Maha Mamish has spent the last two decades growing sustainable luxury product brands in the U.S. and Europe enabling her to inspire creative audiences with a holistic approach to business. As an accomplished mentor in creative excellence, Maha uses a 360 approach focused on business growth and personal wellness, in sustainable harmony. At the core, her approach empowers creative audiences to use their brain's innate super powers to excel in all areas of life.

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