

Why Your Outsourced Sales Team Doesn't Work for Commission Only

By Jonny Grimes • 12 May 2025



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It's late Friday afternoon. Managing Director and seasoned sales veteran Andy Hayward is on the phone with our fourth cold enquiry of the week, while the team clatters away at thick mechanical keyboards.

I slip my headset off one ear, half-listening in. I want to know who I might be working with next and what I might be selling. As an outsourced B2B sales and marketing agency, we've sold everything from children's books to tanks.

Andy finds his rhythm, moving smoothly from fact-finding into his personal history in engineering. It's not a guaranteed sign that the opportunity is in the industrial sector, but it tells me one thing, he thinks the conversation has enough potential to share more about Hayward Miller.

Then, it comes down to the inevitable: price. Our price, to be specific. Anyone worth their salt in sales knows you don't drop a number before establishing value. Everything in business is relative, and as Andy once told me, "Don't give someone the price of a Ferrari if they think they're buying a Fiesta."

And that's when our Hayward Miller Ferrari hits the proverbial pothole. I'm mid-swig of my lukewarm 4PM Nescafé when I hear Andy say, "Commission only? I'm afraid we don't do that." The coffee goes down about as well as the proposition. It's a request we receive often, and while it might seem fair on the surface, the reality is quite different.

Client Confidence

If you're not prepared to invest in your sales and marketing, why should we? When testing a new market or launching a product, a strong outsourced sales partnership requires confidence in the product or service, and a willingness to put your own money on the line to sell it. In business accounting there is a "Cost of Sales" section for a reason. By extension, sharing the risk also shows confidence in us. Trust involves risk. Without any, we can't be sure of your business, your product, or our relationship. As a busy agency with hardworking people, we have no time, or interest, in chasing unscrupulous businesses for unpaid commission.

Our Risk, Your Reward

One day, someone might ask us to drive growth in exchange for a share of their business. Now, that would be an interesting incentive. But you don't really want a stakeholder, you want a good quality service. We work for you as your sales team, but we do not desire to be company owners, and we shouldn't be expected to take on the financial risks of one. Everyone you employ is paid, cleaners, receptionists, IT staff. So why should sales be treated differently? When we succeed in getting you sales, your company reaps the rewards.

Financial Instability

We love SMEs and startups. They're almost always led by driven, courageous individuals seeking independence from someone else's enterprise. But they are also the most common group to request commission-only work. Why? They do not have any money OR at least do not want to risk what they have in the bank. Sometimes, it's naivety and inexperience. But more often, it signals financial insecurity. If a business can't afford to pay for sales right now, will it even exist in three months? Businesses come to us for two reasons: they see the value in outsourcing to a complete team with a proven track record; or something isn't working in their business, in which case what they really need isn't sales, it's consultancy.

Talent

As the saying goes: "If you're good at something, don't do it for free." While some salespeople will work for commission only, it's rarely a mark of quality. We know our craft. We know how to get results. We've proven that our model works, and businesses pay for our services. One client has been with us for four years; another has returned for no fewer than ten projects. For your business, you don't want a team just chasing commission. Sales reps working this way are often pushy and reckless, potentially harming your reputation. Paradoxically, a paid sales team is often more motivated.

Starting the Machine

"We'll pay your monthly fee once you've earned it in sales." It sounds like a compromise, but it's worse than commission only. Why? Because the slowest part of sales is the beginning of the process. In the first month, we're becoming an extension of your business. That means learning the company and its offering; setting up datasets, internal resources, meetings, scripts, email accounts, brochures, and more; and reaching out to potential customers for the first time. None of this earns a commission. But it lays the foundation for our outreach, outreach that will get you sales.

Immeasurable Value

Rory Sutherland, Vice Chairman of Ogilvy, often highlights how modern businesses undervalue things they can't immediately measure. But just because something isn't quantifiable doesn't mean it lacks value. Part of our managed services package includes marketing to support outreach: social media, website design & SEO, adverts, and trade shows. While our focus is always on sales and revenue, the long-term impact of our work is often underestimated.

The Call Back

So, will we work for commission? Yes, internally. We incentivise our own team based on performance, ensuring motivation and results. They are paid a full salary and can earn commission on top of that. We will also consider structured models that offer security, confidence, and recognition of value while allowing both parties to benefit from success. But commission-only? It's not a model that works. As I said, I didn't hear the end of Andy's conversation that afternoon. But there's a good chance that phone will ring again, someone has had time to think it over and is ready to proceed.

Ready to grow your sales?

Hayward Miller is your outsourced B2B sales team, generating leads, booking meetings and winning business for you.

Contact us today on **01842 777 760** or visit haywardmiller.co.uk