

## Scaling Up Services

Episode 244 - Michael Walford-Grant

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### Michael Walford-Grant, Founder, Director of MDWG Consulting Ltd

Michael Walford-Grant is a seasoned B2B sales professional with over three decades of experience in technology sales within the financial banking sector. After a successful career working for various software and services companies, he founded MDWG Consulting Ltd in 2020, specializing in assisting foreign-based companies enter the UK market.

His consultancy practice focuses on improving sales effectiveness and implementing sales best practices for small, niche, and early-stage companies. This specialization led to the publication of his book "Sales Unplugged" in 2023, offering invaluable guidance for busy B2B salespeople through a blend of traditional and scientifically-backed techniques, enriched with personal anecdotes from his frontline experiences.

Prior to his consultancy career, Michael authored two crossword puzzle books in the 1980s, showcasing his diverse interests and expertise. He resides in London, England, with his wife Annie.

### EPIISODE TRANSCRIPT

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#### Bruce Eckfeldt

Welcome, everyone. This is scaling up services. I'm Bruce Eckfeldt. I'm your host. Our guest today is Michael Walford grant, he is the author of sales unplugged the invaluable go to guide for busy b2b sales people. We're gonna talk about the world of sales, we're gonna talk about services. This is a really hot topic. For me, I think one of the biggest challenges that companies have in terms of scaling, particularly service companies, is how to really systematize sales and make it strategic making something that's predictable and repeatable and something that people can really kind of build an engine around. So we're talking to Michael about this his experience, what he's learned, talking about the book and what he's helping companies with. So I'm excited about this topic. And I'm really interested in hearing Michael's experiences and background and what he has to say. So with all that, Michael, welcome to the program. Thank

**Michael Walford-Grant**

you very much, Bruce. Welcome. Hi, you're British accent.

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

I love it. I love it. Others build upon? So I'm curious, before we kind of dig into the book and kind of what you're doing today, in terms of helping companies with sales process? What was the background? How did you get into sales? Give us a little bit of the story. Tell us the journey that you've been on?

**Michael Walford-Grant**

Thanks a lot. Okay. So it goes back, a bit scary, it goes back to the late 1980s. So I really am dating myself. And I actually recall working in a more administrative role and working for NCR. And in fact, we were one of the pioneers would you believe of PCs personal computers. And so I was one of the early office staff to get them also want to helping the finance manager and learn spreadsheets and word processing and things like that. And I did actually get into a bit of programming, and acting in pre sales. So supporting salespeople, they bring clients in, and we would show certain technologies, mostly hardware, but sometimes software, as was emerging at that time. And I soon discovered, I was much better at the client facing work, and not so good at the programming. So that really helped me decide to follow the sales path. And so I joined NCR, one of the big account teams, and we get the opportunity, I have an anecdote around that, which is quite an interesting one and pioneering at the time regarding services and packaging up services. So yeah, I got my grounding at NCR, which was really valuable because they trained salespeople properly. So I went on all the formal courses. And that really was the foundation for my career going forward. Because after that, I've tended to work for much smaller companies.

And they're, of course, those companies don't have training budgets. And therefore, I realized very soon that if I didn't take the initiative, and keep learning myself, that I could soon become an irrelevance, a dinosaur in the industry, and I wouldn't be able to sustain a long career. So yeah, I work for smaller companies. And what I've tended to and I fell into it, there was no real great planning, but I fell into a specialist role, which is, like a first man in role. So what I've tended to do is specialize in opening up an office. So a foreign based company, foreign in terms of not in the UK, wish to enter the UK market, they may have had some success in their home markets, and now wish to expand into the UK.

And I have been hired as their first man in, which has, you know, setting up an office, maybe hiring a couple of people, but then taking their offering to market. And so I've done that quite successfully contributed very proud to have contributed to private companies, you know, exiting at a good equity ratio than been involved in three or four of those. And then, about four years ago, decided, if I didn't do it now, I never would, and started up my own sales consultancy, and really have retained that focus and specialization. So it's small, niche businesses, typically, usually software, but I've done software and services and services only. And it's representing them over here in the UK on a consulting basis. So either doing sales, health checks, helping them put together sales strategies, and in many cases being feet on the street, you know, they want someone to take their product and offering to market and sell it. So that kind of brings me up to today. Yeah, and then that will perhaps we'll talk about it later. And that really led into the book. Yeah,

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

let's do. I would love to kind of just define sales a little bit because I think that's one challenge a lot of companies have is like what do we call sales? What do we not call sales and protect delay, right? What is sort

of marketing or lead development versus sales versus account management? Like I guess, where do you kind of draw some lines or break points between some of these business processes?

**Michael Walford-Grant**

Okay, property sales is the person that, say, closes the deal. But you know, has to follow the process all the way through from the very early stages to the very end, and very much lead that process. And we can get into some ways in which the industry has changed, where it's more a buying process. Now, Bruce, as I'm sure you've heard, rather than a selling process, when I first started out in sales, there's a not such subtle difference between the two terms. But let's park that for one minute. Yeah. So in terms of the engagement with the prospect and moving them through the various stages, that are typical for, let's say, a typical b2b sale of a certain value, so it's not a commodity item, but it's a value add service, or evaluate software offering with services, which will require to go through the various stages.

And so the salespersons responsibility is managing that whole process coordinating their own internal resources, as required, whether it's a pre sales specialist, IT architects a subject matter expert and a particular segment, and then helping the prospect identifying what the need is with frog the prospect matching that need, building a compelling business case, working with the client, to build that business, compelling business case and really supporting them in buying. I think that's a term maybe one of the terms to take away is a salesman's role is to support the buyer to buy is not necessarily to sell. Yeah, and there's a subtle difference, but it is an important one, especially in this day and age where prospects are so well informed around the market that they operate in.

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

Yeah, tell me more about that. Because I think that's an interesting kind of mindset shift of, you know, going from this thing, you know, my job is to get them to buy something and more of like, I'm a consultant to help them make a choice. Like, how does that affect, like, your approach to things?

**Michael Walford-Grant**

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, one of the reasons you and I even got together, as you printed out, you did an article, the five best or most influential sales books or sales books, you must read, and one of them is the Challenger sale. Now, that was actually written in 2011. Yeah, which in the space of business is a lifetime ago. But it is still so relevant today. And it really is the foundation upon the approach that I take, and I think all successful selling people take and that it's talking to prospects about what their peers are doing, what the trends in the industry are doing, you know, putting a little bit of fear in them saying that this is no longer a nice to have, but a must have.

Because if you don't you're going to fall behind? Or how do you want to support your five year strategy? And if that's your strategy, and your ambition, can we help you to get there incremental steps. So it is very much about being a trusted adviser, being able to add value every time that you meet a prospect so that they want to meet you again, because if you're not adding value, they're soon going to get fed up meeting with you. And therefore they won't take up your meetings, and they'll start talking with your competition. So it is very much that prospects need that guidance or value, that guidance that a supplier can provide. And it's not just a here's my product, here's my service. These are the features. These are the benefits, that really is a bit old school. And that's all a bit in the past now. Yeah.

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

So tell me a little bit more about the book. I mean, how did it come about? Like, what was the impetus read the book, like tell me a little bit about writing it itself? Yeah,

**Michael Walford-Grant**

sure. So as I alluded to, fortunately, one of the good decisions I've made in my life was early on when I joined those smaller companies is diligently keeping myself up to date and keep improving my sales skills. And so throughout that, you know, 2025 or 30 years, I've diligently, you know, read book books, read books, newspaper, articles, webinars and such, like, and I've made copious notes of each of them. Because if you've got a two or 250 page book on negotiations, when you're going into a negotiation, you haven't done one for six months, because you're selling high value services or products or solutions. You're up against the professional buyer that's doing it five days a week, 10 hours, and you're gonna get absolutely murdered. Now you have got the time to read a 250 page book again.

So what you need is the key points drawn from that book. And so I did make a load of these notes. So when I started up my sales consultancy, one of the most popular services I offer is a sales health check. And what I do is I go into a company and I just critique their sales processes. So how do they present to prospects? If they've got a software system? How do they demonstrate it? What is their sales and marketing collateral? What's the website? What's their value proposition? Is the messaging consistent? Is it compelling? Particularly is it uniquely different from their competition? So really just doing a health check and then producing a report and issuing that as a deliverable?

And what I was finding is that there were a lot of best practices that they weren't following. So presentations is one of my sort of bugbears. In this day, it still absolutely staggers me, Bruce, at the different quality of presentations that suppliers deliver. Some are very good, and some are absolutely awful. It's like I wouldn't even be doing it back in the 80s. And 90s. Yeah, it's feature function, too many words on the screen on the slide, or that sort of thing. I just started producing these best practices and delivering those with the report. And then had the light bulb moment of saying, Oh, hang on, I've just done that three times. One was, you know, negotiations, one was sales presentation. One was, you know, writing a business development email or something. There's a book in this.

Exactly. And so I thought, right, well, let's give it a go. And I, you know, went into those 400 different items that I'd saved over the years and drew them all together into 24 chapters. And it pretty much follows the order main processes that a sales person would follow from, you know, they're given a territory, what's an ideal customer, business development, prospecting, getting a first meeting, etc, right, the way through to negotiating a final contract and looking after themselves, you know, not getting too stressed and things like

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

that. Yeah. Yeah, guess who you're writing to? Right? Give us a sense of the ideal listener, or the professional that you really want to be speaking to and helping.

**Michael Walford-Grant**

So in terms of the book, what has been particularly satisfying, is that, you know, the book was published a couple of months ago. And, you know, I've received some good, very good reviews and very pleased, very flattered by some of them. But the important point in terms of your question is that a lot of people and this was my objective, saying it's suited whether you're, you know, an old veteran, like me with gray hairs and, you

know, lines under my eyes, or you're just starting out in the industry. And that was always my intention, but you never know, whether you are really relevant for the younger, less experienced salesperson. Because I'm not that, you know, I can only imagine what it's like. But what I knew one of the motivations and why I was confident that it would be good for the more experienced sales person like myself, is that I do make mistakes, you know, I might take me three months to secure a meeting with a prospect that I've desperately wanted to meet.

And then you get that meeting, you have the meeting, you walk out go, Well, that didn't go very well. You know, it's because you were complacent, you didn't prepare properly. Yeah, you know, you didn't have a clear idea in your head, how you were going to advance your prospect, your sale as a result of that meeting. And so that was very much the premise. And because, you know, the topic of this podcast is scaling services. It is also really suited for business owners. And for, you know, if you're a consulting company, a lot of my observations, and I've worked in firms that are services, only nothing to do with software products. And it is the senior consultants, isn't it the subject matter experts responsible for winning new business?

Now, they were never trained on selling your data. They're very articulate professional business people, the expert in whatever subject they're experts in, but they don't know how to sell. And therefore, I really feel when I've had some positive responses back on there is that this is a book very suited to those type of profile of people as well, not just traditional b2b salespeople. Yeah,

### **Bruce Eckfeldt**

I guess how much do you feel in general that, you know, someone needs to be an expert in the service are able to deliver the service to be able to sell the service or do you feel like you Not a good sales professional can learn how to sell something, even if they don't have proficiency, like selling loss or legal services or something like you don't need to be a really expert lawyer to sell legal services or do your How much do you need to know about the service? No,

### **Michael Walford-Grant**

I don't believe you do. Otherwise, I wouldn't have had the career I've had, because I've been selling to banking organizations, mostly, and I've never worked in a bank. Now, my responsibility, of course, is to be able to have sufficient knowledge to understand the challenges and risks and the problems that the prospect wants to solve, and be able to understand those and then be able to then relate those and match those to the service on selling.

And that's what I feel a sales responsibility is now the more knowledge they have of the prospects business, then the better without doubt, but just having that skill alone, I don't think is sufficient. And I've seen that with my own eyes. You know, I worked for a consulting company that was selling, like regulatory controls and knowledge of FCA regulations and things like that. And they were brilliant at that. But they couldn't sell at all. And, you know, they really needed both, and they didn't have it. So yeah.

### **Bruce Eckfeldt**

So tell us a few of the kind of recommendations you're giving in terms of process or techniques, or mindset, like what do you think is really important that people take away from the book, in terms of understanding how to be a great salesperson? Yeah,

## **Michael Walford-Grant**

I think we've touched on a few of them, it's very much now that, you know, you need to be able to be delivering value, be a trusted adviser, and a thought leader, and be able to provide insight to your prospect as to what's coming around the corner, and what they should be prepared for and planning for. There's a term that I picked up some years ago, which I really like, and it's called unconsidered need. So it's reasonable to assume that every sales organization will be competing with something, whatever it might be. And one way of differentiating is if you can highlight to a prospect an unconsidered need, and what that is, is a need, the prospect hadn't considered that they needed.

But once they discussed it, and realized it from you, they realized that they did. Now if you can do that, and your competition isn't that would really set you apart from the crowd. And to do that you have to know their business, you have to know trends in the industry and invest some time in, right, you know, reading reports and insightful blocks and articles around your segment. So that would be one, certainly one thing. The other that you really need to focus on, is the biggest competition is not the other supplier or another consulting company. It is no decision. Yes, it's doing nothing. That's right, exactly. So you know, status quo, I'll just show my age and my background, I love them as a rock band, but they are the biggest threat to any organization that's looking to scale sales and business. Now, the best way of overcoming that and you can't overcome, it always, is building compelling business cases.

And so it is a key responsibility for any client facing individual to be very attuned to how to build a business case, try and build up enough trust and relationship with your buyer, to be able to work with them and assist them and support them in putting together a compelling business case. And that will be made up of both quantifiable and unquantifiable factors. So the needs in most cases to be, you know, some commercial return on investment, but also the softer things you know, like driving out operational, risking your reputation in the market if you make a mistake, that involves fines from HCA or something like that. So I think the focus on building a business case is important. And from sort of presentation and differentiating yourself from the competition. Most buyers are overwhelmed by information and they need to be able to relate something to you as the offering and so consistent messaging that is sufficiently different and stands out from your competition from other alternatives they're considering, I feel is something that is overlooked. Often overlooked by setting organization is something you really ought to focus Yeah,

## **Bruce Eckfeldt**

it gets you generally find that the sort of a sec effective sales kind of strategies or processes or techniques are based on You know, helping people achieve something they want or avoid something they don't want more like, you know, positive, like getting them somewhere or reducing risk or addressing fears.

## **Michael Walford-Grant**

Yeah, what a great question. And my instinct is to have the positive one. But all the research shows that you're more likely to get action, when people do it to avoid a downside. And they, you know, they do these going in the street, don't they and flip a coin, and they give double the return, if it goes a certain way, and people are less motivated to make a profit, but much more motivated to avoid a risk of loss. So I think there's real merit in that, you know, selling on fear.

But that fear can be a positive fear, it can be fear of missing out on new business opportunities, it can be fear of competition, overtaking you in certain areas. And so I guess the best value proposition is solutions that avoid

that risk, but also add positives on top and then you get the best of both worlds. And then you've got a more compelling business case.

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

Yeah. What are some of the other techniques or things that you'll cover in the book that would help you know, salespeople with, you know, understanding kind of process and strategy?

**Michael Walford-Grant**

Good. Let's pick two, one is the Business Development email?

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

It is yes.

**Michael Walford-Grant**

There have been 1000s of books written on that wonderful, wonderful topic. And I don't claim that my book will give you the secret to getting every email, reply to with a positive, yes, I'd love to have a talk with you. But I do feel that the guidance I provide in the book is pretty well tried and tested. I think one thing I would just allude to is the book, whilst it refers back to some, you know, good traditional sales skills. And one thing, it also incorporates a lot of modern thinking, I'm a big fan on without getting too crazy.

But this sort of neurology of buying and selling and how our brains work, you know, I don't think we really understand how the brain works particularly well. And so there are certain techniques that one can employ when you're client facing that just improve those chances. So one of the second topic in the book that I'm particularly proud of, and something I'll try and work quite hard on is sales presentations. I alluded to that topic earlier in our conversation, but there are certain techniques that one can employ that provide a much more that improves the likelihood of the prospect remembering you. So there's a great statistic quoted, and it's frightening, rarely, within 24 hours, the prospect you've just met will only recall up to 10% of what you say. Now, okay, so it's not great, but you've got to work with that. So if that's what the outcome is, you have a responsibility to ensure it's the 10% 10%?

Well, absolutely, yeah.

**Michael Walford-Grant**

So therefore, there are techniques, and it's not rocket science, it's just having clear value proposition, and a recurring message and a recurring theme that recurs throughout your materials. And then that way, they'll remember what you're about. And if that's what you want to be remembered for, then that's very likely to improve in improved sales effect.

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

I mean, is this that, you know, kind of less is more, and we have to hear something six times before we actually hear it or lands?

**Michael Walford-Grant**

No, no, no, that's absolutely right. And, you know, it may not come naturally, to a lot of us, because we might feel it's patronizing, or whatever it is, but, you know, if you want to be successful and scale your business, then

they're the kind of techniques that are, you know, tried and trusted. And I would strongly recommend that you adopt them. And,

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

I guess, what do you hope the impact is of the book, like, do you have goals around readership around, you know, helping your own business, like give us a sense of where you want the impact? Well,

**Michael Walford-Grant**

I hope this doesn't come over in the wrong way, but I'm really proud of the career and profession I have now. You know, I imagine a lot of people might say that, but when you come through as a salesperson, Bruce, you'll appreciate that you know in for some people would you say you're in sales, I just think of you as a double glazing sales guy or something that is all foot in the door, you know, trying to sell you on something you don't want, and so on. And so, you know, I think I enjoyed that along with all my other colleagues many, many years ago. But as you know, the profession has now become very professional.

And the sheer breadth of topics and skills and knowledge that a, you know, sophisticated b2b salesperson selling high value offerings has to be familiar with. And Master is very broad, we've got to know, you know, finance, and contracts and terms and selling and managing, meeting and managing people leadership and all these things. So, you know, they're quite challenging roles. So really, my aspiration for the book is that I'm proved salespeople, and that they get better and better and better, have more and more success. And the reputation of these salespeople improves over time so that people do respect them in the same way they might respect. You know, a lawyer or an accountant and such like, Yeah, but yeah, and it's not be naive. It should assist me. In my business, it gives me more credentials and credibility. And yeah, the publishing of the book is with a major US publisher, but I've invested my own money in it. So if I can get that back through

book sales, that'd be good.

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

Yeah, I think that's a great point. I mean, I think, you know, a lot of people kind of have this vision or this feeling of, you know, kind of the used car salesman, right, really kind of, you know, trying to convince you to do something you really don't want to do but I think, you know, really good high quality salespeople are critical to not only businesses but to buyers, right? Like if a buyer doesn't understand what they really need and what they're going to get, and does it fit those needs? Right?

It can be, you know, it's a win win. Really good salespeople make this a win, win. And ultimately, really good salespeople make a lot of money. They are often the most highly paid professionals inside a lot of organizations, particularly service companies, because it is such a critical role for these companies.

Yeah, absolutely. Agree. Absolutely. Agree. Yeah. This has been

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

great. Michael, if people want to find out more about you more about the book, what's the best way to get that information?

**Michael Walford-Grant**

Great. Well, one of the benefits of having a reasonably unusual name is that there's only one of me on LinkedIn. And so just to make things really simple, Michael Wolfe grant with a hyphen between the Woolford and the I'll call it grant, I know you pronounce it right. On LinkedIn, please have a look and send me a message and I'll be more than happy to take up any conversations and the further questions you have, as you would expect, as plenty of posts from me about the book, but it is available from all the popular retailers, you know, Barnes and Noble, etcetera, etcetera, Amazon, very

**Bruce Eckfeldt**

good, very good. I'll make sure that all that information, the URLs to you to your LinkedIn and to the booking everything around the show notes to be able to get that, Michael, it's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you so much for taking the time today.

**Michael Walford-Grant**

Pleasure, really enjoyed it. Bruce, thank you very much.

**About Scaling Up Services**

Scaling Up Services is a podcast devoted to helping founders, partners, CEOs, key executives, and managers of service-based businesses scale their companies faster and with less drama.

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