An Investigation into the Sales Process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore selling and the sales process in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from the selling organisation's perspective. It investigates the sales process between SME manufacturers/distributors and Food retail and Foodservices customers/buyers in a new and a modified selling task situation in Scottish-based Food and Drinks businesses. The research examines the sales process practiced by SMEs and barriers and enablers that hinder and support effective selling practices.

According to the Scottish Government, the role played by SMEs in the Food and Drinks industry is vitally important to the Scottish economy. However, given the paucity of literature in the field, knowledge concerning the role and importance of selling in SMEs, particularly in the Food and Drinks industry, is underdeveloped and lacks empirical research.

To investigate the thesis research question, the author adopts an interpretivist perspective. Qualitative data was gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. In all, 20 people involved in selling activities and the sales process were interviewed from 15 SMEs across Scotland. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis to establish key findings regarding the sales process.

The research's findings suggest that the sales process practiced by Scottish-based SMEs in the Food and Drinks industry is complex. Each selling interaction in a new and a modified selling task situation is unique. A number of dimensions impact the sales process. The type of sale varies, from being relatively simplistic with standard product, to being more complicated with customised or seasonal products. It varies from being a straight forward short-term transaction that either achieves a sale or not (usually with a smaller customer), to being a longer-term event (usually with a larger customer). What is evident is that SMEs do not rely entirely on existing customers. Prospecting is required to start the process and a follow up of some kind occurs at the end of the process; whether a sale is concluded or not. The research establishes that the steps in the process are neither wholly sequential nor simultaneous. This study identifies that there are 5 steps in the SME sales process in new and modified selling task situations: prospecting and/ or revisit customer, prepare for the sales meeting, the sales meeting itself, action points arising from the meeting and maintaining contact.

In addition to the key findings, five important themes emerged from the data in the form of barriers and enablers that either directly or indirectly affect the

operationalisation of the selling process. In theme one, the owner manager of the SME is usually inextricably linked to, and has considerable involvement in, and see themselves as important to the sales process. Theme two identifies that those SMEs with some degree of sales knowledge and/or expertise take a more consistent and systematic approach to their sales process. Theme three highlights that many SMEs utilise technology such as SMART phones but lack awareness of how CRM software technology can assist in the delivery of a coherent sales process. Theme four identifies that power in the seller-buyer dyad is tipped in favour of the buyer but appears to be tolerated or accepted as the norm by the SME. A fifth theme deals with the location of the SME and suggests that interacting face-to-face with customers from their Scottish geographic base, places constraints on how SMEs conduct business.

A conceptual framework of the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs has been constructed to depict the 5 step sales process as identified in the research. This conceptual framework also incorporates 5 important dimensions (type of customer, time perspective, type of problem, type of relationship and sequence of stages) and 5 enablers and barriers that impact the operationalisation of this sales process.

Since this research is exploratory in nature, the thesis identifies areas where future research is required in the field alongside suggestions where policy makers and government business development agencies might focus intervention to assist SMEs improve delivery of the sales process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
CRM	Customer relationship management
DEFRA	Department of Education, Farming and Rural Affairs
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EDI	Electronic Data Exchange
EU	European Union
FDF	Food and Drink Federation
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
HQ	Headquarters
IGD	Institute of Grocery Distribution
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCNs	Personal contact networks
SDI	Scottish Development Agency
SE	Scottish Enterprise
SFD	Scottish Food and Drink
SFDF	Scottish Food and Drink Federation
SMART	Sustainable, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic & Time-Limited
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SOCO	Sales oriented/ Customer oriented
USP	Unique Selling Proposition

Declaration

I declare that this Doctorate of Business Administration thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of the text.

Tony Douglas

Signed:

Date: 25th October, 2012

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

"Everyone lives by selling something". Robert Louis Stevenson

1.1 Introduction

The Food and Drink industry is socially and economically important to the UK (Scottish) economy (Watson and Everett, 1993; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003; Scottish Enterprise, 2012). Yet the sector faces many challenges; particularly in the area of effective selling. Hence, this thesis is about selling and the sales process from the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises' (SMEs') perspective. It investigates the sales process between SME manufacturers/distributors and Food retail/Food services buyers/customers in a new and in a modified selling task situation in the Food and Drinks industry. The SMEs in this study are owner managed with small market shares in the Food and Drinks sector, have a turnover of under £50 million, with no more than one hundred employees and where the owner manager is directly involved in the day to day running of the business and all SMEs have been trading for over 5 years (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). The aim of this study is to critically understand the steps of selling in the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs and identify barriers and enablers to its good practice.

This chapter provides a background to the study, justification of the research question, the aim, objectives and scope of the study including the Food and Drinks industry context, the research philosophy and methodology, contribution to practice and finally, the structure of the thesis chapter by chapter.

1.2 Title

"An Investigation into the Sales Process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs"

1.3 Background to the study

The organisation Scotland Food and Drink (SFD) is tasked to assist and embed profitability in all businesses working in the Food and Drinks industry in Scotland. SFD was set up in 2009, as the industry's leadership organisation funded by Scottish Enterprise, and tasked to help improve the profit performance of all Food and Drinks companies (SFD, 2012). The challenging target to be achieved for 2017, in a highly competitive sector, is a sales value of £12.5 billion (SFD, 2012). Food and Drink SMEs, therefore, need to be pro-active if they are to attain this sales target and be supported effectively to achieve it. The Food and Drinks industry is an important employer and its success is vital to the overall economic performance of the manufacturing sector of the country. It is primarily made up of SMEs who account for in excess of 90% of all businesses involved in the industry (SFD, 2012).

1.3.1 The Scottish Food and Drinks Industry Context

Scottish Enterprise (SE) is the economic development arm of the Scottish Government with responsibility for engaging with businesses the length and breadth of Scotland to stimulate growth in the economy and do what it can to better the business environment, providing tailored support to firms of all sizes (SE, 2012). Despite the current fragile economic climate, the overall aim of SE is to make Scotland globally competitive by supporting specifically growth firms, sectors and markets. Companies supported by SE deliver 330,000 jobs and turnover of £75 billion to the Scottish economy. The Scottish economy has a number of strengths giving competitive advantage in global markets. It has world class assets and resources in its companies and universities, including the established sector of Food and Drinks (SE, 2012). Despite these assets Scotland lags behind competitors with low investment in business research and development according to SE (2012), with relatively low levels of entrepreneurial activity (Levie, 2006). There are also a small number of companies of any significant scale with only 115 generating £100 million of sales turnover per annum. In addition, Scotland suffers from poor productivity with an output of 15% less than top performing OECD economies (SE, 2012).

According to SFD (SFD, 2012), Scotland has some of the best food and drink in the world. SFD, as the industry's leadership organisation, promotes all Food and Drinks companies in Scotland. Their mission is to establish Scotland as 'A Land of Food and Drink' (SFD, 2012). As mentioned earlier the target for 2017 is an industry sales value of £12.5 billion with the key focus on the growth areas of premium, healthy and provenance (SFD, 2012).

The Scottish Food and Drinks industry comprises several distinctive segments, for example, Alcoholic Beverages. There are a total of 2,121 companies involved across the industry supply chain (SFD, 2012). The Food and Drinks industry in Scotland manufactures and markets practically every variety of food item consumed in the UK and other developed countries. Apart from being a producer and exporter of some iconic products like Scotch whisky, it also produces and exports many characteristic Scottish dishes such as haggis.

The manufacture of Food and Drinks in Scotland comprises around 1,200 of the 2,121 businesses involved in the wider industry. These firms are dominated by SMEs, 80% of these employ less than 50 workers. Most of these are family businesses that supply quality, niche products and use locally sourced ingredients. According to Scottish Food and Drink Federation (SFDF), the Food and Drinks industry directly employs around 50,000 people (SFDF, 2012). In total, over 100,000 people are employed in the Food and Drinks processing sector and the associated supply chain. Food and Drinks is the largest employer within Scottish manufacturing and accounts for more than a quarter of manufacturing exports. Scotland also has a thriving agricultural sector, with substantial share in national agricultural output. Scottish Development International (SDI) states that Scotland produces 80% of UK's fish catch, holds 30% of its beef herd and supplies 10% of its liquid milk (SDI, 2012).

£1 million of British taxpayers' money will be used to advertise and support Scottish-based Food and Drinks firms in the run up to three notable events taking place in Scotland in 2014: the Commonwealth

Games, Ryder Cup and Second Year of Homecoming. The Scottish Government intends that Food and Drinks producers use the events to promote their produce around the world (The Scotsman, 2012). Additionally, currently the Scottish government is allocating £3.7 million (£30 million since 2008), to fund a number of SMEs, in a variety of development projects, across Scotland. The funds will not just be used for capital projects but also for investing in sales professionals to be salaried in the SMEs to provide the expertise to assist them with their growth aspirations (The Scotsman, 2012).

1.3.2 Selling and the sales process practiced by SMEs

Selling is a societal as well as business activity and can be defined quite simply as "making a sale" underpinned by a number techniques and personal skills according to Jobber and Lancaster (2009, p.4) across a variety of tasks and selling situations (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005). The sales function within a business is responsible for the crucial generation of revenues, delivers economic stimuli and forms the vital bridge between a business and its customers (Ingram *et al.,* 2010). Business relationships rely on individuals and how they deal with customers making the buyer-seller interface a highly variable interaction (Donaldson, 1998). How a sales person within a firm performs, usually affects a firm's performance (Zoltners *et al.,* 2008).

The sales process is best described as selling activities delivered by the selling function as stated by Churchill *et al.,* (1997) or carried out by sales people (Moncrief 1986; Marshall *et al.,* 1999). The traditional sales process has changed/is changing according to Moncrief and Marshall (2005) with more automation anticipated due to technological advances (Sheth and Sharma, 2008). The focus has shifted towards a customer-orientation away from a sales-oriented focus with the role becoming more relational in nature. The role of the salesperson today looks as much inwards to working with colleagues as outwards and dealing directly with customers (Sheth and Sharma, 2008).

Despite the importance of selling and the sales process to SMEs, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence/academic research according to Mantrala *et al* (2008) though no such lack of practitioner interest (Zoltners *et al.,* 2008). It is posited by Veludo *et al* (2001) that it is difficult to capture the complexity that is business seller-buyer interactions. If this is the case then it is clear that a more inductive exploratory approach is required to better understand complex selling processes. This exploratory approach would assist in comprehending the actions and experiences of SMEs. This supports Dixon's and Tanner's (2012, p.9) assertion that more focus in research in sales needs to consider "the industry context in which the sale is occurring as well as the language and metaphors used in selling and sales research".

1.4 Research question and justification

The research questions of this study are:

- *What is the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs?*
- *What challenges or obstacles do Scottish-based SMEs face during the operationalisation of the sales process in the Food and Drinks industry?*

There is growing recognition of the importance of selling and the sales process in SMEs in Scotland (Rutterford, 2011; McCourt, 2011). Recent research reveals that while SME owners rely upon networking as an important source of sales introductions and leads according to Carson *et al* (2004), they lack selling competencies according to Hill (2001a; 2001b). In previous research into this area it was found that personal selling skills and knowledge of what is involved in a successful sales process to close sales deals and build relationships with trade buyers, was lacking (Douglas and Brodie, 2010). Tom Hunter (foremost Scottish business person), in his foreword in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Scotland 2005 states "if an entrepreneur (by implication a SME) cannot sell, he/she (the firm) cannot succeed, period" (Levie 2006, p.3). Skills and knowledge are fundamental in helping ensure that SMEs survive and thrive and succeed (Burns, 2007; Jobber and Lancaster, 2009).

Investors in SMEs rate selling skills and sales process knowledge highly alongside the make-up of the management team and financing the new venture (Huang and Brown, 1999). McCartan-Quinn and Carson (2003) attribute high failure rates of SMEs to weaknesses not only in financial management but in particular to selling. The ability to make sales, especially in the harsh economic climate is vital. Lord Sugar, formerly the UK government's enterprise champion in The Apprentice TV show sets his 'Apprentices' a high number of selling tasks which may well be indicative of his belief, after a lifetime in business, that a sales knowledge gap exists (The Apprentice, 2011). The 'Dragons', in the popular BBC Programme 'Dragon's Den' frequently ask SMEs about buyers they have already approached and how much of their product they have already sold before coming to the 'Den' to ask for investment (The Dragons Den, 2011). This knowledge gap appears to be a constraint on SMEs growth and profitability, which has a knock-on effect on Scottish economic performance.

Many researchers focus upon large organisations and highlight the importance of the steps in the sales process used to professionally engage in selling activities (Dubinsky, 1980/81; Moncrief and Marshall, 2005; Ingram *et al.,* 2010). Hugely successful global sales training companies place 'process' at the centre of success in selling. They claim that sales process knowledge and the discipline of 'sticking' to that 'process' assists firms in the delivery of strategic sales objectives and supreme sales performance (Sandler, 1995; Rackham, 1998; Miller and Heiman, 2011). Some SME research suggests that selling forms one of the biggest challenges SMEs have in their operations according to Huang and Brown (1999), yet it is one of the most important business activities for SME survival and growth (McKenna, 1991; O'Brien, 1998; Simpson and Taylor, 2002). Due to their size, their resources and their usually insignificant market share, SMEs encounter particular selling challenges (Stokes, 2002).

Carson *et al.,* (1985); Carson *et al.*, (1995) and Hill (2001a; 2001b) have explored the importance of networking as a sales tool and aspects of

SME marketing used in the early stage of sales development. Successful SMEs tend to be close to their customers and quick to adapt to change but ultimately the operationalisation of selling techniques and tactics need to directly correspond to management capability, key individuals' backgrounds according to Liu (1995) and resource constraints (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). The focus of SMEs' selling tends to be a combination of transaction, relationship, and network marketing according to Brodie *et al.,* (1997) and Gilmore *et al.,* (2001), that is often determined by the *modus operandi* of the owner manager (Hill and Wright, 2001).

SMEs need to adapt to meet the competitive pressures created by the growth, particularly of supermarkets, or identify alternative sales channels and understand what is required to get new business and sustain relationships in alternative Food and Drinks industry outlets. The increasing hold of supermarkets on the grocery trade in the UK/Scotland, the increasing power of Foodservice distribution giants and the reducing number of independent and specialist outlets serving the Food and Drinks industry delivers both a challenge and an opportunity to Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs (SFDF, 2012).

SE is keen to understand skills/knowledge/experience gaps in SMEs in relation to selling and the sales process (SE, 2009). SE and other related stakeholders, some part funded by Scottish Government, including SFD, need to better target limited resources to improve the prospects of Scottish-based SMEs to the greater benefit of the Scottish economy. Some recent basic provision of workshops and 121 interventions in sales–related learning by SE and SFD bear testament to a sales knowledge gap that needs to be further addressed and where intervention and support need be better targeted (SE, 2012).

The researcher has witnessed through 25 years of experience in the Food and Drinks industry, working in, and with SMEs in various roles, that there would appear to be many varied approaches to the sales process practiced by SMEs in how they go about locating target

customers, interfacing with prospects and new customers, presenting the benefits and features of their products and services, closing sales deals and building relationships (or not) and an understanding of what the buyers' needs are in the seller-buyer process. Now in an academic role, the researcher is fortunate to have the opportunity to study the SME sales process.

1.5 Aims and Objectives

The author argues that, in order for Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs to improve their sales performance, they would benefit from possessing a good understanding of an effective sales process to assist them in the delivery of their sales objectives. The main aim, therefore, of this thesis, is:

- To understand the sales process currently practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs and identify key barriers and enablers that affect the operationalisation of this process

The main objectives of the study are:

- To undertake a critical evaluation of the existing literature on effective sales processes and to identify what precisely are the 'steps' in the sales process adopted by Scottish-based SMEs in the Food and Drinks sector and whether these steps are sequential or simultaneous in nature
- To conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews and to identify through thematic analysis how dimensions such as type of customer, type of relationship, time perspective and type of problem affect the sales process adopted by Scottish-based SMEs in the Food and Drinks sector
- To conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews and to identify through thematic analysis what barriers or enablers impacted, either positively or negatively, the operationalisation of the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs
- To provide practitioner recommendations to support a more effective sales process for Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs and highlight where government support could best be diverted to underpin this.

1.6 Scope of the study

In order that this study meets its aim and objectives a clear focus is required. Therefore, firstly, the study has within its scope trade selling and *not* selling directly to consumers or via the Internet. Secondly, the research concentrates on a selling firm's sales process approach and *not* a buying firm's buying process perspective. Thirdly, its scope is within new and modified selling task situations and *not* repeat sales situations. Fourthly, the focus is on selling from a process perspective (the purpose of selling/ the 'doing' of business) and *not* selling from a communication tool perspective (part of the marketing mix). Fifthly, the sales process is viewed from a sequential and simultaneous viewpoint and *not* specifically from a customer relationship management approach and, finally, the perspective adopted is from the SMEs and the lead sales resource within the firm and *not* by specifically exploring any differences between owner managers and entrepreneurs.

Business to Business (B2B) channels/ personal selling

Selling jobs occur up and down the supply chain (Boone and Kurtz, 2009). For the purpose of this thesis, selling refers to personal selling, the selling that exists at the beginning of the business to business (B2B) and consumer channel chains and is a face-to-face interaction between the salesperson representing a firm that has products to sell directly to another business person/buyer who is a retailer, distributor or industrial customer. Sales people involved in this part of the B2B selling process are often referred to as 'trade' or 'industrial' sales people (Manning *et al.,* 2010). This interaction is distinct from a personal selling situation involving a consumer directly.

New selling and modified task situations

Selling task situations in trade or B2B selling can be summarised as a new selling task, a modified selling task and a routine selling task (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005). Routine selling activities are characterised by the routine nature of the task itself. The modified selling activity relates to limited problem-solving situations whereas the new task requires needs identification activity and a large degree of problem solving. These concepts are broad enough to indirectly capture several

different sales situations. This study focuses directly upon the new and modified selling task situation and *not* a repeat sale scenario.

Steps of selling and the sales process

This study focuses upon the sequential steps of selling: prospecting, preapproach, approach, presentation, objection handling and close (Dubinsky, 1980/81). In addition, it discusses Moncrief and Marshall's (2005) alternative simultaneous perspective: customer retention and deletion, database and knowledge management, nurturing the relationship, marketing the problem, problem solving, adding value/satisfying needs and customer relationship maintenance.

Main sales resource within SMEs

The sales remit can potentially be managed by the owner manager themselves or a sales director/manager or by an outsourced sales resource to deliver the selling activity (Carson *et al.,* 1995). This review is not intended to explore or further the discussion concerning differences between owner managers and entrepreneurs which, is inconclusive, and depicts owner managers as running SMEs to further personal goals while entrepreneurs do likewise but tend to focus on profits and expansion of their business (Chell and Haworth, 1993; Burns and Harrison, 1996; Burns, 1996).

1.7 Research philosophy

The researcher's axiology is that research is value bound and subjective. In order to analyse SMEs, and the key sales resource within those businesses, experiences of the sales process and the barriers and enablers identified during the seller-buyer interface from the selling firm's perspective, an interpretivist, inductive, qualitative strategy that employs in-depth semi-structured interview questions and thematic analysis is considered appropriate. This approach provides the researcher the opportunity to investigate and understand themes relating to the sales process and to provide a contribution to practice, based upon subjective interpretative data – from the SMEs' perspective. In taking an interpretive stance, the researcher acknowledges that his ontological perspective is

that our knowledge of reality is socially constructed and does not exist independently. Epistemologically, his view point is, we can only discover knowledge about the world when focusing on the details of the situation in a social setting (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

1.8 Research methodology

Following an analysis of existing literature on SMEs, the sales process and the Scottish Food and Drinks industry, a semi-structured qualitative thematic analysis approach was adopted to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Open ended questions were used to interview 20 owner managers and sales personnel from 15 SMEs. The Interview data was transcribed verbatim, coded, categorised and analysed to support the interpretative approach employed by the researcher to understand what SMEs do during the sales process. An interpretative approach relies upon interaction between interviewees and interviewer (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The analysis of the interview questions focuses upon addressing the main research question. A conceptual framework of what the sales process practiced by SMEs is, and the barriers and enablers from the SMEs perspective, emerge from the data gathered.

1.9 Contribution to practice

This research focuses upon understanding the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs. The significance of the study is the illumination of exactly what this is and additionally any new knowledge that sheds light on particular barriers and enablers that affect SMEs during the operationalisation of the sales process as reported from their perspective. This research contributes in areas where literature is sparse. The research assists practitioners and government agencies, charged with the mandate to support SMEs, to better understand the sales process and its role in developing and growing SMEs in the Food and Drinks industry. The research also seeks to indicate tentative interventions and support products for Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs to help improve their selling potential.

1.10 Thesis structure

Chapter two provides a review of the current literature on SMEs, the literature on the steps of selling in the sales process and current main sales process models. Through this review a gap in the literature is identified due to the paucity of literature on SMEs and their sales process.

Chapter three presents the methodological approach and research design of the study. It also outlines the data collection, analysis and interpretation used in this research. The chapter justifies why an interpretivist, inductive, qualitative, thematic analysis of semi-structured interview questions is an appropriate method for investigating the research aim.

Chapter four provides synopses of the sales processes of SMEs from the study.

Chapter five provides a detailed analysis from the researcher's investigation and relates this to the literature. It discusses the steps of selling in the sales process in this study and a number of dimensions that impact that process. It also discusses a number of emergent themes - barriers and enablers - that affect the operationalisation of the sales process in SMEs. This chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that depicts the sales process practiced by SMEs and the barriers and enablers that relate to it.

Chapter six revisits the research aim and objectives to see how well they have been achieved in this study. It summarises implications for the practitioner and makes a number of recommendations. It also contains the study limitations and potential avenues for future research investigations.

In the next chapter, the thesis addresses the current literature on SMEs, the steps of selling in the sales process presented in the literature and sales process models and the dimensions that relate to them.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the literature review Chapter is to identify, review and critique research related to SMEs, selling, steps in the sales process itself, and related important dimensions. The chapter begins with a general discussion of SMEs and then outlines the current trends in sales literature.

2.2 SME definition

There is no one clear definition of a small firm (Stanworth and Curran, 1981; Ibrahim and Goodwin, 1986; Cromie, 1994; Karlsson and Ahlstrom, 1997; Deakins and Freel, 2009). The label 'SME' is interchangeable with the term 'small business' (Curran and Blackburn, 2001). Criteria used to define SMEs can vary. A recognised definition by UK business and academics researching SMEs is that laid down by the European Union (EU) which is updated from time to time to take account of economic developments (EU, 2003) (see Table 1). The latest update defines small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the concept of the micro-enterprise. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are defined according to their staff headcount and turnover or annual balance-sheet total. Autonomous, partner and linked business typologies also form part of the categorisation (EU, 2003; BERR, 2009). The purpose of classification is to ensure that, only those businesses that are regarded as SMEs are eligible for economic business assistance (Curran and Blackburn, 2001; Curran, 2006).

Academics often choose their own criteria based around existing definitions to assist them in focusing their research funnel. For example, McCartan-Quinn and Carson (2003), in their research into the SME Food industry, define SMEs for their purposes as firms that are owner managed with small market shares in their industry sector, with no more than one hundred employees and where the owner manager is directly involved in the day to day running of the business.

> ❖ **A medium-sized enterprise** is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 250 persons and whose annual turnover does not exceed EUR 50 million or whose annual balance-sheet total does not exceed EUR 43 million.
> ❖ **A small enterprise** is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million.
> ❖ **A microenterprise** is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million.
>
> www.eu.europa.eu/enterprise (2012)

TABLE 1: SME Definition (www.eu.europa.eu/enterprise, 2012)

2.2.1 The importance of SMEs to the UK economy

The Bolton Report (1971) is regarded as the starting point for UK research into SMEs. Coincidental to this report was an increase in activity in SME studies reflecting a rise in profile of the importance of SMEs to the UK economy (Boswell, 1973; Stanworth and Curran, 1973). The numbers of publications concerning SMEs has increased dramatically but the quality of the empirical work was questionable with a concentration upon 'how to run a SME' with little or no academic underpinning through robust academic study. It is argued that the quality is improving, but there is much still to achieve concerning high standards evident in other fields of business research (Curran and Blackburn, 2001; Storey, 2005).

It is widely acknowledged, that SMEs, both new to the market and existing have unique challenges that differentiate them from larger businesses (Cromie, 1994; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). The failure rates are too high despite targeted Government SME support through policy driven by extensive research (Smallbone, 1990; Deakins and Freel, 2009). SMEs are both socially and economically important to the Scottish and UK economy (Watson and Everett, 1993; Scottish Enterprise, 2012). This fact has been often overlooked (Storey, 1994;

2005). SMEs provide substantial employment according to the DTI (2012) and are significant generators of innovative products and processes (SE, 2012). Targeted assistance provides a better focus for start-ups and those SMEs identified to have fast and significant growth potential (Deakins and Freel, 2009).

2.2.2 General characteristics of SMEs

SMEs tend to be more creative and innovative than larger firms (O'Shea, 1998; Susman, 2007). They work hard at keeping close to their markets, according to Evans and Moutinho (1999), respond rapidly to market changes, and have an ability to adapt and make quick decisions (Rogers, 1990). SMEs have very small market shares in any given sector (Deakins and Freel, 2009). They tend to plan less and live for the moment (Bennett, 1993). They have highly personalised management styles with few decision makers (Stokes and Fitchew, 1997). What is to be done is usually decided by the owner manager who is the lead influencer (Carson *et al.,* 1995). SMEs' management style emanates from the owner manager; this renders the SME to be inconsistent, incoherent, and simple and straight forward in its approach (Hankinson, 1991). There is not much to separate the owner manager of SMEs from the SME itself. The owner manager of the SME tends to be involved in all aspects of the operations of their firm. The sum total of expertise resides in the owner manager. Therefore, the degree of expertise can vary enormously (Stasch and Ward, 1987; Stokes, 1995; Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummela, 1998). No one SME is the same as another but they do have certain commonalities – such as, owner's style, growth goals but this depends upon the industry sector (Ahmadi and Helms, 1997; Dobbs and Hamilton, 2007). There is a prioritisation of immediate concerns with a fire fighting mentality according to Storey and Sykes (1996) and predominance on 'doing' through experience and/or intuition (Matthews and Scott, 1995; Cope, 2005; Corbett, 2005).

2.2.3 Challenges facing SMEs in selling

The 'Model of SME Marketing' presented by Gilmore and Carson (2000) and 'A Holistic Model of SME Marketing' suggested by Hill (2001a; 2001b) have emerged from 'SME/ small business marketing' and

'entrepreneurial marketing' investigations (Carson *et al.,* 1995; Hills and Hultman, 2011). There is, however, scant evidence of success in the implementation or testing of either of these models on practical grounds (Dwivedi, 2011). Hill's (2001b) holistic model straddles McCarthy's (1960) traditional 4Ps marketing mix framework with some important aspects of the SMEs entrepreneurial approach developed. It does not deal specifically with the steps in the sales process in SMEs but does offer explanations of 'marketing in context' dimensions and how these suit specific SMEs and their marketing approach. It also addresses the competencies required (experience, knowledge and judgement) to deliver effective marketing performance.

In SMEs there is usually no distinction between the marketing and sales roles as these are often 'parcelled up' by necessity into one individual, usually the SME owner or an employee or someone outsourced by the SME (Carson *et al.,* 1995). SME marketing/selling is often characterised as informal and spontaneous (Gilmore *et al.,* 2001) with limited expertise in evidence (Carson *et al.,* 1985; Chaston and Baker, 1998; Gilmore *et al.,* 2001; Hill, 2001b; Liu, 2005; Verhees and Meulenberg, 2004). It is often determined by the *modus operandi* of the owner manager (Hill and Wright, 2001). This individualistic approach leads to a haphazard and unstructured short-term focus (Baker, 2003, p. 758). The approach to marketing/selling becomes reactive as demand grows. Stokes (2002) states that marketing/selling is used for the needs of the moment with inadequate attention directed towards planning, strategies or analysis.

McCartan-Quinn and Carson (2003, p.205) posit that the "boundary between marketing and selling becomes very blurred; marketing in most SMEs takes place during the selling process". For many SMEs, marketing is assumed to be 'selling' (Oakey, 1991). Marketing is for many SMEs a synonym for selling (Marcatti *et al.,* 2008). SMEs are simply often confused and treat marketing as operational sales-oriented activity (Murdoch *et al.,* 2001). Marketing in practice for SMEs is "informal, intuitive and selling focused" (Gilmore *et al.,* 2001; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003, p.206).

Hill (2001b) reports in his study of the food sector in Ireland that SMEs have a predilection towards a sales–oriented approach. Contradictorily, Hill (2001b) found that his research sample, while sales-focused (suggesting a sales orientation), also engaged in a customer-focus approach by endeavouring to have "meaningful and sincere relationships with customers" (Hill, 2001 p.219). Lehtimaki *et al.,* (2011) acknowledge that SMEs in the technology sector are affecting sales potential in international markets because they are too product or sales-oriented and suggests a move towards a customer-centric focus is desirable to deliver integrated sales solutions to customers. Murdoch *et al.,* (2001, p.146) in their study into Welsh SMEs reported that most businesses interviewed had a "good customer orientation and were keen to satisfy their customers' wants and needs". However, this study did not directly involve Food and Drinks industry SMEs.

The focus of SME marketing/selling tends to be a combination of transaction, relationship, and network marketing (Brodie *et al.,* 1997; Gilmore *et al.,* 2001). Hill (2001a; 2001b) focuses on the importance of Personal Contact Networks (PCNs). SMEs use networking to do business by gathering information on, or by fact finding about, or getting introductions to potential customers and to keeping in touch with prospects (Gilmore and Carson, 2000). Information gathering is crucial and customer relationship management (CRM) tools are invaluable to both selling and buying firms. These help SMEs identify not only its best customers, but also what it is they need to do to keep them valuable (Rigby *et al.,* 2002). Networking, recommendations and referrals are effective in activating interested parties to get sales started (Bayus, 1985; Carson *et al.,* 1995; Stokes and Fitchew, 1997). Once an initial customer base has been attracted, SMEs expand by acquiring more of these like-minded customers according to Dalgic and Leeuw (1994). Once secured, SMEs tend to try to hold on to new customers endeavouring to develop meaningful and long-term relationships with them (Payne *et al.,* 1995).

Owner managers like the personal selling method because it allows SMEs to stay in touch with the market giving them the opportunity to provide a rapid response to customer's requests. This is a source of

competitive advantage with an anecdotally held understanding that personal contact is the most cost-effective method of promotion. For most SMEs there is no choice but for the owner manager to personally sell and take responsibility, even if his/her time is not calculated into the cost equation (Murdoch *et al.,* 2001). To build a good seller-buyer relationship, SMEs need to get in front of a buyer in the first instance. This can be the difficult part of the process. As said earlier, SMEs have limited resources to persist with calls to get sales appointments. The alternatives are the employment of sales professionals which can be very costly (Donaldson, 2007). Agents can be employed but this can remove the SME directly from the personal contact they crave and of course a commission needs to be paid to the agent. Arms-length personal selling can result in loss of contact with the marketplace, loss of control of how the product is presented to the customer, less influence over the levels of marketing effort and of course less revenue per item sold. On the other hand the sales agent will have local knowledge, industry contacts and a proven track record in selling skills. There is however no empirical evidence to support this (Stokes and Wilson, 2010).

2.3 Recent Trends in the Food and Drinks Industry

According to the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD), the UK Grocery market was worth £256 billion in 2011, 3.8% up on 2010 (IGD, 2012) (see Figure 1). The UK Food and Drinks industry has changed considerably in the last 15 years with overall steady growth year on year but a steady decline in the number of businesses and employment in this sector. This trend, however, does not necessarily reflect failure on the part of Food and Drinks businesses but merely a concentration of those businesses strong enough to survive in tough economic times (SFD, 2012).
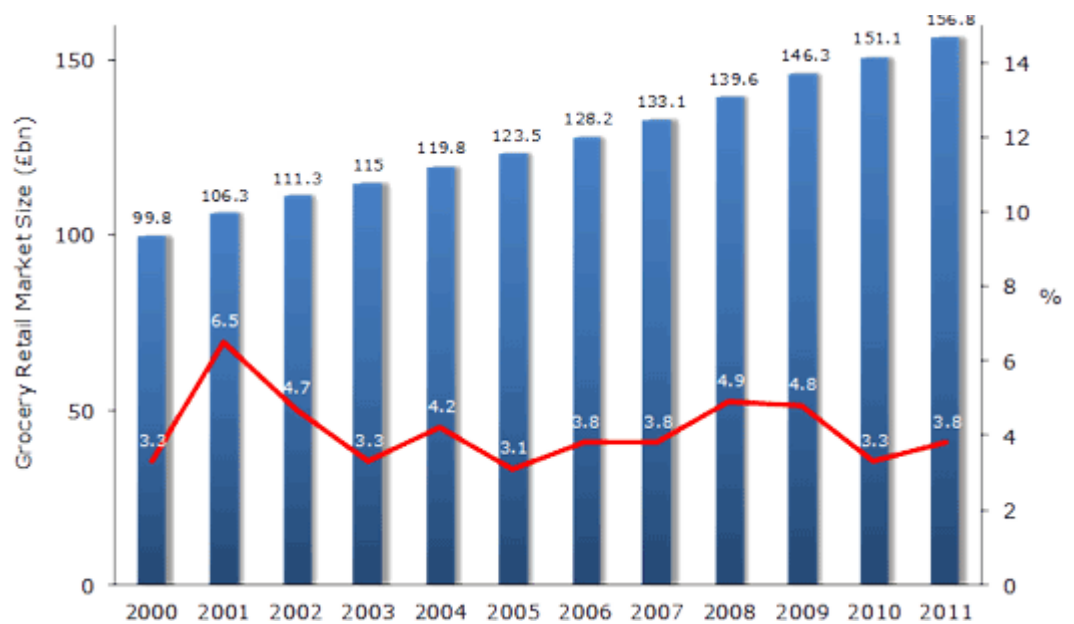
Grocery Market Performance/ Source: IGD Research 2011

There is a trend in the UK Food industry sector for trade buyers to reduce seller relationships to a few suppliers to enable more meaningful partnerships to form (Dorsch *et al.,* 1998). Two-way interactive partnerships are not fully developed in the UK Food industry (Howe, 1998; Robson and Rawnsley, 2001). There is a limited mutuality and an imbalance of power in their relationships with retail partners (Hingley, 2001). Power is notably imbalanced in favour of retail buying organisations. However many relationships are long standing between SMEs and big customers but are often *not* considered as partnerships by the suppliers (SME selling organisation). However, the power imbalance appears not to impede the formation of relationships but it does not follow that SMEs would not like to see a greater demonstration from buyers of the mutuality of the relationship, with more emphasis on collaboration and reciprocity. SMEs for the moment have no choice but to live with asymmetry and power imbalance (Hingley, 2005).

As there are no signs of let up in the competitive pressures created by the growth of supermarkets, and the concentration of Foodservice distributors, this simply means that SMEs need to better understand how to approach and sell to these channels. The increasing control, particularly of supermarkets in the grocery trade in Europe and the

UK/Scotland, delivers both a challenge and an opportunity to the Food and Drinks industry (Wijnands *et al.,* 2007).

Food Retail

In the UK, a handful of integrated store groups control most of the market resulting in a concentration of larger players on both the selling and buying sides (Dobson, 1999). Grocery multiples, Tesco, Asda-WalMart and Wm. Morrisons are major retailers of food in Scotland. There are in excess of 500 grocery outlets accounting for a turnover in excess of £6 billion (SFD, 2012). Convenience stores which have declined over the last 20 years have a turnover of approximately £1 billion. Grocery multiples in Scotland continue to support the Food and Drinks industry by engaging with Scottish Food and Drinks suppliers, helping get them 'supermarket-ready' and listing their products in their Scottish stores. 'Meet the Buyer' events are organised by SFD to help SMEs make contact with buyers (SFD, 2012). The major supermarket groups, including Tesco, have regional buying offices located in Scotland from where they interact with potential new SME suppliers (SFD, 2012).

Foodservice

The Foodservice sector comprises: - restaurants, pubs, hotels, leisure outlets in the 'profit' sector and staff catering and healthcare and education services in the 'cost' sector. Scotland has a Foodservice market valued at over £2 billion, out of which nearly £1 billion is accounted for by meals sold in cafes and restaurants. Foodservice is currently the fourth largest consumer market in the UK (SFD, 2012). There are over 260,000 Foodservice outlets across the UK with 2,500 groups accounting for 40% of the market. Key players in contract catering are: - Compass Group, Sodexho and Aramark. The 3663 company and Brakes are the two largest delivered wholesalers and Booker the largest Cash and Carry operator. Despite the Food retail market being twice the size of the Foodservice market, there are twice as many Foodservice outlets as Food retail outlets for SMEs to sell to (SFD, 2012).

It is easier for Scottish SMEs to get listings in the Foodservices sector since Food retail is dominated by high-volume and low costs. The Foodservice sector offers opportunities for premium foods in the 'fine dining' sector (McGinlay, 2007). Major Foodservice distributors regularly hold surgeries in conjunction with SFD to identify potential listings for SMEs (SFD, 2012).

Exports

The Scottish Food and Drinks industry has revised its target for exports from £5 billion to £7.1 billion (a fraction below the value of the high profile oil and gas sector) following exceptional performance in the last six years. Despite recent dips in sales in quarter on quarter performance, sales are up overall in the last 12 months (BBC, 2012; SFD, 2012). John Swinney, Scottish Government's Finance Minister, stated that: "The quarterly fall in Drink exports follows the extremely strong performance of the sector during 2011 after nearly two years of uninterrupted growth. Taken annually, exports from the Drinks sector are up 9.2%" (BBC, 2012). Emerging markets in Asia and South America are projected to offer ongoing opportunities to further establish Scotland's 'culinary footprint' around the world and offset any potential downfall in sales in Scotland's European export markets; seven of Scotland's top 10 export destinations are Eurozone countries. This can be achieved through Government support in encouraging growth companies to expand export selling resource (SFD, 2012).

2.4 Current trends in sales discipline literature

Sales as a "phenomenon of human-driven interaction between and within individuals/organisations in order to bring about economic exchange within a value-creation context" according to Dixon and Tanner (2012, p.9) is constantly under review by academics in order to account for growth in knowledge, changes in sales function and the impact of technology on sales process. Current tracks in academic research in the selling discipline, in the USA and the UK, include the sales and marketing interface (Rouzies *et al.,* 2005); developing sales personnel (Cron *et al.,* 2005); leadership; motivation, compensation and control (Brown *et al.,*

2005); technology and customer relationship management (CRM) (Tanner *et al.,* 2005); and key accounts and team selling (Jones *et al.,* 2005). The updating of research in this discipline, together with the inherent complexities is reviewed regularly in the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (Gordon and Howell 1959; Pierson 1959; Swan *et al.,* 1991; Marshall and Michaels, 2001; Weitz *et al.,* 2005). The state of selling and sales management research is documented as being healthy, vibrant, and evolving. It is important to note, that the majority of the current literature is USA-based though over the last 10 years there has been a considerable increase in non-US authored articles, however, most research focuses on selling in larger corporations (Richards *et al.,* 2010).

In the UK, research into selling and sales-related topics is less abundant and limited to a few academics and institutions (Richards *et al.,* 2010). For many the focus is general selling and sales management textbooks (Blythe, 2005; Donaldson, 2007; Jobber and Lancaster, 2009). A number of articles have been published in the last 20 years on selective aspects, for example, the role of selling in marketing strategy, the selling and marketing interface; relations between marketing and selling and sales and marketing integration by Lyus *et al (*2011), integrative selling devices by Dewsnap and Jobber (2009), key account management and trade fairs by Blythe (2005), sales operations, CRM and sales force automation by Donaldson (2007) with the focus primarily on larger organisations.

Generally available, are a myriad of paperbacks on every conceivable selling and sales topic, for example Lennon (2010) that are practical, instructive and useful guides packed with anecdotes but with little theoretical underpinning. However, large businesses take very seriously a number of sales process approaches and selling techniques: Sandler's 7-Step system by Sandler (1995), Spin Selling by Rackham (1998) and Strategic Selling (Miller and Heiman*,* 2011). These approaches and techniques have been widely adopted by large corporations through training seminars to assist in improving sales performance but remain untested academically.

2.5 Development of selling

Understanding what constitutes selling and how to sell effectively has become more challenging since the environment of selling is ever changing (Weitz *et al.,* 2005). Over the last few decades, selling has evolved from focusing on short-term seller needs to focusing on longer-term customer/buyer needs. The role of the salesperson has evolved from one of provider, to persuader, to prospector, to problem solver, to value creator (Wotruba, 1991). The activities involved in selling have also evolved, from the taking of orders and delivering products and services, to persuading customers to purchase products, to aligning available offerings to customer needs, to creating novel alternative options that match customer needs with the capabilities of the salesperson (Weitz *et al.,* 2007). The focus of the objective of selling is now more likely and necessary to be one of relationship building and creating value for customers according to Rackham and De Vincentis (1999), and less of just satisfying customer needs and closing a sale (Weitz *et al.,* 2007). Changes in the selling environment, with more emphasis on the relationship-oriented sales approach, and a number of technological advances increase both the salesperson's capabilities and the customer's expectations (Bush *et al.,* 2000; Moncrief and Marshall, 2005; Piercy, 2010).

With the shift to customer-centric relational selling approaches and the increased availability and use of technology, it is no surprise that selling activities have changed somewhat over the last few decades (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Traditional selling activities that required ability to prospect, overcome objections and close a sale have had a number of new success factor activities added. These include; listening skills, follow-up skills, ability to adapt sales style, tenacity, organisational and oral communication skills (Marshall *et al.,* 1999). Moncrief (1986) developed a framework that encompassed 121 activities, grouped into 10 headings that assisted in clarifying what exactly sales people do. Moon and Armstrong (1994) focused on team selling and identified five roles. Deeter-Schmelz and Ramsey (1995) focus was different, with an emphasis on different roles for the core selling team. Despite changes in

the selling environment and the advent of modern technology, it is personal or face-to-face selling that is regarded as the most effective form of selling, with the presentation step in the sales process considered as very important (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005; Futrell, 2006).

2.6 Steps of selling in the sales process

The sales process is a series of interrelated steps. It is often referred to as the seven steps of selling: prospecting, preapproach, approach, presentation, objection handling, the close, and follow up (see Figure 2). These steps are usually identified as making up the personal selling process and are sequential (Dubinsky, 1980/81; Hite and Bellizzi, 1985; Ingram,1990).

Figure 2: The 7 Steps of Selling (in the Sales Process)

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Prospecting	Pre-approach	Approach	Presentation

Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
Handling Objections	The Close	Follow up

based on Dubinsky (1980); Rudelius (1980);
Hite and Bellizzi (1985) in Dwyer et al., (2000).
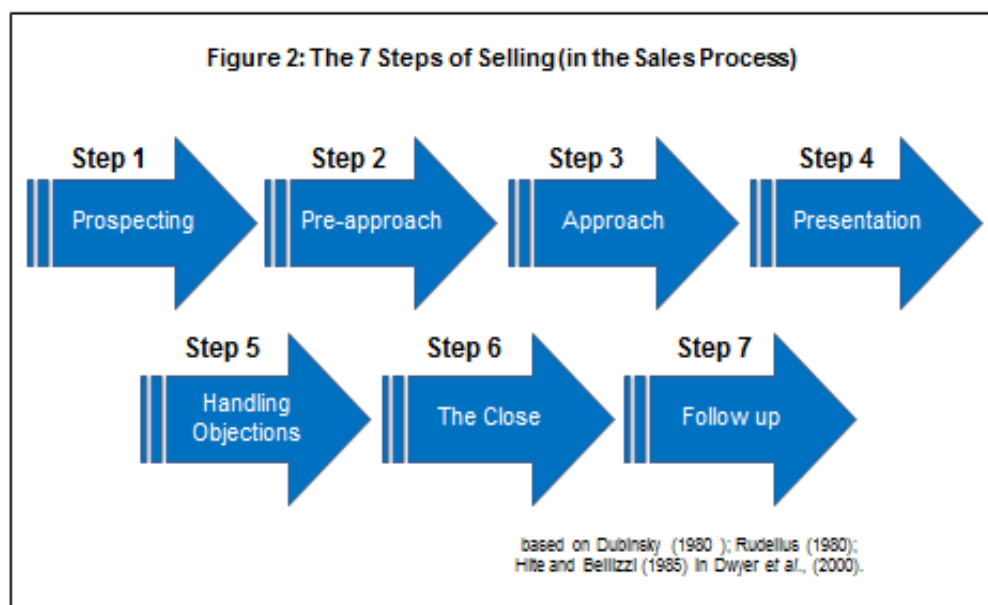
There are a myriad of academic-authored text book versions of the steps of selling in the sales process: 'SELL' by Ingram *et al* (2010), 'Selling' by Hopkins *et al* (2008), 'Selling Today' by Manning (2010), 'Relationship Selling' by Johnston and Marshall (2012) and 'Selling: Building Partnerships' by Weitz *et al* (2007). However, none explicitly provide steps of selling based on research gathered from SMEs. It is either assumed that the steps are the same for SMEs as large companies and the challenges faced similar, or up to now, there simply has not been

sufficient interest in the topic or a sound rationale for it to be tackled. In any event it is useful to summarise what literature there is in selling textbooks (see Appendix 1).

Below is given the key steps of selling in the literature to date.

2.6.1 Prospecting - STEP 1

Step 1 Prospecting: Salespeople use multiple sources to identify prospective buyers for their products and services.

Few businesses can afford to lose established customers. It is important to build, protect and grow business with existing customers where possible according to Hill (2007) and keep the sales pipeline full (Anderson, 2000; Ingram *et al.,* 2010). But, in a shrinking economy, the most capable companies have become vulnerable to the mobility of accounts and migration of business. Even loyal customers hit hard times, key contacts leave or move to a different area or price rises get rejected. Lost customers must be replaced and new customers found. Various selling efforts bring new customers to a business or by the actions taken by a business, the business to a customer (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). A sales person's job is not just about making sales calls but about creating customers (Gschwandtner, 1995). Prospecting is a fundamental step in the sales process. It can be defined as engaging with potential clients either by phone, by email, or in person. Boe (2007) considers prospecting a mind-set and not just another sales activity.

By finding customers with the need for a company's product and approaching the right people, the sales process time can be cut significantly. The sales process can become drawn out if not planned well and can often result in limited success. This can put a lot of pressure on businesses that use this type of selling. Sales targets are often not met because new prospects are not sufficiently quickly qualified (Gschwandtner, 1995). The best way to speed up the process is to find targets or prospects who exhibit the greatest need (Anderson, 2000). Prospects, or leads, are qualified by a series of questions relating to need according to Kendy (2000), value that can be added according to

Reilly (2000), means and legitimacy to place the business according to Leeds (1993) and Geschwandtner (2002), and financial security or means to buy (Johnston and Marshall, 2012).

The narrowing down of leads to prospects has historically been done manually through the collection of data from websites, getting in touch with the company, or via relationships formed with others who know about a prospective customer (Anderson, 2000). Monat's (2011) modelling tool for business origination or lead generation can help automate this part of the process but the model remains untested and it is unclear if it is useful for the Food and Drinks sector. Improved identification of prospects and qualification of leads is achieved through careful preparation and professional implementation of a systematic prospecting plan (Stritch, 2012). SMART objectives are set, good records kept, often with appropriate customer relationship management (CRM) software systems and prompt follow up with prospects executed (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Previously sales firms may have been reticent or too busy to acquire information on their customers or spent too much time over analysis. This can be made easier with technology to help firms quickly identify profitability of their customers over a given time period (Tanner *et al.,* 2009). CRM systems can enable sales firms to identify key relationships and connections that may not be readily obvious (Magnini *et al.,* 2003).

Leads for potential prospects come from existing loyal customers giving referrals (Green and Wysocki, 2012). Only 20% of sellers ask their existing customers for a referral (Boe, 2007). Referral requests are more likely to receive a positive hearing once a trusting relationship with the buyer has been developed (James, 2004). Satisfied customers passing on positive remarks by word of mouth or customer advocacy are a good source of leads (Bowen, 2005). Good sales people create and nurture networks of contacts (Maltz *et al.,* 1998). Networking is a valuable source of potential new business through relations, friends, professional groups and via social networking including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter according to Kisiel (2008), especially with a profile that will attract

attention (Stock, 2007). Good sales people create and nurture networks of contacts (Maltz *et al.,* 1998). Bulearca and Bulearca's (2011) study suggests that while new media such as Twitter is useful, it is only one of a number of tactical tools for businesses to deploy. Access to listings in directories is easy using the Internet via a Google search of websites and contact email addresses (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Trade shows can be fertile ground for new contacts and to generate leads but not, or less likely, for doing business at the event since product offerings and buying processes are sometimes too complicated to allow detailed analysis or a decision to be reached at a trade show (Blythe, 2005). It is argued that businesses therefore use trade shows to meet many outcomes beyond simply communicating with prospects and selling (Bonoma, 1983). Cold calling has become less effective, saved for 'spare time' as it is expensive and often disliked by sales people (Johnston and Marshall, 2012).

2.6.2 Preapproach – STEP 2

Step 2 Pre-approach: Information is gathered about the prospect in the preparation for the sales call. This information is used to both further qualify the prospect and to develop an effective approach and presentation to the customer.

Prospecting (Step 1) and preapproach (Step 2) preparation overlap, since many sales people have undertaken much of the preapproach work during the prospecting stage (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). The preapproach stage includes establishing SMART goals for the first sales call (McGarvey, 2000). These include: agreement to demonstrate product, checking of references, 'boning up' on the prospect and buying team members according to Soloman *et al* (2006), deciding what technology to use for the presentation, sending an agenda in advance, what to wear, determining the approach and preparing a sales proposal (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Importantly this preapproach activity is worthless unless the selling process, for example, adapting the presentation plan, is aligned to the customers' buying process (Rackham and De Vincentis, 1999).

Planning the preapproach (Step 2) also overlaps with the presentation (Step 4), since planning the preapproach can be arguably an important element of the presentation strategy, since a well-planned presentation adds value when it relates not only to the customers' buying process but to the sales call objectives (Fleschner, 1999). Careful planning can help make sure that the presentation is tailored and adapted to meet the needs and time constraints of the prospect. This can deliver more value for the prospect and increase the sales person's productivity (Rollins, 2006). A pre-call plan forces sales people to list more precisely what they need to get out of a meeting, for example knowledge of the prospect's business and ways to improve the service of an existing client (Agry, 2002).

Presentation objectives are different for each sales encounter, a first meeting or a further meeting in a multi-call scenario. The recommendation is to prepare presentation objectives for each and every call at each stage of the selling process (Manning *et al.,* 2010). Presentation objectives for a first sales call on a new prospect include: establish rapport, ask 'need identification' questions, secure personal and business information on the buyer and their firm. Included in the objectives are an 'action' objective, one key and important 'nugget' of information the seller wants to learn from the prospect (Reilly, 2007). The meeting objectives, providing details of the topics to be discussed, can usefully be encapsulated in an email sent to the buyer in advance. Often buyers require a proposed solution in writing (Fellows, 1995). A well written proposal can add value and set a company apart from its rivals and is often be the first 'product' the customer receives from the selling organisation (Manning *et al.,* 2010).

To be effective, the sales call is adapted, or tailored to, the specific needs, wants, and concerns of the buyer with the sales person prepared and ready to alter their sales behaviour in order to improve communication with the customer during the buyer-seller encounter (Robinson Jnr. *et al.,* 2002; Franke and Park, 2006). Planning is critical, with time pressures, intense rivalry among competitors, and escalating

travel costs, the opportunity to secure a face-to-face meeting with a buyer is becoming more and more difficult since the limited time available in front of a buyer may be the only chance of getting an order (Manning *et al.,* 2010).

2.6.3 Approach – STEP 3

Step 3 Approach: This step covers the first few minutes of the sales call. The sales person's objective is to make a favourable first impression and to gain the customer's attention and interest sufficiently to make the presentation

The Approach is simply expressed as the first contact with the buyer (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). This can sometimes be by telephone to confirm details of the appointment, time and place, with a follow up email message or letter (Fellows, 1996).

First impressions matter and can make the difference between success and failure (Henthorne *et al.,* 1992; Chaney and Green, 2004). In face-to-face contact, appropriate dress code according to Bixler and Nix-Rice (1997) and punctuality for a sales meeting are prerequisites and affirm credibility in the eyes of the buyer (Freese, 2003). Acknowledgement of arrival and the switching off of mobile phones are plain good manners and firm handshakes and getting seated are part of the process (Hill, 1999). The first three minutes of the encounter vary depending on the style of the seller and buyer. A few moments of personal rapport building around non-controversial small talk topics is commonplace and expected (Rasmusson, 1999; Hill, 2008). Typical examples can include searching for common ground between buyer and seller according to Atlas (2003) and, or hobbies or interests in common (Clayton, 2004). Mai and Hoffman (2011) suggest that a sales person's dialect and how it is regarded by a buyer can affect the seller-buyer interaction positively or negatively.

The face-to-face sales call starts with the social contact before the business contact part takes place (Manning *et al.,* 2010). Securing the attention of the buyer and making the transition from the social contact to the business contact can be achieved in many different ways. The

agenda approach refers to a pre-planned agenda that indicates to the buyer that their time is valued (Goettsch, 2004). The product demonstration approach is appropriate for specific products and can utilise technology to provide simulations according to Campanelli (1994), it can also cut through clutter and simplify explanations said Tuck (1999) but technological snags can occur (Ball, 2005). Direct references to third parties, is a popular approach called the referral approach (Manning *et al.*, 2010). The customer benefit approach ensures the product is going to benefit the buyer (Boyles, 2001). The question approach involves the buyer directly in considering how a problem might be solved (Littel, 1990). The survey approach gets the buyer to complete a questionnaire in advance of the meeting in order to use the information to identify needs. Needs identification may require the adoption of a number of approaches. The benefit of an adaptive selling approach is its flexibility (Manning *et al.,* 2010). Arrangements to assist with a problem-free purchase is where sales people can add value, they often become a 'customer advocate' within their own organisations for the buying company, doing what they can to ensure all is in order for the buyer within the selling organisation (Rackham and De Vincentis 1999).

2.6.4 Presentation – STEP 4

Step 4 Sales Presentation: This is the 'core' of the sales process where salespeople present their offerings, features and benefits to potential customers.

Effective sales presentations matter in the seller-buyer interaction as they make up the main body of the sales call (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005). Futrell (2006) regards presentations as very challenging, gratifying and pleasing aspect of the buyer-seller interaction. Greenberg (2012) posits that not only is the presentation step the crucial step but that usually the process involves multiple presentations; it can be repeated time and time again. The more experienced the sales person, the more likely are better presentation skills (Johlke, 2006; Agrihotri *et al.,* 2009). Weitz (1981) claims that sales effectiveness, is down to the sales person in a sales presentation. Understanding the emotions of the prospective buyer and what motivates them may have an effect on the success of a sales

presentation encounter (Kidwell *et al.,* 2007). A leaning towards a customer-orientation in the presentation process is likely to deliver better performance (Keiller *et al.,* 2000).

Weitz (1981) introduced a model for adaptive selling and suggested that situational variables will moderate the relationship between adaptive selling behaviour and sales performance. (Marshall *et al.,* 1999) posits that adaptation does not necessarily rule out personal persuasion in a face-to-face buyer-seller encounter. Saxe and Weitz (1982) developed the selling orientation-customer orientation (SOCO) scale to calculate the degree to which sales people practice customer-oriented sales activity. Spiro and Weitz (1990) 16-item scale calculates the level to which sales people practice adaptive selling. Their research results showed that there was a positive relationship between customer orientation and actual sales results. Other research suggests customer orientation is the preferred option but Homburg *et al.* (2011) assert that the effectiveness of a customer orientation is contingent on the selling situation and Guenzi *et al.* (2011) that customer orientation selling requires more expenditure of effort by the sales person, suggesting that salespeople need to be motivated to use this type of orientation.

Cicala *et al* (2012) identify knowledge, adaptability and trust as the three key themes that expose a gap in expectation between what a seller considers an effective presentation and what is considered an effective presentation by the buyer on the receiving end; technical knowledge and communication skills matter too. Ingredients of a great sales presentation include a successful delivery of the value proposition with both oral presentation and non-verbal communication through power point presentations and written proposals (Brexendorf *et al.,* 2010). Buyers buy things based on what they can do for them; they do not simply buy things (Manning *et al.,* 2010). Clarity of the advantages and benefits of the product or service especially in relation to the competition is important as is the enhancement of the customer's knowledge of the company through demonstration of the product's development and productivity (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Sales people who fail to back

up claims of savings and/or benefits through demonstration and documentation often fail to make the sale (Anderson *et al.,* 2006). Johnston and Marshall (2012) identify four distinct presentation strategies ranging from a memorised presentation, where the sales person does most of the talking, at one end of the continuum to a problem-solving style presentation, where the sales person does more of the listening, at the other end. The ideal presentation style adopted by the selling company is contingent on the selling skills of the sales person, feedback from the buyer and the buying organisations' preference.

Areas of common interest, appropriate use of praise and reinforcement and unquestionable trustworthiness all create value by concentrating on the importance of the relationship (Cialdini, 2001). The linking of what is important to the buyer, for example, on-time delivery and increased market share, taps into, and targets the internal emotions of the buyer (Sherman and Sherman, 1996). The appropriate use of metaphors, stories and testimonials can focus the buyer's attention and help communicate the value of the offering (Mesch, 2007). Simple and concise presentations often work best, carefully dress rehearsed with consideration to the specific buyer in mind (Kaydo, 1998). There is no substitute for practising to make the presentation as perfect as possible (Zemanski, 2007). Overall what matters most is that the seller needs to create a memorable and interesting presentation (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Presentation between seller and buyer is a very important stage in the selling process but the importance of this communication rarely receives the consideration it deserves (Dion and Notarantonio, 1992; Cicala *et al.,* 2012). An effective presentation could be claimed when the prospect or existing customer/ buyer agree to meet again and/or do more business (Weitz, 1981; Cicali *et al.,* 2012).

2.6.5 Handling Objections – STEP 5

Step 5 Handling Objections and Overcoming Resistance: sales people attempt to overcome the prospect's resistance and reluctance to purchase by responding to objections and emphasising particular product benefits to promote purchase decisions.

Some sellers believe that when the customer wins a negotiation, the seller loses, and vice versa (Riley, 1990; Batchelder, 2008; Chakrabarty *et al.,* 2010). If, either the buyer or seller loses, then both parties have effectively lost. Both buyer and seller need to be satisfied with the outcome of any negotiation (Alexander *et al.,* 1994; Lee, 2007). Negotiation is about discussion and compromise and not about conflict, so, negotiating through customer objections is an important part of the sales process (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Buyers need to be very sure they need a seller's product. It is the seller's job to identify a need and to present requisite features, benefits and advantages over any competitor's product (Jones *et al.,* 2005). Selling is about trust; there may be reluctance to change suppliers. Buyers are often worried about a new company's abilities to deliver on its promises. Concerns with smaller suppliers are often to do with lack of experience and funding and therefore whether or not they will be still in business in the future. Buyers changing suppliers is often a last resort (Johnston and Marshall, 2012).

Legitimate concerns expressed by buyers often lead to a hold up in the decision making process; the timescales for this depends greatly on the industry in question. Customers may either not be ready to make the decision or perhaps have not been convinced by the seller of the benefits (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). The single most cited concern raised is that of price (Reilly, 2003). This is often a ploy to drive the buying price down but may also be to do with lack of commitment to the value proposition being offered by the seller. This leaves the seller with two choices; reduce the price or increase the perception of the benefits beyond the price tag (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). This can be achieved through adding value as discussed by Wotruba (1996), with improved financial payment terms, customer support or perhaps warranties if appropriate and the perceived benefit of the seller themselves (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Price concerns are often seen as the end of the sales call but they could in fact be the trigger used to highlight the value of the product more successfully, perhaps earlier on in a face-to-face encounter. Sandler (1995) argues you may as well get the price out 'on the table' early since you are only going to have to talk about it later.

The best result of a negotiation is a win-win outcome with both parties happy. Good preparation for the sales meeting, including having good knowledge of the buyer, and their company, and being aware of, and prepared for any likely objections by meeting these in the presentation content all help in getting the optimum result (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). The likely buyer objections are well known and experienced sales people can learn how to handle these according to Huisken (2003), for example, solving a problem before the buyer has the opportunity of bringing it up (Campbell and Davis, 2006). It is always a better strategy to be honest if information is not available than bluff, buyers do not necessarily expect sales people to know everything all the time. The stronger the bond of trust the less likely the buyer is to challenge prices and their ability to deliver (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Listening to, and validating concerns the buyer has is vitally important. The buyer is entrusting their business to the selling company and therefore expects the seller to listen to their concerns (Evans *et al.,* 2000; Lynch and de Chernatony, 2007). Overall the quality of the value proposition and summarising solutions through outlining benefits and advantages alleviates most buyer objections (Ingram *et al.,* 2010).

2.6.6 Closing – STEP 6

Step 6 Closing: Salespeople initiate purchase decisions through methods designed to solicit orders. In the most appropriate effective manner, customers are asked to purchase.

The definition of a 'close' is "asking the buyer to say yes or no" (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009, p.267). There are a number of closing methods and successful sales people can utilise any of a number of these to fit the situation; closing techniques need to be tailored accordingly. Active listening technique can help a sales person identify the right time to close (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Silence is a powerful tool in the hands of experienced sales people where the 'ball' is put back in the 'court' of the buyer (Dwyer *et al.,* 2000). Closing methods include: assumptive close (the verbalisation of assumptions) according to Gitomer (2007), the minor point close (the focus on a small element of the purchase), the alternative choice close (the decision of small details), the direct close (simply

asking for the order) according to McCune (2004), the summary-of-benefits close (going back over what has been agreed) according to Willingham (2003), the balance sheet close (buyer involvement in reasons for buying and any final objections) and the buy-now close (delivers sense of urgency) (Pickens, 2003). Aspects of many of these can be used in different situations, success rests in learning how different closes can work according to Willingham (2003) and through ongoing practice (Silberman, 1990).

Once the sale is made this is often the beginning of the partnership with the buying organisation. Modified re-buys and repeat sales come once the selling company has demonstrated its value-add credentials in the form of on time delivery, accuracy and follow up contact with the buying company (Beverland, 2001).

2.6.7 Follow-Up – STEP 7

Step 7 Post-Sale Follow-Up: Salespeople continue to emphasise customer satisfaction in the post-sale period. In general, the goal is to build goodwill to enhance future sales chances.

Successful selling companies concentrate as much on the after sale service as they do on the sale itself (Ingram *et al.,* 2010). Customer expectations are high according to Levitt (1983) and Raz (2003), so selling firms that do not follow up effectively are short sighted, since repeat business through retained customers matters (Stevens and Kinni, 2007). Selling firms that demonstrate the ability to add value win repeat sales (Armstrong and Kotler, 2003).

Companies engaged in selling encourage feedback, good or bad. Customers, who do not get complaints dealt with satisfactorily, tell 10 others of their disappointing experience; conversely, satisfied customers tell between four and five others of their positive experience according to Ingram *et al* (2010). Another study suggests six for good service and twice as many for excellent service (Johnson, 1999; Gulati and Oldroyd, 2005). Fortunately dissatisfied customers can be won back; a survey revealed that 60% can come back according to Taylor (2005) but it is

expensive; four to five times more expensive than keeping a current customer happy in the first place (Brewer, 1998; Zemke and Bell, 2004). The follow-up, or after sales service, and the quality of the service provided is paramount in building lasting relationships (Robertson, 2009). Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles such as the physical appearance of the selling companies' website, marketing communication materials matter according to Zeithaml *et al* (2005), as does diligence and information communication, and even returning calls promptly (Ahearne *et al.,* 2007).

Buyers do not want to be abandoned once the sale has been made (Galea, 2006). Buyers have an expectation, created by the sales person during the selling stages, and a gap in what was promised, and what gets delivered can result in complaints. Common sources of complaints include product delivery problems, invoice errors and product performance concerns (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Timely and effective handling of complaints (listening carefully, never arguing, always showing empathy, not making excuses and expressing appreciation) can help achieve service recovery and solidify the customer relationship (Gonzalez *et al.,* 2010). Winning the loyalty of customers goes further than just making it right (Michaelson, 1998). Research indicates that 96% of customers do not complain, and 63% of these will not re order and perhaps go elsewhere (Michaelson. 1998). Customers who are not looked after by the selling firm, or feel that way, become more receptive to a selling firm's competitors (Tashek, 2001).

Good practice follow-up activities undertaken by selling organisations include, performance reviews and measuring and analysing customer satisfaction. Dissatisfied customers are unlikely to remain loyal and satisfied customers do not always repay satisfaction with loyalty (Reichheld, 1994). Re-examining customer expectations is an ongoing activity in the sales process cycle (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Customer follow up through personal visits, telephone calls, email messages, letters or cards or call reports can add value and give the important perception of caring (Reilly, 2003). So, the first sale could

either be the last sale or the beginning of a new one (Manning *et al.,* *2010*).

This section has reviewed the traditional seven steps model by Dubinsky (1980/81) that leads into the following section which deals with the sales process models and dimensions that impact the process.

2.7 The sales process and sales process dimensions

Sales process is best described as selling activities delivered by the selling function (Churchill *et al.,* 1997) or carried out by sales people (Moncrief 1986; Marshall *et al.,* 1999). In literature a number of dimensions can impact the sales process: -

- The type of customer (big or small)
- The type of relationship (transactional or relational)
- The time perspective (short-term or long-term)
- The type of problem to solve (simple or complex)
- The sequence of stages in the sales process (sequential/linear or simultaneous/non-linear)

Backstrom (2008) maps these dimensions onto sales processes he investigated (Wilson, 1975; Shapiro and Posner, 1976; Plank and Dempsey, 1980; Persson, 1999). The sales processes reviewed are all unique and effectively describe very different selling situations. In understanding sales processes it is important to note that too narrow a definition is not generalisable beyond its specific remit and, too wide a definition is not relevant to a specific selling situation - new selling task, modified selling task or repeat sale (Backstrom, 2008).

2.7.1 Type of customer (large or small)

The type of customer a selling firm interacts with is dependent upon the industry, the strategy of the selling company and the company's choice of sales/distribution channels (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009). In the Food and Drinks industry manufacturing/wholesaling businesses can sell/distribute directly to export markets via agents and distributors, to

home Food retail or Foodservice markets via specialist distributors and Cash and Carries. This is more likely if the end trade customer is a smaller independent food outlet, for example, a delicatessen or restaurant or café. Supermarkets are usually, but not exclusively, accessed direct by Food and Drinks manufacturing/wholesaling businesses (DEFRA, 2011).

Both smaller and larger Food and Drinks manufacturers/wholesalers do business with both smaller and larger Food retailers and Foodservice companies. It is more likely that a smaller selling company will do business with a smaller customer and a larger selling organisation transact with bigger buying firms. Partnering is more commonplace between firms of a similar size (Rackham, 1998).

2.7.2 Type of relationship (transactional or relational)

Sales people advancing a transactional selling approach are not primarily, or particularly interested, in the needs of the buyer. When a buyer is simply interested in only the best price and perhaps convenience of a product then a transactional selling typology is best employed (Peterson *et al.,* 1997). Transactional selling is also interpreted as identifying and acquiring new customers or one-off purchases rather than building relationships with existing ones (Guenzi, 2007). Buyers in transactional sales scenarios know what they want and require little input from the sales person into needs awareness, evaluation of solutions and relationship building; this would be considered time wasting by the buyer (Rackham, 2004).

According to Manning *et al* (2010), relational selling is deployed when the customer is seen as a person to be served, not a prospect to whom to be sold; the seller wants to listen to what the buyer has to say and is intent on needs identification, problem solving and negotiation and not manipulation of the buyer (Wotruba, 1991). This approach is required for those buyers requiring assistance with needs identification and the evaluation of possible solutions. It provides discrete hand holding of the buyer at every stage of the process, particularly after the sale has been

made according to Rackham and De Vincentis (1999). There is a focus upon service to the customer and the satisfaction derived from the buyer-seller interaction, which rarely finishes when a sale is made (Homburg *et al.,* 2011).

2.7.3 Time perspective (short-term or long-term)

It depends what the nature of the sale is as to the length of the sales process. The simpler what is being sold, the lower its value and less the risk to the buyer/customer, the more likely the process will be shorter. The more complex the sale, the higher the value and the greater the risk, then there is a likelihood the sales process will be protracted, involve multiple meetings and take a considerable span of time (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009). Beverland (2001) argues that relationships with customers evolve through a two-stage process that involves balancing short-term performance based behaviours with long-term relationship building behaviours; so not one at the expense of the other. In this sense, a shorter-term time perspective suggests a transactional sale and a longer-term time perspective a relational approach to the process.

2.7.4 Type of problem to solve (simple or complex)

Sales processes that do not recognise the importance of the buyer and their company's needs are underdeveloped (Donaldson, 2007). A number of 'Needs-Satisfaction/Problem Solving' models take the buyer's actions into consideration including FAB (Feature/Advantage/Benefits) and SPIN (Situation/Problem/ Implication/ Needs payoff) (Rackham, 1987; 1995; Donaldson, 2007). Three types of buying situation exist: extensive, limited problem-solving and automatic response (Howard and Sheth, 1969; Hutt *et al.,* 1985). Manning *et al.,* (2010) refer to these as the buying situation typologies of a new task buy, a straight re-buy and a modified re-buy. Each has costs associated and degrees of complexity attached, may take up several meetings between seller and buyer, and involve one or several decision makers in the process (Manning *et al.,* 2010).

When a new need is expensive and therefore uncertain, the process is likely to require extensive problem solving. Limited problem solving takes place when the buyer has a degree of understanding with the issue at hand. Large volume sales and repeat business requires no problem solving activity, the response is automatic (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009). The more complex the problem to solve the more likely the time perspective will be elongated and a relationship be built. The smaller the value of the product being sold and the lesser the problem, the more likely the time perspective will be shorter and the relationship type be transactional (Rackham, 1995).

2.7.5 The sequence of stages in the sales process (sequential or simultaneous)

The sales process is traditionally explained, and most easily understood, as a series of interrelated steps. As already mentioned in section 2.6, one of the best known and recognised approaches to selling is often referred to as the seven steps of selling: prospecting, preapproach, approach, presentation, objection handling, the close, and after sales activity. These steps are usually identified as making up the personal selling process and are sequential (Dubinsky, 1980/81; Hite and Bellizzi, 1985; Ingram, 1990). Each step in the process is underpinned by a number of techniques and methods and approaches to deliver improvements, communications and relationships with customers/buyers (Dwyer *et al.,* 2000). Dubinsky (1980/81) developed a taxonomy consisting 84 selling techniques that are considered representative of those used in the personal selling process and which make up a systematic process approach that continues to be widely used as a training tool for how to make a sale as well as a model for teaching personal selling (Hawes *et al.,* 2004).

Tanner *et al.'s*, (2009) alternative model inserts 'needs identification' between 'approach' and 'presentation' steps in recognition of a more relational approach to his sales process model, while the 'trust-based' sales process model (see Figure 3) of Ingram *et al.,* (2010) concentrates on initiating, developing and enhancing customer relationships through

understanding, creating and communicating and delivering and increasing customer value. Both are variations on a similar theme.

Figure 3: Trust-based Sales Process in Ingram *et al.,* (2010)

Ingram et al. (2010)
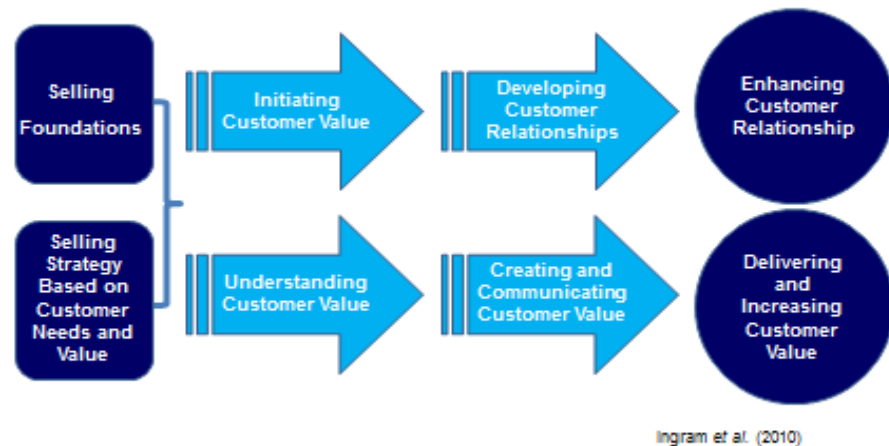
Moncrief and Marshall (2005, p.13) offer a more relevant and up-to-date expression of the steps of selling within the sales process as "customer retention and deletion, database and knowledge management, nurturing the relationship (relationship selling), marketing the problem, problem solving, adding value/satisfying needs and customer relationship maintenance" – a simultaneous approach (see Figure 4). Moncrief and Marshall (2005) choose to eliminate the prospecting step from their model despite the obvious need for businesses to attract new customers to fill the pipeline, the starting point in their model is a business that already has customers – this is not necessarily always the case but pushes the emphasis towards a relational model away from a transactional one. Skills required by the sales person are those linked directly to this modern sales process of customer retention, customer information and knowledge management, building relationships with the buyer, marketing the product and service, problem solving and system selling and satisfying needs and adding value (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009).

Figure 4: Evolved Selling Process
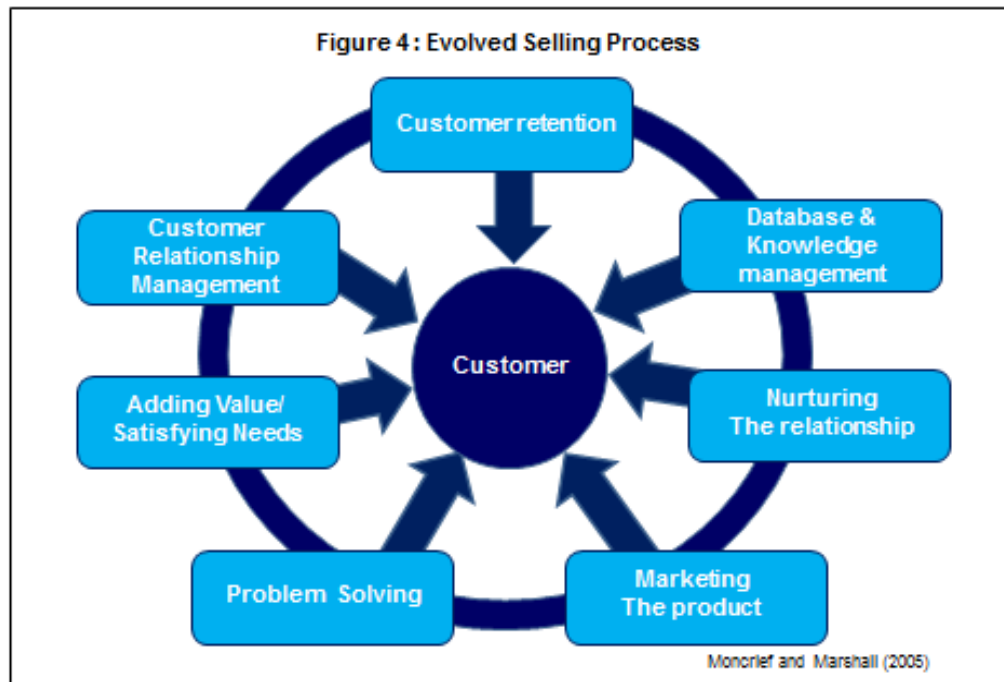
Moncrief and Marshall (2005) point out that for many large companies, the sales process is often no longer a linear process, but non-linear, where a number of activities as described by Marshall *et al.,* (1999) are connected to the process and are happening non-sequentially. For many firms, the relationship management process, embedded throughout Moncrief and Marshall's (2005) model *is* an appropriate sales process for the selling firm. However, the sales process is expressed as a linear model for the purposes of imparting knowledge, each usually state that despite the layout, the "stepwise flow does not imply a strict sequence of events" (Ingram *et al.,* 2010, p.18). Researchers recognise that the steps are interrelated and could overlap at different times and points in the process (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009). The detail of the techniques and methods that help deliver communication and relationships with customers/buyers always follow an explanation of the selling process framework.

2.8 The gap in the literature

The precise nature of selling in SMEs is still under review with much work outstanding on testing the few models/theories provided in academic papers that relate to SME marketing (Carson *et al.,* 1995; Hill, 2001). What is evident is that SMEs have unique challenges and not all SMEs

are the same. Due to lack of resources, owner managers play a vital part in the focus and orientation of the SMEs and cannot be excluded from the context. PCNs matter, and the competencies that help deliver networks have been explored but the more precise nature of personal selling and the sales process in SMEs requires further investigation. PCNs provide contacts but how exactly do SMEs go about the process of interacting with prospective buyers and interact with those in the pipeline? For some SMEs it is suggested that marketing means sales but what matters more is precisely what are the issues or challenges that SMEs face at the seller-buyer interface from the selling firm's perspective.

Based on the above, a literature gap is evident because there appears no peer reviewed academic literature from the selling or SME research discipline streams that focus specifically on selling, steps of selling and the sales process practiced by SMEs. So the above literature review leads to a necessity to explore the 'gap' in the literature of an understanding of the sales process practiced specifically by SMEs; whereas the steps of selling undertaken by larger businesses is exhaustively covered in both linear and non-linear models (Dubinsky, 1980/81; Moncrief and Marshall, 2005; Ingram *et al.,* 2010). There is an implied understanding, that the sales process in SMEs must be the same or similar. The competencies required to 'do' marketing (selling) in SMEs and some aspects of the SME marketing context, including personal contact networking (PCN) and the sales-orientation of SMEs are addressed (Hill, 2001a; 2001b), but just exactly what the steps of the sales process are in SMEs and the enablers and barriers that affect the operationalisation of the sales process in SMEs are not evident (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: The Gap in the Literature on Selling and SMEs

SME's   The Gap   Sales Process & Steps of Selling

Scottish Food and Drinks Industry

(Douglas, 2012)
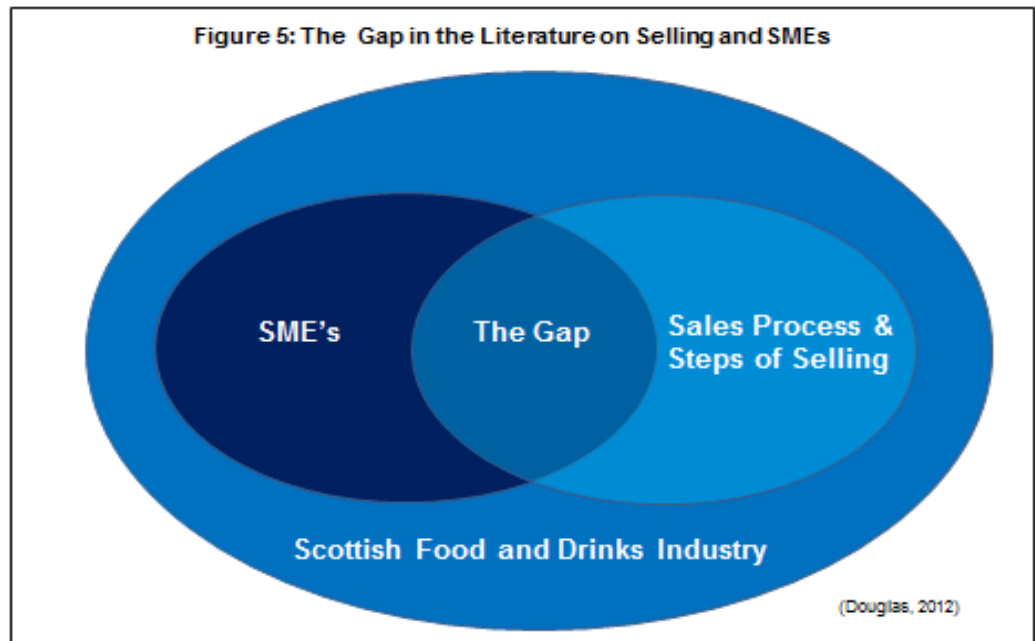
In addition, the vast majority of literature reviewed for this study originates from research by high profile academics from quality institutions in the USA. Much of this in relation to the sales process and steps of selling appears in academic text books. There is also considerable practical-based literature from business and trade journals in the USA and UK (Selling Power, 2012; ISMM.org, 2012). Whether the literature appears in text books or business and trade journals it is evident there is a lack of theory or model-based evidence to support much of the practitioner-based content displayed therein. Each step within the process contains a paucity of theory-driven research to support the knowledge expressed. The majority of the evidence is supported by case studies and practical examples from the field and not theory-laden evidence. Therefore, the main research questions are: -

Q1*. What is the Sales Process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs?*
Q2*. What challenges or obstacles do Scottish-based SMEs face during the operationalisation of the sales process in the Food and Drinks industry sector?*

2.9 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature relating to SMEs and literature on the sales challenges they face. An introduction to the development of selling literature was reviewed on each step of the selling process. Then a summary of a number of sales processes models, together with five dimensions that impact them: the type of customer, the type of relationship, the time perspective, the type of problem being solve and the sequence of stages in the sales process was presented. The chapter concluded with the identification that a gap in the literature exists concerning the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

The next chapter explains the research design used to obtain information about the steps of selling and sales process adopted by Scottish-based SMEs in order to address the research questions.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Methodology is an explanation of "how the problem was investigated and why particular methods and techniques were used" (Bell, 1993, p.155). The chosen methodology must be aligned to the philosophical assumptions of the overall research paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This dissertation seeks to understand what the social actors interviewed perceive the sales process to be and what challenges are faced in its implementation.

To achieve this, a suitable approach to primary research must be outlined and justified. This chapter analyses the chosen research philosophy (interpretivism), methodology (interpretive), the research methods employed (semi structured interviews) and the method of data analysis (thematic analysis) (see Figure 6). In addition, the choice of interviewees and research interview format is explained, and the challenges of ethical considerations, validity and reliability and generalisability are addressed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the data analysis approach - thematic analysis - and limitations to the overall research design.

Figure 6: Research approach

Philosophy → Interpretivism

Methodology

Interpretive

Semi-structured interviews

Method of analysis → Thematic

Research Methods

Douglas (2012)
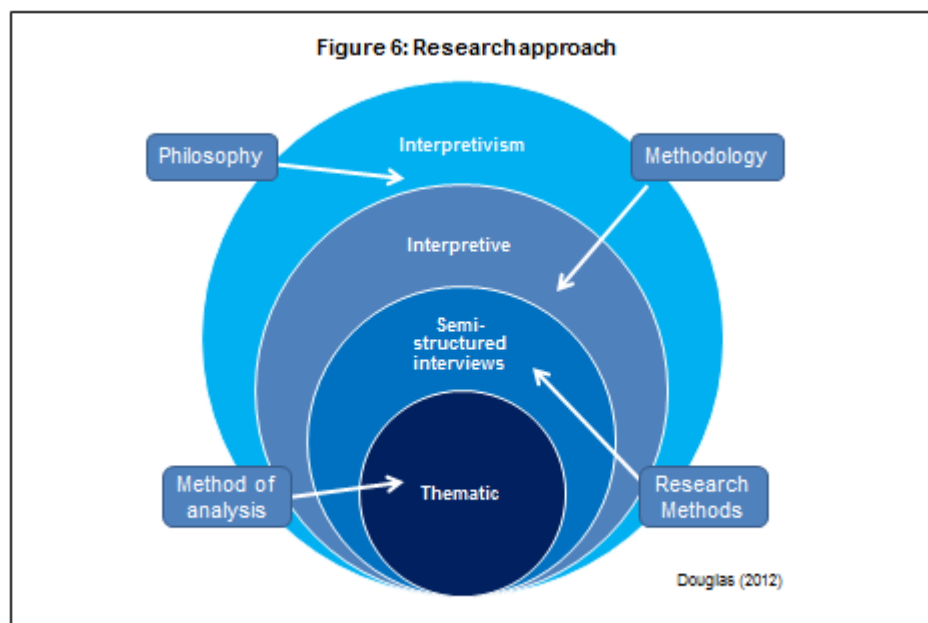
3.2 Research paradigm (ontology/ epistemology/ methodology)

Academic research is based explicitly or implicitly, on some philosophical positioning. Clarity of the philosophical perspective taken impacts the value of management research (Amaratunga and Baldry, 2001). Comprehension of the philosophical research approach assists in identifying alternative research designs and approaches and additionally helps decide the most appropriate approach to research questions (Easterby-Smith *et al.,* 1991). It is fundamental beliefs that should lead the research process according to Guba (1990) and Sarantakos (2005), with a framework formed by the response to three basic questions: ontological (researcher viewpoint – what is the nature of reality?), epistemological (attainment of knowledge – what is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the known?) and methodological (research design and interpretation – how should the researcher find out the knowledge?) (Guba 1990; Cresswell, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

A 'paradigm' describes an example of principles about fundamental aspects of reality. It is a general conception of the nature of scientific endeavour through which an enquiry takes place (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The two key research paradigms are positivist and constructivist (interpretivist) according to Smith (1983), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Collis and Hussey (2009). Positivists regard reality as independent of the researcher. Their main aim is to unearth a new theory based on experiment and observation. Variables are tested and eliminated under controlled conditions until a cause and effect is positively determined. The methodology used in this approach is deductive in nature, "based on what is known about in a particular domain" (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.11). The positivist approach, principally a quantitative approach, is based on the belief that a unit of investigation should always be measured objectively and be generalisable from sample to population. This method usually involves quantitative data collection and analysis.

If the research were to espouse a positivist position the enforced detachment from the object of study would mean that the researcher did

not appreciate the role that social actors play in reality. Thus, adopting a positivist position would deny the study the opportunity to gain a deeper, richer understanding of the sales process from the SME's perspective. Social scientists that reject a positivism paradigm argue that it is inadequate because reality is subjective and is moulded by our perceptions (Collis and Hussey, 2009). When people are the focus of a study and provide information about a situation that takes place in the real world, an objective scientific positivist research approach is far from ideal and would not help the researcher address his key research questions.

On the other hand, the interpretivist approach to research is based on the assumption that there is a plurality of realities that can be understood, based empirically as well as socially, on what individuals say about themselves and the world around them (Riege, 2003). The interpretivist belief is that knowledge is not independent of the researcher from their research and the research participants and that theory and practice are inter-dependent (Mir and Watson, 2001).

Interpretivists postulate that social research must always be subjective – influenced by values, interpretations and assumptions of the researcher investigating the meanings and interpretations of social actors in specific situations (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The research is usually small-scale and qualitative data methods are used with an emphasis on validity rather than reliability or generalisibility of the research findings (Mertens, 1998).

In adopting an interpretivist philosophy, this research will gain detailed insight and get a clearer understanding of the SME sales process. Interpretivist researchers opt for research methods such as interviews. The interpretivist approach focuses upon the interaction of the researcher and their interviewees (Mingers, 2001). Knowledge flows from the interaction since "findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds" according to Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.111), and supports the researcher's construction of a conceptual sales framework based upon interviews from 15 SMEs.

The interpretivist paradigm maintains that it is simply not possible for the researcher to arrogantly assume a neutral stand point since he/she cannot be wholly separated from the object of the study (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). This means that new knowledge is effectively co-created and also means that there is no objective reality which can be discovered by researchers and replicated by others (Walsham, 1993). Crotty (1998, p.42) defined interpretivism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world".

The interpretivist approach also helps elicit findings of enablers and barriers that affected the sales process based upon subjective interpretive data. The approach is suitable since there was a paucity of published research specifically on the steps of selling and sales process in SMEs and none that could be used to conduct quantitative, objective, reflections of existing hypotheses.

3.3 Inductive versus deductive approaches

Inductive discovery (inductive) and deductive proof (deductive) are two general paradigms of enquiry underpinning research approaches (Dewey, 1933). This research takes an inductive approach for the primary purpose of permitting an in depth investigation and analysis of empirical reality to help better understand the sales process in SMEs and any additional knowledge that might emerge as enablers and barriers during the process (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The inductive approach seeks to build new theory according to Collis and Hussey (2003) once patterns emerge and relationships between variables become evident (Gray, 2009). Reliability is achieved through the use of more than one instance or observation. An inductive approach seeks to determine patterns, consistencies and meaning to data gathered.

At the other extreme, a deductive approach moves towards hypothesis testing (Miller and Brewer, 2003). There is no tried and tested sales process method specifically for SMEs, so there is no hypothesis to test.

The scarcity of SME sales process literature is favourable to this study's use of the inductive approach, especially in conjunction with qualitative methodology (Bryman, 1988; Neuman, 2006).

3.4 Reflexivity

Business research cannot exist in isolation but inevitably will be influenced by values, practical considerations, epistemology and ontology of the researcher. Ontology and epistemology should be congruent and aligned to beliefs and values or axiology. The researcher brings 25 years of experience in the Food and Drinks industry, working in, and with, SMEs in various capacities, to his research study. He also brings his beliefs and values from his experiences of dealing with inherent business challenges implicit and explicit to these many roles. These values cannot be disconnected entirely from his philosophical research approach and will therefore inevitably have a bearing on the research (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Due to the researcher's view of what constitutes acceptable knowledge and experience of SMEs, the nature of the study is subjective. Thus, the researcher cannot be wholly detached from the object of study (Neuman, 2003). This is important given the nature of the phenomenon being studied. However there may be advantages using the practitioner's history in sales roles in the Food and Drinks industry, the researcher has tried to draw on this detailed contextual knowledge concerning the topic of this thesis. In exploring the sales process, the observation and findings in the study will lead to early stage theory building of a conceptual framework of a sales process approach specifically practiced by SMEs.

3.5 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is about words not figures (Cassell and Symon, 2006). It is linked to an interpretative methodology that usually delivers a high degree of validity, such as ethnography, as opposed to quantitative data that is related to positivist methodology and the scientific method that delivers a high degree of reliability (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Qualitative research is about "attempting to make sense of, or to

interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). It enables the researcher to "see and understand the context within which decisions and actions take place" according to Myers (2009, p.5) and to investigate them more deeply (Johnson, 1995). One major feature of qualitative research is it "focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what real life is" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10). This approach is often chosen when there is limited empirical knowledge on a particular topic and when knowledge is sought through engaging participants who have an understanding of that topic (Cresswell, 2003). This study is seeking to understand the key steps of selling in the sales process practiced by SMEs since there is little empirical knowledge in this area of research.

The advantages associated with qualitative content analysis include: its transparency, it is unobtrusive, is flexible across many contexts and is reliant on what is being analysed so the data must be real, believable and representative. Limitations of qualitative content analysis include: the labelling of code schemes, thoroughness of categorisation, researcher inference and bias and the sheer amount of rich data that may need to be dealt with (Bryman and Bell 2011).

3.6 Research design

The research design was developed in a way that would elicit rich data about aspects of, and approaches to, the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drink SMEs. Using an interpretivist approach, detailed interviews with owner managers of SMEs enabled the researcher to explore and develop an understanding of the process of selling in considerable depth and detail. Data on the sales processes practiced by SMEs, and factors important to SMEs during the operationalisation of the sales process were analysed. What might be termed 'barriers and enablers' – the factors which either help, or obstruct, the implementation of the sales process – were also uncovered.

3.7 Chosen Methods – Semi-structured interviews

This study chose a face-to-face, semi-structured interview method of inquiry. Rejected methods included case studies, observation and focus groups. The Case Study method (Yin, 2009) was rejected, in part, due to lack of supporting sources of evidence and limited personnel particularly in micro-sized SMEs to interview. With the exception of information available on websites (and not all SMEs interviewed had websites), the research discovered that the SMEs had only very limited amount of written material with which to generate a full Case Study. Company Financial reports were also not readily available. So, access to documents to add to interview notes to create Case Studies would have been a challenge due to the lack of information readily at hand or in written form (especially from the SMEs who were micro-sized).

Observation was rejected due to the potential for this to negatively affect the sales process itself. Perhaps normal behaviours might be altered to relay a good impression rather than how the relationship normally played out when not being observed or scrutinised. It is also extremely unlikely that a buyer would allow their private business to be observed (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Furthermore, background data would perhaps be excluded from the seller/buyer dialogue, and render the meeting a confusing experience for the researcher; unless repeat visits were made but access to this would be unlikely.

Focus groups were considered at the beginning of the study but rejected due to the difficulty in getting the necessary participants, whose work locations were scattered throughout Scotland, to agree to a date and time. Also it would have not been appropriate to have owner managers/sales people from different and competing SMEs, divulging important and sensitive data about themselves and their processes in front of each other (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Rejecting the above methods, the researcher chose face-to-face, in-depth interviewing of a sample of Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs because it was identified that this would deliver a rich source of data on

sales process adoption and challenges faced in its operationalisation. Unlike mailed questionnaires and group surveys, the research interview allowed for direct communication between interviewer and interviewees so that clarification and checks could be instigated *in situ* according to Bryman and Bell (2011) and issues explored in full and notes kept of minor nuances and feelings (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Using exploratory interviews help develop ideas to try to understand how ordinary people think and feel about 'something' (Oppenheim, 1992). In semi-structured interviews, the interviewee does a lots of talking and it is therefore crucial that the researcher listens 'with the third ear' not just to what is being said, but importantly, to what is not, or is being omitted (Oppenheim, 1992).

3.7.1 Interview Process

The amount of time requested for each face-to-face interview was one hour. The names of the interviewees and the name of the SME, was kept anonymous and the interviewee asked that the interview be digitally recorded to assist with note taking when writing up the data.

The researcher adopted a semi-structured interview approach with a list of key open questions on topics related to the steps of selling (see Appendix 2). The formulation of the interview questions was not "so specific that alternative avenues of enquiry that might arise during the collection of fieldwork data were closed off" (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.482). Sequencing of questions was altered depending upon how the interview proceeded. Overall, all questions were asked but not necessarily in the intended order (Willman *et al.,* 2002). The semi-structured approach was more fluid and akin to research in the 'real world' (Minichiello *et al.,* 1990; Digance and Wilson, 2001). The researcher encouraged interviewees to speak out if there were any concerns regarding ambiguity or questions that were difficult to understand at any point during the interview.

The researcher firstly gathered name and position of interviewee, name and age of the company, the category of company in the Food and Drinks industry. During and after the interview the researcher made notes about the interview; how it went, new avenues of discussion that emerged from the interview and so on. At one of the interviews it became apparent that the person would not be able to provide detail specifically concerning the sales meetings that took place with buyers. He suggested that another colleague, his national account manager, might be able to help. The researcher conducted a telephone interview with this colleague to ask the questions the initial interviewee had been unable to answer.

It was important that the researcher focuses on the interviewee's interpretation of the sales process practiced by SMEs and not the meaning that the researcher might bring to the research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In answer to the researcher's questions, the interviewees were allowed to speak uninterrupted and were interrupted only when it became necessary to gain further clarity on the issues being discussed. Leading questions were avoided but probes and follow up questions were used. The researcher tried to ensure these were non-directive and non-specific (Oppenheim, 1992; Kvale, 1996). Even when respondents departed from the main theme of sales, care was taken not to interrupt them in order to let them converse on the broader themes of both marketing and sales as the interviewee understood and practiced it. The interviewees could therefore shape the themes that emerged and allowed the study to be more revealing. In qualitative interviewing, interviewers often depart from the 'script' with the result that the interviewee says more that is relevant and important to them; this is the rich data that was revealed in this research (Cassell and Symon, 2004). The approach was successful, as interviewees highlighted some interesting thoughts on aspects relating to the selling process. The interviews, therefore, included some information unrelated to the sales process.

3.7.2 Interview questions

A series of semi-structured, open ended questions were drawn up based upon broad themes relating to selling and related factors identified in the literature review (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Semi-structured open ended questions were formulated loosely around the sales process forming an interview guide (see Appendix 3). The decision to adopt a face-to-face, semi-structured interview approach avoided the use of 'leading' sales process terminology such as 'prospecting'. It took some time to construct a guide that covered the main topic areas of research but would *not* 'lead' the interviewee.

The 20 in depth interviews were conducted by the researcher himself thus providing consistency in approach. This aids reliability of the interview process and validity of the responses. All interviews were digitally recorded apart from two, when the digital recorder failed to function and the researcher resorted to copious note taking. Content was submitted back to interviewees for their confirmation of its accuracy (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The interview process advanced interview by interview until data on the steps of selling in SMEs started to become repetitive and no new 'emergent' themes/ information were presented; suggesting that thematic saturation was achieved (Carson *et al.,* 2001).

3.7.3 Gaining access to the sample interviewees

An appropriate senior person (owner manager, sales director or senior employee responsible for sales) was identified and an outline of the research area and study explained to them over the telephone. The researcher secured the SME owner's approval to interview the owner themselves or their sales director or key sales resource (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Once approval to proceed was given, a verbal meeting date, time and a place was agreed. The meetings all took place at the interviewees' places of work, their natural setting (Cresswell, 2009). Exploratory/inductive research generally needs little prior instrumentation (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.36). An email and hard copy letter introducing the research focus and confirming the time and date and

place of interview were sent in advance to the interviewees (see Appendix 4).

Interviews took place within a tight timeframe, between the May and June, 2010 for the three pilot study interviews and between March and April, 2011 for the main study interviews.

3.7.4   The sample and selection of the sample

A purposeful random sampling method was chosen. This approach to sampling was selected to increase the credibility of the research and not specifically to foster representativeness (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

20 personnel from SMEs who engage in sales activity in one form or another were interviewed from 15 SMEs that operate in the Food and Drinks industry. Their businesses were all domiciled in Scotland. Five are designated as micro-sized, five as small-sized and five as medium-sized businesses (EU, 2012).

Of the 20 interviewees in the 15 SMEs, 12 are owner-managers/ directors and eight have sales role titles within their organisation. 13 of the interviewees are directly involved in selling activities on a day to day basis, while seven were indirectly involved and undertake selling roles from time to time. Five of the SMEs rely quite heavily on agents and distributors as partners to help their firms undertake sales activities. 10 males and 10 females were interviewed.

For the purpose of this study SMEs are defined as owner-managed businesses with a turnover of less than £50 million, have limited market share and power in the markets in which they operate and where the management style of the business is influenced by the owner-manager (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). All SMEs have been in existence for more than five years.

The researcher attempted to achieve a balance between size of SME (micro, small, medium), 'area of operation', 'outlet type' and 'geographical

dispersion' to include SMEs across the 11 'local sourcing' areas (SFD, 2012). For the purpose of this study, due to the remoteness of northernmost and western island businesses and time and money considerations of the researcher, Highlands and Islands, Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides were grouped as one 'local sourcing' area (see Appendix 5).

SMEs were selected through contacts at SE and via the directory of Food and Drinks firms on the SFD website. SE helped with the identification of the size and categorisation of SMEs. Size and categorisation were verified at interview. However, the researcher decided which SMEs to interview and *not* SE.

A selection of SMEs from the three categorisations of SMEs, were included in this study. There were five medium-sized, five small-sized and five micro-sized firms (Bolton, 1971; EU, 2012). All 11 'product types' in the Food and Drinks sector were included in this study: alcoholic beverages, meat, game and poultry, non-alcoholic beverages, preserves and sauces, food ingredients, prepared foods, fruit and vegetables, dairy, fish and seafood, bakery and cereals, and confectionery (SE, 2012). In the study, all geographical areas (Aberdeen City, Angus and Dundee, Ayrshire and Arran, Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh and The Lothians, Fife, Glasgow and Clydesdale, Highlands and Skye, Perthshire and Stirling) as designated by SE were included. There is a minimum of one SME from each region. The SMEs operate across export, foodservices, food retail and online 'sales channels' selling to all four 'retail types' of multiples, gift retailers, other retailers and specialist/delicatessen.

3.8   Ethical and confidentiality considerations

It is challenging to present findings without people being identified specifically (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Alderson (1998) says the difficulty is being able to ensure that the same safeguards concerning confidentiality can be guaranteed when secondary analysts examine data from the original researcher (Carson *et al.,* 2001; Bryman and Bell, 2011). All

interviewees were advised that their name and the name of their company would remain anonymous; all were happy with this approach to confidentiality (Kvale 1996; Mason, 2002). Each of the 15 SMEs were assigned 'labels' to protect anonymity: 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', 'E', 'F', 'G', 'H', 'J', 'K', 'L', 'M', 'N', 'P' and 'Q'. The 20 interviewees in the SMEs in the study were assigned 'labels' to protect their anonymity: 'A1', 'A2', 'B1', 'C1', 'D1', 'E1', 'F1', 'G1', 'G2', 'H1', 'J1', 'K1', 'L1', 'L2', 'M1', 'N1', 'P1', 'P2', 'Q1', 'Q2' (see Appendix 6).

All agreed to the digital recording of the interviews and were happy for the material to appear in the researcher's papers. All interviewees were shown, as agreed, a draft of the transcripts for approval (Bloomberg *et al.,* 2008). No adjustments were necessary to transcriptions. To ensure ethical treatment of participants Edinburgh Napier University Code of Ethics was adhered to explain the purpose of the study, the participant's right to withdraw at any stage of the study and each participant agreed by email to consent to the study.

Diener and Crandall (1978) highlight a number of other ethical considerations relevant to the study including the impact of data protection and affiliations of the researcher that might cause conflicts of interest. Data collected by the researcher has been encrypted and stored in keeping with Edinburgh Napier University's policy (Edinburgh Napier University, Data Protection, 2010; Edinburgh Napier University, Information Security, 2010).

3.9   Reliability and validity and generalisability

Accuracy, according to Winter (2000), and believability, according to Hoepf (1997) determine the means of evaluation in research findings when considering reliability and validity in terms of replicability in qualitative research (Krauss, 2005). Validity in quantitative studies would be compromised if there was direct involvement by the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). In qualitative studies the interviewer's views are interpreted**,** rendering each interview episode unique and making reliability a challenge (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Winter (2000) posits that

the definition of reliability in a qualitative study is replicability and the definition of validity is accuracy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that credibility, neutrality and confirmability can help ensure quality.

Validity is a positive strength of a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative validity means that the findings from the research are accurate from "the researcher's and participant's perspectives" (Cresswell and Miller, 2000, p.191). The researcher is aware that validity of his research study comes from careful implementation of the procedures and protocol during the study. As discussed earlier (page 67), the transcript from the semi-structured interviews were sent back to the respondents in order for them to check the accuracy of the data they had provided at interview. Interviewees validated the findings of this study by reading their transcripts and confirming their approval that these accurately represented the data they had given during interview.

Qualitative 'reliability' ultimately comes from the researcher's data collection through interviewing other SMEs. Reliability comes from "making as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone was always looking over your shoulder" (Yin, 2003, p. 38). The researcher drew up a Research Protocol in order to help bring 'reliability' to the face-to-face, semi-structured interview data collection method. The Research Protocol included an overview of case, field procedures, interview questions and a guide for the report (several of these form part of the Appendices).

The interview process advanced interview by interview until data on the steps of selling in SMEs started to become repetitive and no new 'emergent' themes/ information were presented (Carson *et al.*, 2001; Bryman and Bell, 2011). The size of sample precludes generalisability to an entire population but as an interpretivist, the findings from this study can be transferred to a similar setting, for example English-based Food and Drinks SMEs (Normann, 1970; Gummesson, 1991).

3.9.1 Pilot study lessons learnt

A pilot study was run in order to check the feasibility or to improve the design of the research; in other words, "a trial run, done in preparation for the major study" (Polit *et al.,* 2001, p.467). The researcher instigated a pilot study to assist in further clarifying the research focus. The pilot investigation sought to test the researcher's philosophy, approaches, strategies and methods and help determine the feasibility of the larger study. The pilot study specifically trialled the appropriateness of the researcher's qualitative approach, the interview guide, data collection methods, mode of analysis and sought to identify any practical problems encountered.

The pilot study SMEs were included in the main research study since there are no substantive changes to the interview guide being required. However, a few lessons were learnt from the pilot study and incorporated into the main study protocol:

1. Interviewees to be contacted to enlighten researcher with regards to any incomplete or unclear statements contained in the transcripts
2. Transcripts to be denaturalised because only 'informational content' is needed
3. Interviewees (interviewed face-to-face and by telephone) to be sent back transcripts and be asked to confirm that transcript.

3.10   Data analysis and interpretation

Qualitative data analysis can be defined as the transformation of data through analytical procedures into "clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis" (Gray, 2009, p.1). The transformation process deals with the sorting, retrieving and indexing and management of data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Qualitative data analysis is also about the interpretation of what the subjects of the study have to say about a particular phenomenon (Denzin, 1997; Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003). In essence, it is both about the handling of data and its interpretation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Flick, 2006; 2007a). Data collection and data analysis are inextricably linked in

qualitative research approaches with data analysis starting from the moment the first interview is under way with the researcher's presuppositions unavoidably affecting the gathering of the data (Myers, 2009). A qualitative research strategy seeks to understand the point of view of the interviewee (Krauss, 2005). The interaction between the researcher and subject of his study provides a subjective understanding of the phenomenon being studied, therefore can be coloured by the biases of the researcher or their prior knowledge of the topic (Cresswell, 2003). Qualitative approaches in this study are characterised by large amounts of data both from collection and added to by analysis. This led in this study to a coding phase that helped organise and manage the data (Gray, 2009). 'Rich' data leads to 'thick' descriptions of the focus of the study (Mason, 2002) and in turn leads to an explanation of what is happening through the discovery of patterns from the data.

Thematic analysis is a process that is part of a qualitative data collection and analysis approach but not regarded a method in its own right (Boyatis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). Thematic analysis can be expressed as a qualitative research approach that identifies recurrent issues by searching through data (Cresswell, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Ritchie *et al.,* 2003). A theme is simply a collection of categories that are linked and convey a similar meaning; an identification of data for example such as conversation topics, recurring activities, meanings and feelings according Taylor and Bogdan (1984) that link to classified patterns. From transcribed interviews, patterns of behaviour and experiences were identified through statements made by interviewees or the paraphrasing of key themes which in turn were combined and catalogued into sub-themes in this study (McCracken, 1988; Aronson, 1994). The analysing of qualitative data is a "dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorising" (Basit, 2003, p. 143).

Miles (1979) stated that the analysis of qualitative data is very complex. Only when the rich, raw data is analysed comprehensively can the interviewees' view of the phenomenon under investigation be understood. Through the process of coding the researcher was able to

identify similarities, differences, patterns and structures (Seidel and Kelle, 1995). In this study, following the exhaustive reading and re-reading of the transcribed interview responses, thematic analysis was used to refine the data into the broad interview guide headings (or codes) by summarising participants information using line-by-line indexing permitting bite-sized data to be identified and scrutinised (Smith, 1995).

Codes and categories are simply units of meaning to the information gathered during the research. Coding and categorising of the data is an important part of the analysis process where the data is broken into codes and placed into categories (Dey, 1993). Through interpretation of the data and the process of condensing and distilling down the data, the information becomes less and at the same time more manageable (Tesch,1990).

The researcher adopted Cresswell's stepped approach to data analysis in qualitative research for this study (Cresswell, 2009, p.185) utilising a thematic analysis approach (Boyatis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). The first steps were the organisation and preparation of data, the reading through of all the data to get a general sense of the information followed by a coding process to get the information into manageable bite-size pieces before any sense could be brought to the data (Rossman and Rallis, 1998, p.171). The data was digitally recorded allowing repeated examination to help correct limitations of memory. This ensured familiarity and a better understanding of the transcribed data (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2004; Kvale, 2007). Topics were then organised into categories and codes, these were then labelled and linkages identified.

In the case of the non-recorded and non-transcribed interview, detailed notes were written in long hand during the telephone interview after permission to do so was sought. The summary of the interview was written in as much detail as possible. In essence, therefore, all interviews were processed in an identical manner.

The researcher followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) guidance on data reduction. Data reduction is "the process of selecting, abstracting and

transforming the data that appear… in transcriptions". Types include "writing summaries, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters etc" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10). In essence the researcher is "condensing and interpreting" what has been heard from the interviews and is in effect "co-authoring" data (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.35). The preparation of, and use in interview of common instruments, for example the interview guide, was essential in helping to ensure good practice at the analysis stage. The researcher was wary of making selective notes from the transcriptions and rendering the analysis invalid and unreliable (Lofland and Lofland, 1984). When conducting qualitative research the transcriptions were under constant review and rigorously reviewed before analysing the data (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2004). This helped ensure that transcripts were of a high quality and representative of the data collected (Poland, 1995).

The transcripts were studied to see if any meaningful patterns emerged in order to identify frequency of codes and code combinations (Myers, 2009). Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive information compiled during a study. The creation of codes was linked to research questions, problem areas and key variables within the study, so codes required definitions. This study utilised the sales process as a starting point. Examples would be 'pre-sale', 'during-sale' and 'post-sale' etc. The transcribed interviews were coded and arranged according to these broad themes of inquiry. Each theme was then analysed in view of the totality of evidence from all 20 interviews (Lofland, 1971).

The challenge for the researcher was to deliver a clear account of the phenomena in hand. Evidence collected from the 20 interviews provided an intriguing insight not merely into the sales process but also a window into the views of business owners, sales directors, senior employees and the functioning of SMEs. The wider themes of this research came through a combination of the analysis of the coded data and the iterative process of reading and re-reading.

Each relevant statement was imported into a Microsoft Excel spread sheet which contained the interview guide headings of: company background, sales resource, marketing versus selling definitions, sales channels and target buyers, buyer meeting preparation, meeting dynamics and post-meeting activity against each SME 'label'. From this the researcher was able to depict the steps in the sales process and the emergent themes.

3.11   Limitations of the data collection methods

Although this study, with its rich data, featured only 20 interviewees from 15 SMEs, saturation of the data (themes) was deemed to have been achieved (Carson *et al.,* 2001). Using the in-depth interviewing technique with open questions can help reduce bias but may not necessarily extract the 'right' information. The research could be criticised because the interviewee might not have been able to clearly identify what they do during the sales process, however the researcher is not looking to prove that there is an external reality, or one right way of selling. So, all participants' viewpoints were given equal consideration.

To eliminate as much researcher bias as possible all interviews were conducted by the same person, the researcher, the same interview guide and protocol was used throughout the study and the transcripts were transcribed by an outside paid person with no interest in the study whatsoever. The researcher is acutely aware he needs to be aware of his inductive approach to his study and therefore is also aware of the 'history' he could bring to the interviews. This has already been dealt with in section 3.5.

There are many potential challenges to successfully conducting face-to-face interviews, these include: lack of trust, lack of time, level of entry and elite bias, Hawthorne effects, ambiguity of language and simply that interviews can go wrong (Myers and Newman, 2007). The researcher is confident that these challenges were dealt with. The research interview, despite being time consuming and costly was chosen as the primary data collection method (Kvale, 2007).

3.12 Summary

This chapter explained the researcher's world view and research philosophy and justified the methodology employed, and the specific research method chosen in order to understand the way in which the sales process is perceived and used by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs. The chapter has outlined and explained why interpretivism provides the most useful philosophical position for understanding the phenomena being explored. It has discussed the merits of semi-structured interviews as a research tool and analysed the reasons why thematic analysis provide an appropriate means of analysing the data, both of which are harmonious with the interpretivist approach.

The next chapter provides synopses of the steps in the sales process of the SMEs interviewed.

Chapter 4 – Synopses of sales process within the study SMEs

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides brief synopses of the steps of selling in the sales process practiced by each of the SMEs interviewed. It serves as a 'bridge' between the methods used in the study in chapter 3 and the subsequent analysis of the data presented in chapter 5.

The data in the synopses was gathered from the interviews with 15 Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs (see Methodology chapter). This chapter is a distillation of rich material gathered from the interviews and presented in the format of the process of selling. The data has been reordered into logical sequence to better articulate each SMEs selling process (see Appendix 7).

4.2 Synopses of the application of the steps of selling in the sales process in SMEs

As discussed in the Methodology chapter the following synopses of the SMEs and the interviewees who participated in the research are anonymised.

4.2.1 SME 'A'

Looking at the selling practices of SME 'A', it was established that the owner manager engages in some networking, uses Google and the Internet to find future buyers. Owner 'A' has a file on prospects currently being approached and those who will be approached in the future. Their research is undertaken using the Michelin Star List and restaurants' websites to identify the suitability of a prospect. Owner 'A' uses a telephone call to make the initial contact to any potential prospect. Sometimes a sample is sent out to a prospect. Owner 'A' has found that they have limited time to impress someone using several key words to get the prospect interested. Owner 'A' emphasises to prospects that the product can be tailored to the buyers' needs – that is the SME's USP. Owner 'A' varies his presentation depending on who is being spoken to. Owner 'A' receives information before a meeting and during the face-to-

face meeting by listening to the buyer. The firm tries to find a solution to the customers' problem(s) during the sales process. In SME 'A' the quality of the product is a huge assistance to the sales person in making a sale. SME 'A' struggles to maintain the discipline of making regular calls yet sales sometimes come from the calls and relationships get built. An initial order trial is always a good outcome for SME 'A'. Sales people in SME 'A' try to build a rapport with buyers to help secure business in the future. This SME only follows up successful meetings due to time constraints. This SME keeps a record of contact details, reports on the call and the outcome on the call so they can contact customers in an agreed timeframe. Overall, However, SME 'A' admits to not being particularly systematic with, or consistent in its sales process approach.

4.2.2 SME 'B'

In SME 'B' the owner manager undertakes the selling activities. The owner manager would prefer to employ a person with sales knowledge but cannot afford this at present. Most business comes via referrals; prospects getting in touch with the company directly. SME 'B' finds it difficult to meet buyers so it has used SFD 'Meet the Buyer' events. Several of these events have produced a meeting with a buyer and SME 'B' has secured 10-15 minutes with key buyers. Previously, SME 'B' has had 'no clout' for getting in front of a big retailer and seldom secured a meeting with a buyer through just phoning and asking. Buyers rarely respond to the communication from SME 'B' and it takes sheer 'determination' to get a meeting with buyers. There is little preparation done before a sales meeting by this SME. The product is presented and SME 'B' relies on the premise that they are not trying to sell something that the buyer does not want. The decision to purchase usually comes down to price. SME 'B' has a price at which it will not go below. Interesting to note, SME 'B' does try hard to build rapport with all its customers. However, rarely does SME 'B' see the buyer again unless there is a something wrong or the buyer wants SME 'B' to reduce its prices. SME 'B' tries to avoid buyers once a listing is achieved.

4.2.3 SME 'C'

During the interview it became clear that the owner of SME 'C' *is* the marketing tool for SME 'C'. The company website attracts some trade enquiries and customers also come via 'word of mouth'. SME 'C' then gets in touch with these enquirers to ask some questions but the owner admits to a 'fear of rejection'. Occasionally SME 'C' identifies prospects through driving passed shops and by seeing prospects advertisements in magazines. SME 'C' has a Facebook page and access to Twitter but this is not used effectively. SME 'C' uses email a lot because it is seen as being less invasive than the telephone. SME 'C' tries to find something out about a prospect before sending out brochures, then sends out an email to potential customers. Often samples are requested but this usually does not secure a buyer meeting for SME 'C'. SME 'C' gave an example of once accessing a major buyer via a SFD 'Meet the Buyer' event but it did not go well for them. SME 'C' has a big failure rate in accessing prospects. If/when successful SME 'C', before a meeting, does some research on the buyer's business. SME 'C' takes its key products to buyers to taste because the owner always gets a good response with this approach. Otherwise there are no plans by the sales people, other than to apply 'charm', to try to build relationships so that the buyer will not go elsewhere. The prospective buyer is given details of the history of the company, the fact SME 'C' is a family company and personal service is guaranteed. There is always a discussion about price, with some room for negotiation and then a decision to buy now or later. SME 'C' tries not to hassle the buyer or take up too much of their time but does try to come out of the meeting with an order. SME 'C' considers that the buyer's trust in them is vital. The follow up to a buyer is variable and SME 'C' does not appear very confident in the sales process.

4.2.4 SME 'D'

SME 'D' is not 'actively' proactive in pushing sales. Prospects often ask if they can see the company website so SME 'D' has recently organised pictures of the product making process. SME 'D' has a loyal base of existing customers which it services with existing products and occasionally introduces a new product variant but tends not to regularly

contact or meet them. SME 'D' does need new business and has attended trade fairs to try to get new distributors and customers. When contacting both, existing or prospective buyers, SME 'D' often finds they are speaking to a junior buyer with limited authority to purchase. Whether over the phone or face-to-face, SME 'D' does engage in some social contact but this is dependent on the buyer. SME 'D' appreciates that buyers are busy but conversely buyers are quick to tell SME 'D' if they have any problems. SME 'D' does not think it matters whether there is personal chemistry or not with their buyers but it does its best to get on with buyers and tries to find common ground in the hope buyers will like them and give SME 'D' more business. When in front of a buyer SME 'D' talks about its history, what it does, the way it works and so on. SME 'D' seldom gets involved in negotiating prices but operates from a standard price list. SME 'D' tends to trust customers and does not ask for payment up front under any circumstances. Getting stock to customers who do not 'pick up' from the factory is workable with local customers but it is more difficult getting products further afield. SME 'D' uses parcel force to deliver to customers but that is not ideal for the company because it is not refrigerated. SME 'D' does not have a structured sales process.

4.2.5 SME 'E'

Usually SME 'E' tends to wait to be approached by prospective buyers. SME 'E' previously exhibited regularly at trade shows in the UK; building up independent retail business but this resulted in pressure to supply a disparate customer base with resultant transport issues and servicing costs. SME 'E' operates mostly now with distributors. SME 'E' uses digital media including Facebook to regularly interact with its 'community' which it believes helps to educate prospective customers and keep existing customers. Despite recognising the importance of building relationships, SME 'E' rarely has face-to-face meetings with new or existing distributors. However, by accident some are met occasionally at trade shows, but this is not planned by SME 'E'. Telephone communication is almost non-existent for SME 'E'. Exports are important to SME 'E'. Its North American distributors have been 'partners' for 20 years, both parties have developed and grown together. The sales

agents come to the HQ of SME 'E' every year, so everyone selling their products has visited the production site. At retailer meetings with export clients, distributors take company literature but on the whole the agents have their own literature that they produce specifically for the USA market. When the owner of SME 'E' visits the USA and accompanies sales agents, some 'giveaways' are provided for retail clients. The USA sales agent of SME 'E' visits accounts every 6 months approximately. The USA agent of SME 'E' contacts the stores in advance, emailing to say the owner is accompanying him/her. Some customers of SME 'E' already are stockists while others are being approached for the first time. So, the approach made by SME 'E' is not 'cold'. The sales process of SME 'E' includes a designated number of calls per day, visiting the store, talking to the manager/staff, the owner gives a 'spiel' (prepared talk) about the product and the factory/production. The store is asked if they would like to place an order. If yes, this is rung directly through to the distributor of SME 'E' who arranges delivery for the company. The sales agent has price lists already agreed with SME 'E' with limited flexibility for negotiation. However, SME 'E' admits that its sales process needs to be far more structured and that its sales systems need improving.

4.2.6 SME 'F'

SME 'F' uses yell.com to find prospects, followed by an email to introduce the company. This 'softens up' the approach since SME 'F' generally finds it difficult to get face-to-face meetings. SME 'F' has lots of customers but finds it difficult to secure new ones. It has a good rapport with a few key customers. About 25 calls are made per day at which SME 'F' leaves leaflets with bullet points of its USP. SME 'F' tries to plan trips for larger customers by phoning ahead but otherwise getting an appointment is 'pot luck'. The process of sales followed by SME 'E' includes: approaching the reception, asking if the chef/owner/buyer is available and has 10 minutes available to speak. When approaching potential customers, one of the first questions that SME 'F' asks is if they are happy with their existing supplier. The approach is adapted based on the buyer's responses. For example, SME 'F' offers the opportunity of comparing prices with incumbent suppliers. Often SME 'F' needs to 'think

on its feet' with the price negotiated 'on the spot'. If a prospect is reticent, SME 'F' then asks if they will trial the firm as a supplier. The average length of a meeting is 20 minutes and usually the buyer 'wraps up' the meeting but occasionally SME 'F' does this, if all the points have been covered. SME 'F' tries to close a sale with an action. The client is often surprised when SME 'F' does what they say they will do – clearly this is an unusual experience for the customer. SME 'F' tries to 'warm' relationships with customers by giving its top 10 customers a bottle of malt whisky as a present at Christmas plus pens with the company name for other customers. This serves partly as a thank you as well as an encouragement to continue to do business. SME 'F' admits to having an underdeveloped or inconsistent sales process.

4.2.7 SME 'G'

At the start of the sales process SME 'G' looks at enquiries via the internet but has no criteria for selecting those that they connect; they operate on 'gut instinct' concerning who to follow up on. At the Gulf Food trade show in Dubai, it took enquiries directly since SME 'G' considers it important to see prospects face-to-face if possible. Wherever the source of the enquiry, SME 'G' emails or phones and arranges to send samples but this is costly, so it asks prospects to pay for the samples and then deducts the value from the first invoice. It also checks credit ratings of potential new customers and wherever possible, SME 'G' speaks to prospects and avoids emails. However, it sends an email with an explanation about the business, with a photo of its product and a DVD about the history of the business. Prospects can look at the website of SME 'G' where SME 'G' has improved its Google rankings. Once in contact by email, SME 'G' would want to know: delivery schedule, transport route, payment terms; it could take up to 12 emails back and forth to gather the necessary information. When in front of their buyers, meetings usually take one hour. SME 'G' spends an inordinate amount of time improving their service to customers, after sales service is an important part of the sales process for them.

4.2.8 SME 'H'

SME 'H' regards face-to-face contact less important in business today because of modern communications. Sales representatives are largely surplus to requirements for SME 'H' since its main contact is with its importers and regional distributors at exhibitions, usually once per year. Separately, there are a few retail accounts with whom SME 'H' deals with directly. Research in advance of approaching a prospect is undertaken using Google. SME 'H' regards preparation as more important than the meeting itself. To get an appointment, SME 'H' sends samples of products, specifications, prices, a proposition and detail of discounts. SME 'H' usually asks for the meeting but does not often get the meeting it wants, unless there is 'new ground' to cover. SME 'H' tries to get buyers to come to its HQ/factory, but geography, and time constraints of the buyers, precludes this from happening. For SME 'H', face-to-face meetings usually consist of social pleasantries, putting the proposition, listening to what the buyer has to say and sometimes getting an immediate decision. However, getting a decision or sale is unusual for SME 'H' and normally SME 'H' has to go back for a second meeting. The buyer controls the meeting, particularly if SME 'H' has not prepared well enough. SME 'H' tries to pre-empt likely buyer objections. For SME 'H', buyers often act as a filter and prevent SME 'H' from accessing the decision maker. For SME 'H' the meeting wraps up with outstanding actions or an indecisive buyer response. Within 24 hours, SME 'H' usually emails the minutes taken at the meeting, asking if any points have been missed. Confidence in SME 'H' supplying is important in building a relationship with the customer, so SME 'H' works at having good close relationships with its agents/distributors. SME 'H' gets feedback from buyers if there are any problems and long standing customers/distributors know that they will put any problem right if they can. For SME 'H' the giving of Christmas presents are part of the process and in some cases necessary according to SME 'H'. SME 'H' is disorganised in its sales process with no formal or consistent approach.

4.2.9 SME 'J'

SME 'J' uses trade press, databases of restaurants chains, hotel directories and its sales team to identify prospects and issues sales collateral to prospective clients. Its telesales staff, are not empowered to negotiate with clients; matters are referred to the relevant sales manager. Feedback is asked by SME 'J', to help how it might serve customers in future. SME 'J' advocates a four step sales process starting with preparation for a meeting, making an introduction to the customer, identifying customers' needs and then offering for sale its range. This, however, is not rigidly adhered to by the sales team since they are all 'individuals' and apply the process in their own particular way and never wholly to the satisfaction of the sales director. Customers' details are logged by this SME and all trading history, pricing and contact details computerised. New and existing customers are introduced to new products/variants. The USP of SME 'J' is having a sales team that make a material difference/ provides value-add to prospects.

For SME 'J' regular appointments are not pre-booked but some buyers are forewarned to ensure their availability. The pricing approach adopted by SME 'J' is structured with guidelines. The sales team is tasked as persuaders, since most customers do not have to buy its product as there are several competitors. SME 'J' has standardised products and customers are not encouraged to ask for products not on the price list. At the end of the meetings, sales team members undertake a number of summary tasks. Only 10% of calls get a follow up email. The sales team make hundreds of calls per week so follow-up to all of them is not feasible. Technology plays an increasing part in the process. SME 'J' sales team members have smart phones and laptops with instant access to emails to save time. There is a sales process but it is informal and each sales person interprets it in their own way.

4.2.10 SME 'K'

The business of SME 'K' is referral and relationship driven with an emphasis on selling rather than marketing. SME 'K' can email a buyer 8-10 times and be ignored, so they find it difficult to get a meeting. SME 'K'

sends out marketing collateral and communicates with prospects via the Internet and Skype. Once SME 'K' secures an appointment, it usually has 45 minutes to do a business review and pitch; this is a short time to get its message across and secure something from the meeting. SME 'K' concentrates upon four to six headline points including a quick snapshot of business performance and any new product developments. Come range review time, there are only two 'windows' per year where SME 'K' can secure the opportunity for listings. SME 'K' tries to follow the same format and structure at each meeting, it tries to get to know its buyers/ buyer's processes and adapt accordingly. SME 'K' is lucky if it gets to deal with the same buyer for more than 12-15 months. There is no comfortable trading relationship with primary suppliers, making relationships temporary and building rapport is a challenge for SME 'K'. SME 'K' feels it shouts loud to be heard in a crowded Food and Drinks sector. It maintains that it is crucial to have relationships with assistants and the buyer's support team, since it is not the buyers who place orders. It is hard to meet the buyers regularly since all communication is electronic with them. Personal chemistry is always important even if the buyer does not like SME 'K' but what does matter is generally an expectancy of professional formalities. However, buyers tend to be more interested in suppliers achieving on time deliveries and dealing with logistics issues than personal chemistry. SME 'K' returns communication to buyers within 24-48 hours after a meeting which it views as professional practice; usually a letter confirming the conversation, what has been agreed, what is being listed, when and at what price.

4.2.11 SME 'L'

SME 'L' attempts to capitalise on having an owner actively involved in the business but does employ a sales agent. It tries to attract buyers to visit their factory but with limited success due to geographic location and time constraints. SME 'L' recognises the importance of developing new products to finds gaps to target new areas of business. It undertakes ongoing research into the Food market and recognises the importance of quality data for buyer presentations. SME 'L' undertakes research ahead of new meetings with wholesalers or retailers by collecting general

information and checking out websites. SME 'L' 'calculates' the likelihood of a positive outcome in advance to save wasting time. It is difficult for SME 'L' to get meetings particularly with supermarket buyers. When successful, SME 'L' takes an agenda to a meeting but in advance considers what buyers might ask. SME 'L' uses power points at first meetings to introduce itself and takes a selection of sample products in order to get feedback and to determine the degree of interest. At the meeting, SME 'L' starts with social niceties and does not rush into the business agenda. SME 'L' recognises that buyers have targets to hit and the more SME 'L' can appear to solve problems for the buyer and be sympathetic to them the better. SME 'L' does this by listening to the buyer to find out what their issues are. Profit margins get discussed rather than price and SME 'L' support accounts with promotions and tastings. SME 'L' follows up every meeting with an email thanking the buyer for their time, a summary of points discussed and action points that SME 'L' will undertake. Supermarket communications, for example, are all web-based but SME 'L' does not yet use Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) for orders. Trust is important and can affect the willingness of SME 'L' to offer more. Buyers who support SME 'L' are in turn supported. Chemistry and personal relationships are important to SME 'L'. It finds dealing with smaller customers is more informal and personal and better for longer term relationships unlike with bigger customers who are less 'open', yet SME 'L' tries hard to have relationships with larger customers. The sales process can be different with different customers.

4.2.12 SME 'M'

SME 'M' sponsors industry events at which it meets prospective buyers; when chefs get promoted and have influence as buyers they remember the firm. For SME 'M' new customers come from networking events and exhibitions but also reactively via phone calls. The sales reps of SME 'M' are targeted to find new business randomly when passing new restaurants *en route* to appointments. The restaurant menu is scanned to match the profile of SME 'M'. The sales process consists of meeting the customer, agreeing on how to move forward, ticking boxes, opening accounts and the service starting. This is the ideal, but is typically

different in practice for this SME. SME 'M' is quite informal in its approach to buyers. It tries to sell based on customer requirements and not on price and therefore has to adapt to its buyers and does not operate from a standard template. Each of the sales people in SME 'M' have a different approach and this is uniquely personal. In the hotel/restaurant industry 12-2.30pm meetings are avoided and SME 'M' presents a few power points depending on the customer; it is a relaxed style with no ties, an informal dress code. The sales representatives display passion and answer any queries. Interestingly, SME 'M' has recruited sales representatives to better match its buyers' accents. This has worked in its favour. Meetings generally last up to one hour and include content such as: market trends, what the customers' plans are, menu 'spend' and development. SME 'M' does not sell cheaply and does not 'buy' business. The focus for SME 'M' is about being the 'right people' and 'perfect' supplier. Trust is everything: the order processed accurately, the products are in stock, delivered at the right time and to the right location and the quality of the product is as the customer expected. Follow up actions are agreed at the end of a meeting with bigger customers getting a follow up phone call and smaller clients an email. Sales representatives leave the company's owner's mobile number to be contacted night or day to resolve any issues. SME 'M' sends out a Christmas card religiously to clients and Year planners as a marketing tool. The sales process is not consistent across all the sales people employed by SME 'M'.

4.2.13 SME 'N'

SME 'N' is in the process of integrating its sales and marketing team and aligning its selling resource to its customers' processes. It admits to not looking after its customers professionally and is poor at attention to detail. It recognises the importance of researching its category but does not do enough of this. SME 'N' is not as close to its buyers as its competitors are and it says that its geographic location does not help. SME 'N' mostly communicates by telephone but buyers do not readily answer emails or phones so contact is really difficult. Contact however is often enabled when the buyer wants something new or different. The

process is to make a call and/or send an email with a proposal; this means that engagement with buyers is a lot more anonymous. SME 'N' provides five bullet points usually in the pre-approach stage, then makes an appointment to see the buyers but this can take up to two weeks to do.

SME 'N' prepares for meetings by putting together a proposal with an explanation to the buyer about why the products of SME 'N' could be right for them. The preparation can include: market information, what SME 'N' does, where the product of SME 'N' should appear on shelf, which customers would buy, competitor information and pricing. Buyers trust SME 'N' to know their market. The desired outcome from a meeting for SME 'N' is that the buyer considers a new listing. There is little necessity for a 'hard sell', with little negotiation, the buyer has either been persuaded that the product and price is right or else SME 'N' is asked to go away and find more information. The selling process of SME 'N' is often constrained by airplane timetables/financial penalties for making alterations to pre-purchased tickets. The follow up is about keeping in touch and finding out if more information is needed, if another meeting is required and whether a decision can be made which is done by telephone or email. The emphasis for SME 'N' is about exceeding the buyers' expectations. SME 'N' admits to not being professional enough in its approach.

4.2.14 SME 'P'

SME 'P' is invited two times per year to meet major retail buyers to present new ideas/products and uses email to arrange these appointments. With other customers SME 'P' has regular meetings, though opportunities are becoming less due to buyers being busy. SME 'P' tries to get buyers to visit their HQ/ factory because it believes that seeing its facilities is a crucial part of the sales process. If buyers can visit they can get 'closer to the Industry' and understand SME 'P' better. At presentations SME 'P' provides a few powerpoints, the meeting includes; an agenda, a sales history, pricing details and market details but this differ at each meeting. The duration of a meeting is over one

hour and the frequency can be monthly or quarterly. SME 'P' flies but sometimes drives to the meetings with the resultant cost implication since 'P' is Scottish-based and flight prices are expensive; the shorter the notice, the higher the price. When SME 'P' is 'down South' it tries to see other customers, but this is buyer-flexibility dependent. If SME 'P' had an office in the 'South' it could access buyers more easily but being near the factory has advantages for communication with other functions in its own business. SME 'P' treats smaller customers the same as larger in many ways, but the difference is that they are more aggressive with smaller customers. These encounters are usually about new listings and predominantly price negotiations. SME 'P' uses Skype for export customers, which works well. Rapport and building a relationship are important but if there is no personal chemistry the sales person needs to adapt his/her behaviour accordingly with the salesperson mostly doing the adapting. There is more respect shown when doing business with smaller companies and overseas customers than with UK buyers. There are no social niceties at a meeting, particularly with a supermarket buyer even though SME 'P' may have travelled a very long way. Having good relationships with buyers avoids aggression so according to SME 'P' sales people need sometimes to be sensitive to the buyer's needs but it does not often work the other way. SME 'P' does not usually get confirmations of listings and has to trust the buyer, it sometimes feels to SME 'P' that their sales people are definitely working as much for the customer as for SME 'P' itself. SME 'P' helps the buyer by watching their 'back', making them aware of issues, telling them the facts about the market and helping with store monitoring of pricing. SME 'P' sometimes gives gifts to buyers; it is traditional to do so but it happens fairly infrequently.

4.2.15 SME 'Q'

SME 'Q' prospects for new business all the time, via trade shows and network events. It gets referrals via word of mouth and SME 'Q' has been in the business long enough to know who it should be speaking to. Getting in front of the buyer is a challenge, whether it is a prospect or an existing customer. Telephone calls are time consuming but are used to

try to get first or follow up sales meetings. Buyers sometimes do not return calls, this is not ignorance on their part according to SME 'Q' but because buyers are busy. Getting the opportunity to get the buyer to taste product of SME 'Q' is crucial. SME 'Q' tries to have as many different points of contact as possible, with supply chain managers as well as merchandisers. SME 'Q' does a lot of preparation for the buyer, purchases quite a lot of information about its accounts since as much intelligence as possible prior to going into a meeting is important. There is a heavier reliance on supplier data than before, buyers expect SME 'Q' to know their customer's business sector. Most meetings are at the buyer's office. For these meetings SME 'Q' prepares an agenda, emails it in advance, takes a paper copy to the meeting and four slides that say something about its history and product range. SME 'Q' tries to anticipate through 'gut feel' how the meeting might go and tries to prepare for eventualities but it is impossible to 'second guess' everything. Most meetings end up a negotiation about prices.

SME 'Q' takes notes at the meeting, summarises the main points at the end of the meeting, so that the buyer and seller agree action points. Buyers do not put things in proper print after a meeting because they cannot be bothered, they are too busy and do not have the resource or do not have secretaries like SME 'Q' has. It is an unequal relationship. The follow up notes help clarify who will do what and by when so that both parties can see that SME 'Q' has done what it said it will do. SME 'Q' always has a 'wrap up' meeting, internal review of what happened at a buyer meeting, what has come out and to be followed up and how SME 'Q' will do this. Thereafter there is endless email 'traffic' after the meeting between SME 'Q' and the buyer. Trust in relationship building is very important to SME 'Q'. Each knows how the other will react in a different situation and if SME 'Q' gets this right it works well.

In some buying industry sectors, buyers tend to remain in their jobs longer so it is easier to form a relationship but in supermarkets, the average life expectancy of a buyer is no more than 18 months and this prohibits the forming of any real relationship. This can work in the favour

of SME 'Q', since if it is unsuccessful in getting a listing with one buyer, it may be more successful with the next buyer who comes along. Conversely, if a SME 'Q' sales person has rapport with a buyer this can help enormously. Sometimes it can be as simple as a buyer coming from where the SME 'Q' seller has originated from. Sometimes SME 'Q' takes buyers out for a curry and a beer which is regarded as part of the process. The sales people of SME 'Q' need to be adaptable, taking buyers out is about strengthening the relationship, so SME 'Q' are 'in their face' when an opportunity next comes up. Buyer are quick to call SME 'Q' if there is a problem, or they want to make a demand for a price reduction or arrange a special promotion.

4.3   Summary

This chapter provided short synopses of the steps of selling in the sales process practiced by each of the 15 SMEs interviewed.

The next chapter, Chapter 5 goes on to discuss and analyse the steps of selling in the sales process and dimensions that impact the sales process adopted by SMEs in this study in relation to the literature. Emergent themes are also discussed.

Chapter 5 - Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Firstly, the chapter draws from the synopses and discusses in relation to the literature, the sales process of SMEs based on the sequential 'steps of selling' (Prospecting, Preapproach, Approach, Presentation, Overcoming objections, Close and Follow up) as expressed by Dubinsky (1980/81) and dimensions that impact the sales process. In addition, five key themes emerge which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. This study will develop a conceptual framework constructed from the steps of selling practiced, the dimensions that impact the process and the barriers and enablers that affect the operationalisation of the process.

5.2 Steps of selling in the sales process

This section presents the analysis of the steps of selling in the sales process of Scottish-based Food and Drink SMEs. This will be supported by literature on the steps of selling and by direct quotations from the interviews.

5.2.1 Prospecting – STEP 1

SMEs lack marketing/sales resource as documented by Carson *et al.,* 1985; Chaston and Baker, 1998; Hill, 2001b; Gilmore *et al.,* 2001; Verhees and Meulenberg, 2004; Liu, 2005). We can see in the literature that the prospecting step is generally undertaken by the owner manager or the nominated sales resource within the SME. There were a few exceptions to this, save two SMEs ('G' and 'J'), who had a small telesales/customer service team who in part undertook this duty.

In this study all owner managers in SMEs are personally involved in some way in the prospecting part of the process; it is most definitely *not* always delegated to others within the organisation as posited by Moncrief & Marshall (2005) who argue that salespeople should devote more of their energy and time to retaining loyal and profitable customers – this is of more value to their businesses than a salesperson spending time prospecting. Even where there is an additional or alternative resource within a SME, such as sales director, national accounts manager or

agent acting on the firm's behalf, the owner manager is an intrinsic part of the prospecting activity. *"I do the prospecting, when you've got such a small business, you end up doing a little bit of everything" (D1 'D' 2011).*

Although most of the SMEs in the study have some established customers (both small and large), they all engage in regularly looking for, and in most cases, need new business which concurs with the first step in the sales process – prospecting (Dubinsky, 1980/81). The data gathered contradicts Moncrief's and Marshall's (2005) assertion that the sales effort should be directed towards retention of customers exclusively. This position does not appear to appertain to SMEs in the data and their circumstances, especially when considering smaller customers. New business generation is important to all SMEs in this study though the methods and approaches vary considerably and it was challenging to identify any clearly thought out or consistent developed prospecting plan of action.

Some of the SMEs operate on a reactive basis, through referrals, with the majority of the SMEs in this study admitting to being inactive, despite the need for new business (LaBarbera and Rosenberg, 1989; Hankinson 1991; Lilien *et al.,* 1992; Fitchew *et al.,* 1997; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). According to Gilmore and Carson (2000) and Hill (2001) buyers seek out SMEs. This study supports this view. *"Most of our customers come via 'word of mouth' and have seen and tried our products elsewhere… they come to us rather than me go to them" (C1 'C' 2011).* "Sometimes we get a phone call from a prospect saying I've heard of you, can you get a rep to see me?" (M1 'M' 2011).*

Conversely but inconsistently, there are examples of proactivity, where SMEs identify leads from traditional sources such as trade press and directories. One SME expresses an organised approach to identifying new prospects by researching potential clients via websites, while another takes part in both trade and consumer exhibitions but with unclear and mixed results (Blythe, 2005). *"We… go through periods when we are more active, there was a time when we did lots of trade*

shows in the UK and did build up lots of business" (E1 'E' 2011). "We look at every avenue for prospective business, for example trade press, databases of restaurants chains, hotel directories" (J1 'J' 2011). "I use yell.com to find a customer and then use email marketing, introductory emails, with follow up calls (F1 'F' 2011). "We do local shows like the Royal Highland Show and the BBC Good Food Show – I don't think we pick up any new business – we're just kind of reminding people we are still here so they buy ours rather than someone else's" (D1 'D').

Another SME proactively encourages its sales team to seek out potential new business while going about their daily business of attending pre-planned appointments. *"Sales reps are always targeted to find new business, randomly when passing en route to somewhere, they see a new restaurant, have a look at the menu, decides if it matches our profile, they'll introduce themselves to the chef…" (M1 'M' 2011).*

Hill (2001) and Gilmore and Carson (2000) assert that PCNs provide a rich seam of prospects for SMEs. They clearly can provide contacts and perhaps help with a broad range of business issues but SMEs in this study mention networking rarely in relation to prospecting. One of the more proactive SMEs did secure prospects post-networking events but this was an exception. *"A new customer who we don't know and have never dealt with usually comes from a networking event, an industry dinner or an exhibition e.g. SCOTHOT (M1 'M' 2011).*

Another important avenue for seeking out potential new business in the data is via enterprise development support agencies such as SFD, with a focus on larger customers. Three SMEs in the study talked about their experiences in dealing with SFD (SMEs 'B', 'C' and 'G'). Attendance by SMEs at SFD 'Meet the Buyer' events (SFD, 2012) return mixed results with one having a positive experience from the engagement and two declaring it a complete waste of their valuable time *"I did once have a meeting with a big supermarket buyer through one of those 'Meet the Buyer' events… It was a disaster" (C1 'C' 2011).* The SME was ill prepared for engaging with such a large customer.

In conclusion, SMEs are utilising well-worn prospecting techniques (the traditional first step in the selling process) as posited by Dubinsky (1980/81), behaving in both active and reactive ways, using referrals to seek out prospective business which supports earlier SME research (Gilmore and Carson 2000; Hill, 2001; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). Leads for smaller customers are located still in directories and ever more found via the Internet using trade body directories, social media/networking sites such as LinkedIn but evidence was still scant and is not the only method of prospecting which concurs with Bulearca and Bulearca's (2011) findings.

SMEs do lack resource and many are frustrated because they *do* know what is required to seek out new business even if they are *not* very good at it. *"We know who we should be talking to" (Q1 'Q' 2010).* What is evident is the lack of consistency in how SMEs approach a fundamental and important part of the sales process, prospecting for new customers. If SMEs were to adopt a systematic prospect planning as evidenced by Stritch (2012) then it may deliver results. Prospecting in SMEs in this study is barely an organised activity and certainly not a 'mindset' as posited by (Boe, 2007). This step in the process for SMEs in this study would be better referred to as Find Customers and/or Revisit Customer step to accommodate both new and modified selling task situations.

5.2.2 Preapproach – STEP 2

The preapproach step relates to activities that take place ahead of the customer/buyer visit or meeting (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). A number of activities comprise the preapproach step including: - identification of buyer needs through continuing research into both the buyer and their organisation, communication with 'gatekeepers' or the buyer for securing a meeting and preparation and rehearsing for that meeting or presentation (Fleschner, 1999; Agry, 2002).

SMEs are constantly looking up information about prospects, or looking for information about distributor partners, for new territories and for information in preparation for first meetings. The Internet is the place to

go and, specifically, to the search engine Google (Stokes and Lomax, 2002). This approach is being adopted more and more by SMEs. This study supports Stokes and Lomax (2002) and Moncrief and Marshall (2005) that there is an increased use of technology, SMART phones and Internet but not CRM software, in this step of the sales process. *"'Google, Google, Google', that's our 'education, education, education'"* (H1 'H' *2011).*

The preapproach activity of buying and using market research data and preparing for presentation, might add value (Rigby *et al.,* 2002), but is time consuming and can be expensive and not all SMEs either do research or are be able to afford it. *"We should do an awful lot more… do more focus groups, do a lot more stuff but we don't do as much as we should" (N1 'N' 2011).* However, several SMEs in the study state the growing importance of accessing market data in assisting them in their meetings with buyers and offering them a greater opportunity of putting their case forward and securing all important listings (Dalgic and Leeuw, 1994). *"I can really see the value in having meaningful market data to take to buyers meetings… it helps us sell is when you sit down in front of a buyer… oh they sit up and go, we want to deal with people that are increasing the rate of sale, bringing in new consumers and it's independent data, I didn't make it up, I think it is quite powerful… I'm going to spend more money on data this year" (L1 'L' 2011).*

SMEs find it tough to secure a face-to-face meeting with a buyer (Manning *et al.,* 2010). Very often getting to speak to the buyer at all can be hard whether the customer is small or large. Over the phone there is a short window of opportunity in which to convince the buyer of the merits of a face-to-face encounter. A scripted approach appears to be the favoured way of delivering a message to a buyer to induce or secure a meeting but it is a stressful activity. *"I've got eleven seconds to impress someone, I have fantastic patter that literally incorporates several key words to get them (the customer/ buyer) interested – we're of rare quality, the owner is a triple specialist, one of two in Europe and*

produces amazing products and I'd like you to see this, can I come and present… all done in one breath" (A2 'A' 2011).

Those SMEs with no sales experience find it difficult to arrange a meeting by phone which concurs with Manning *et al.,* (2010). There is reticence either due to shyness, lack of confidence or concern regarding the outcome. "*Very seldom have we ever been given a meeting with a buyer through me just phoning and asking. You won't get it"* (B1 'B' 2010). *"I know I should try to contact the person (the customer/ buyer) by phone which I'm not comfortable with because I have a terrible fear of rejection"* (C1 'C' 2011). The chance of getting listings, are enhanced if SMEs can get in front of the buyer. *"If you can get an opportunity to have fifteen minutes, they know you are coming then, so you are kind of half in"* (B1 'B' 2010).

Part of the preapproach step is to track, monitor and log activities of customers, but contrary to (Rigby *et al's.,* 2002) assertion, only a few of the SMEs in this study confirm that they keep some record of their customers and maintenance of the customer base. It is interesting to note that this activity is undertaken by SMEs with experienced sales people and not owner managers with no selling credentials. Several SMEs operate this activity on a 'computerised' spreadsheet and do not use a CRM/prospecting bespoke software package. *"Internally there would always be a record, contact details, report on call, outcome on call… so we can contact them in say 6 months, dates put in diaries or ring me back in 2-3 weeks and so on"* (A2 'A' 2011). Moncrief and Marshall (2005, p.16) suggest that smart phone/laptop loaded with customer/buyer data and/or sophisticated CRM system has replaced old-fashioned manually written documents as a means of keeping up to date with requisite information required to be an informed sales person. This is not true in this study, CRM packages were not mentioned by any SME during any of the interviews. This suggests that the Food and Drinks sector, considered to be a low tech industry sector, is not either sufficiently *au fait* regarding the benefits of technology available to them, are stuck in past ways or simply did not have the money to buy these

systems. Better records however were kept by those SMEs where there was some sales experience evident.

All interviewed SMEs prepare something in advance of a face-to-face meeting: an agenda, marketing collateral and tasting samples. This is relevant no matter the size of customer. *"I like to have an agenda for a meeting, I like to have it well planned, think ahead as to how you might react so you are not going to get caught out" (L2 'L' 2011).* Preparation is almost as important as the meeting itself, this partially refutes Cicali *et al.,* (2012) who state that the presentation step is the most important step. *"The meeting is secondary; it's the prep that matters". "Meetings are generally half an hour face to face (F2F)… but two days in the preparation" (H1 'H' 2011). "A great deal of work is done for the buyer interview... a shopping list... understanding what makes the account tick at the moment… we might buy quite a lot of information about our accounts... as much intelligence as possible …" (Q1 'Q' 2010).* The more information the SME has concerning the buyer and their company, the better equipped the seller appears to be according to this study. Some SMEs have collateral printed and some do not, or admit to it being tired or in need of an update. Collateral is important but insufficient, in the Food and Drinks sector it is expected that a tasting sample be presented. *"I take info about the owner (his special skill), the product, the price list and a leaflet about our business – I also take samples along, if I haven't got the product there for them to taste, then nothing's going to happen – they've got to have a sample" (A2 'A' 2011). "... getting the opportunity to get the customer to taste your product is crucial" (P1 'P' 2010).*

In conclusion, the majority of SMEs engage in some form of preapproach activity and gathering of data about the buying firms they present to. Many resort to Google for secondary information to assist in preparations. Several of the SMEs recognise the importance of accessing data (marketing dynamics and trends) about the industry, are actively using this in their presentations to buyers, particularly larger customers. However, for many SMEs the cost of purchasing data is prohibitive. The most important item to prepare to take to a meeting is a

product sample to taste. SMEs recognise the value of the face-to-face encounter but getting meetings with buyers is difficult. The means to achieving this, often via an introductory phone call, is a stressful experience and one often shied away from, thus extending the time between making contact to getting a meeting. The logging of calls and approaches to prospects are not recorded using bespoke software packages and for most SMEs there is no consistent approach to this part of the sales process. This step is mostly about getting ready to engage with the buyer/customer and could be more aptly referred to as Prepare for the Meeting step.

5.2.3 Approach – STEP 3

The SMEs in this study were unfamiliar with different named sales approaches such as; 'agenda', 'product demonstration', 'referral', 'question' and 'survey' (Campanelli, 1994; Littel, 1990; Boyles, 2001; Goettsch; 2004; Manning *et al.,* 2010). Only three SMEs mentioned sending an agenda in advance of a meeting as part of a proposal (SMEs 'L', 'N' and 'P'). *"You make a call and send an email with an agenda and a proposal, 5 bullet points … (N1'N' 2011).* Most provide a product demonstration and several did activate a version of a 'questioning' approach stressing the importance of listening to buyer's requirements as stated by Ingram *et al.,* (1994) and Acuff and Wood (2004) helping in turn to come up with solutions to problems. *"I listen to what they are saying… I gain a lot of information…" (A2 'A' 2011).*

SMEs in this study were acutely aware of the importance of first impressions as noted by Henthorne *et al* (1992) and Chaney and Green (2004) but said little about appropriate dress code according to Bixler and Nix-Rice (1997) and nothing about punctuality (Freese, 2003). One did suggest that 'passion' for their product is more important than coming to a meeting in a two-piece suit. The majority of first impression prerequisites were taken as read. Most did concur with Rasmusson (1999) and Hill (2008) that social chit-chat and searching for common interests according to Atlas (2003) and Clayton (2004) was the obvious way to start a dialogue with a buyer. *"You need some niceties at the*

start, find out where they are from, their football team, how's your category doing… it's important not to rush into the business stuff… you need to understand what is important to the buyer" (L2 'L' 2011). "I usually try to make a connection with them on something personal like… do they like dogs, do they ride? If I can get a personal 'thing' going with them then I try to make them feel it really would be awful to buy the product I'm offering for sale to them, elsewhere". "I try to charm them". "It's important to me to form some sort of relationship, so they can speak to me and I can speak to them". "It's about creating some sort of bond with them so they don't want to go anywhere else (R2 GLP 2011).

Most SMEs care about trying to build a good working relationship which brings benefits. *"Personal chemistry matters, I think it is crucial – there's consistency so they know they can pick up the phone and ask a question – if you can't communicate then you're never going to get the best out of anybody. We've been lucky and never had anyone (any buyer) who blatantly doesn't like us…"(L1 'L' 2011).* For many SMEs, personal chemistry matters but is *not* necessarily essential. It helps, but getting business and *not* necessarily 'getting on' with the buyer, is more important. *"I don't think it matters whether there is chemistry or not – I wouldn't NOT supply them obviously, I'd do my best to get on with them and try and find common ground in the hope they would like us and it would get us more business… there are some (buyers) who really irritate you but we're not in a position to be turning away customers" (D1 'D' 2011).*

Some SMEs felt it depended on the behaviour of the seller and buyer as to how the relationship might form. *"With some people we do build a wee bit more of a chat with than others – it depends on what type of person it is" (D1 'D' 2011).* The ability to adapt as stated by Saxe and Weitz (1982) to the needs and demands of customers is regarded by many in the study as very important. *"It is very important to 'get on' however if there isn't chemistry you just have to adjust/ adapt. Somehow you 'find a balance'. You do the adapting mostly though sometimes the buyers do" (P1 'P' 2011).* And in one example, the SME simply recruited a sales

person who aligns better to the buyer. *"To get business in Aberdeen we found it was difficult sending a rep with an Edinburgh accent to Aberdeen, so we took the decision to invest in someone who was going to be based in Aberdeen … he's got the 'twang' (accent)… that's been successful" (M1 'M' 2011).* The importance of having synergy even to the extreme of matching dialect supports Mai and Hoffmann's (2011) findings in their selling and regional dialects study.

Conversely, one SME questions the necessity to nurture the relationship at all. Once a listing has been achieved it is down to the success of the product and how many consumers buy and not much to do with any relationship that might have been built up between seller and buyer. It suggests that keeping out of the buyer's way is a good strategy, allowing the relationship to progress without the seller being 'over' visible. *"You'll never see the buyer again; you don't want to see the buyer again. If the buyer wants to see you then there's something wrong" (B1 'B' 2010).* This example proved the exception rather than the rule. Nevertheless, most SMEs in the study recognise the importance, making and keeping in contact means in relationship building (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Huntley, 2005).

The approach step in the process comprises not only the early moments of interaction, rapport establishment, but also the building of an ongoing relationship. The sales person's behaviour and demeanour sets the tone for the meeting as stated by Williams and Attaway (1996) and also the future relationship. Most of the SMEs in this study support this sentiment, that constant and consistent communication, doing a good job and being trusted to do what is or was agreed to be done matters (Khermouch, 2003). *"My biggest achievement is the fact that I presented to that account on day one and they are still a customer of ours". "I have contact with them and I can be there if they want me to be". "I try to help them and hopefully have a rapport that means we could do business again in the future" (A2 'A' 2011).*

Moncrief and Marshall (2005, p.17) consider that this step in the process has been transformed into a wider relational/relationship approach. When the meeting is a first time around encounter, then needs and problems are required to be determined and these form the establishment of a relationship selling approach. In contrast to the traditional steps of selling, the focus is on the customer and relates to an ongoing enduring relationship and not a 'one-off' or 'close the next sale' approach (Beverland, 2001).

In this study, SMEs struggle to build rapport and relationships through lack of focus on the importance of this part of the process because buyers change roles in larger buying firms or because of the sheer size of the customer base or the time and effort that needs to be expended (Guenzi *et al.,* 2011). There is a sense that dealing with smaller customers can sometimes be easier. *"Dealing with a smaller company is a lot more personal, you can build up a much better long term relationship, they are a lot more 'open' while the big accounts are focused on what is happening in their section, how much sells through and a lot of them don't know what is happening in the marketplace" (R18 MS 2011).* But SMEs in this study had large numbers of small customers making relationship building a challenge.

In conclusion, the SMEs in the research recognise the importance of first impressions but these are mostly taken for granted. Building rapport and relationships with buyers/customers whatever their size, matters, but is not essential. Personal chemistry is not a prerequisite to have but could improve the relationship. This needs the buyer to play their part in this part of the process. Some of the SMEs are able to adapt to the buyer to help the relationship. The study suggests that the SMEs are more comfortable in front of smaller customers. Trust is important and is represented by the SMEs being able to offer and deliver quality product to specification, make deliveries on time and generally 'do what they say they will do'. The content of the Approach step is inextricably linked to STEP 4, the Presentation STEP that is analysed in the next section. The

approach to the presentation, the meeting and the initial social contact, inevitably form part of the Presentation step.

5.2.4 Presentation – STEP 4

Effective sales presentations matter in the seller-buyer interaction as they make up the main body of the sales meeting according to Moncrief and Marshall (2005) and are often regarded as the most important step in the process (Cicali *et al.,* 2012). Getting a sale or having the opportunity to return for a further face-to-face meeting signals a successful presentation (Weitz, 1981; Cicali *et al.,* 2012). Ingredients of a great sales presentation include a successful delivery of the value proposition and benefits to the customer as suggested by Anderson *et al* (2006) with both oral presentation and non-verbal communication through power point presentations and written proposals (Brexendorf *et al.,* 2010).

The means of communicating the information to a buyer in a sales dialogue or presentation varied in this study, but in the main, powerpoints are the preferred choice, especially for larger customers. One SME suggests that four slides was a sufficient number to use. There is little clarity concerning ideal numbers of powerpoint slides to take or to use in a presentation. In this study SMEs suggested it is as much about the person presenting as the product on offer. The strongest suite for the SME is a great product and a great personality of the person presenting. *"The power of the product is a huge assistance to her 'X' making a sale, so however wonderful she is, it's definitely a combination (personality/ sales person and the product)… people tasting something they haven't had before, that's probably an easier entrance… a product they (the customer) can't get anywhere else" (A2 'A' 2011).* This manifested itself in passion and enthusiasm often of the owner manager as a presenter of their SME and products *"we go in with passion, that's because we have seen so many times people in 3 piece suits, all slick but … no passion…" (B1 'B' 2010).*

Despite the stated importance of the sales dialogue (Cicali *et al.,* 2012), no SME in this study indicates it practices its presentation beforehand

(Kaydo, 1998; Zemanski, 2007). Having experience in how to present certainly helps according to Johlke (2006), and understanding what the buyer wants and how they would like to be presented to can matter (Weitz, 1981; Keiller *et al.,* 2000; Kidwell *et al.,* 2007). This did not register in this study.

Types of presentation span at one end of the continuum, 'memorised' (where the buyer does most of the talking) to the other extreme, 'problem solving' (where the seller asks questions and mostly listens) (Jobber and Lancaster, 2009; Johnston and Marshall, 2012). In this study more emphasis is placed going into meetings with buyers to provide information for the buyer about the SME and its products, the features and benefits and even what might be 'right' for the buyer (already determined). *"We put together a proposal... background information pulled together for a presentation… explain to them why we feel it's the right thing for them and their customers… gather as much info as possible… market info, your proposal, description of what you are doing, basically all the background info, where it (your product) sits in store (on the shelf), which customers are going to buy it, competitors information, pricing etc etc" (N1 'N' 2011).* There is less evidence of an emphasis on a fact finding approach when in front of the buyer or one where the plan of action is to elicit information about the needs and wants of the customer (Rackham and De Vincentis, 1999).

The focus for all SMEs in this study is to get their message across as highlighted by Mesch (2007), get their product presented and tasted. *"There is usually a fairly generic agenda… we do have a template… to ensure consistency of message" (L1 'L' 2011).* The restricted amount of time SMEs have to dialogue with buyers, may have a bearing on this need to impart as much information as quickly as possible. *"I go and present to them, which I do on ppt and let them know who we are and what we can do, and take them a selection of sample products …" (L1 'L' 2011). "We talk about our history, what we do, the way we work and so on" (D1 'D' 2011). "I just sort of bring the jars out and let them try them and tell them the history of the company" (C1 'C' 2011).* The amount of

time alloted for meetings varies from as little as 20 minutes, with an average being around 45 minutes to one hour. *"Once you've secured the appointment you've got 45 minutes to do a business review and pitch, what your proposals are for the coming six-nine-12 months... you've got to get your message across quickly and secure something from the meeting... four-six headline points to talk about..."(K1 'K' 2010).*

Two SMEs did allude to the need for a seller not to be too rigid in their approach but to adapt the presentation to suit the customer (Robinson Jnr. *et al.,* 2002; Franke and Park, 2006), *"Presentations are varied depending on who is being spoken to" (A1 'A' 2011)* while another expresses determination not to adapt to a regimented or prescribed or laid down norm of turning up in a suit for a meeting, suggesting that if the buyer likes a product or the person, what that person is wearing is inconsequential. *"Try and follow the same format and structure, but you've got to know your audience and adapt accordingly" (K1 'K' 2010).* *"It's about the product, the quality, the sales, what we can offer – we are not going to go in with a fancy suit and briefcase and 25 slides to prove something ..." (M1 'M' 2011).* This disagrees with findings from a study by Bixler and Nix-Rice (1997).

Moncrief & Marshall (2005, p.20) argue that the evolved sales presentation activity is about a closer relationship between the marketing function and the salesperson's role in presenting, and what they present to a buyer. Sales people's role is now more integrated with the marketing function according to Cespedes (1995). This is not the case for SMEs in this study. There is a distinction drawn between what marketing means, or is to a SME, and explanations of the difference between this, and selling. According to the study, marketing costs money and is resource intensive, while selling is immediate and a necessity. And for some SMEs the owner manager does the selling because the cost of a professional sales person is simply too much. *"We actually wanted to employ a salesperson but to put someone on the road is a lot of money if you want someone who is good... we need someone who actually knows how to sell but it's just not feasible" (B1 'B' 2010).* SMEs conclude that there is a

greater focus on selling over marketing. "*I would say there is more emphasis on selling*" (K1 'K' 2010). For many 'marketing' is selling according to Oakey (1991) and this is borne out in this study. "*Selling and marketing tend to get wrapped up into one thing and I'm not quite sure … we distinguish between the two… we need sales – I suppose to get sales there's an element of marketing*" (C1 'C' 2011). "*I think marketing can be mistaken for selling …*" (L1 'L' 2011).

In conclusion, the presentation step in the process varies considerably among SMEs and is not differentiated when delivering to either a small or larger customer. The outcome being sought from the SME is the same, a listing. The key focus is on the listing with little regard for extracting information concerning the needs and wants of the buyer. Every SME prepares for, and delivers their presentation differently in a sales meeting, there appears to be no evidence of any knowledge or understanding of what may make one presentation more effective than another. SMEs market the product and present themselves as they 'see fit' – contingent on the moment. "*It's all very, unstructured, but the outcome is that you would like the buyer to say 'yes – we're going to have a look at it and potentially launch it and fit it into their ranging plan'…. that would be our ideal outcome…*"(N1 'N' 2011). The presentation step can better be expressed as simply The Sales Meeting step, since the presentation to the buyer is one part of a sales meeting.

5.2.5 Handling objections - STEP 5

There are a myriad of reasons why buyers deny the sales person the opportunity to 'close': wrong product, wrong price, no rapport with the sales person, not enough information, buyer inability to make a decision and so on (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). Listening skills play an important role in anticipating and overcoming objections according to Marshall *et al* (2003) and particularly active listening (Ingram *et al.,* 1994; Acuff and Wood, 2004). SMEs in this study recognise the importance of listening but do not listen enough to understand buyers' needs and consequently how they might address problems and take advantage of opportunities. "*I fear that there's not enough listening… we should be*

doing a lot more listening to get the right product for the customer… it's for me to identify (issues) and find a solution to his problem" " (A1 'A' 2011).

By listening to what the buyer wants/needs, perhaps a modified or altered product from the original proposed, the SME is able to focus in on what exactly the buyer needs, not simply what the SME has to offer. In this study, several SMEs confirm that buyers provide signals and information concerning what it is they need during the course of a sales interaction but SMEs also confirm that they try to push what it is they have to sell. *"You have to do a lot of listening but hopefully the organisation is not trying to sell things that are not going to find a market or are not going to find resonance with the buyer or consumer otherwise we have not done our homework… but equally you have to put your proposition on the table and get through the various 'gates' and get your product onto the shelf" (L1 'L' 2011).*

Moncrief and Marshall (2005) maintain that a sale need not be made on the first encounter and indeed is optimistic to think that it might. It is all about a 'win-win' philosophy over time, listening and adapting the offering or proposal to meet the buyer's needs and/or more closely match or align buyers' needs and and selling firm's ability to supply (Howe, 1998; Robson and Rawnsley, 2001). *"I need to think about this, can I have some samples?... I'd like to show my sous chefs… you're not always going to walk away with a sale there and then…" (A2 'A' 2011).* No SME in the study mentioned a win-win outcome as such, but regular contact and meetings between SMEs and buyers at which joint plans are discussed, promoted the concept of both parties gaining something from the relationship (a buyer getting the product they require at the right price for example and the SME getting access to the buyer to discuss new and more business opportunities on an ongoing basis). *"We like to think we have goals that are jointly developed." (P1 'P' 2011). "The more they can sell, the more we can sell and the better everything is" (N1 'N' 2011).*

The SMEs in this study raise a dilemma. While recognising the importance of mutually beneficial outcomes as discussed by Batchelder (2008), Chakrabarty *et al* (2010) and Johnson and Marshall (2012) and the need to deliver a solution, SMEs still need to persuade the buyer to take what it is they can produce or have to distribute, whatever the size of the customer. *"We can change the look of it (the product) within the framework of what we produce but we don't do thousands of different products" (A2 'A' 2011).* It is evident from the study that SMEs offering particularly impulsive luxury food products, deploy persuasion tactics or techniques to try to convince the buyer that they need the SME's product. *''Do they want or need is a good question… my job really is to make them need it and want it – some of the chefs will want it but can't afford it, therefore they don't need it, some chefs will really need it, they are desperate because they need help… my loyalties lie with my company to grow its business but also with the chef, I'm not going to present him with something that he's not going to use" (A2 'A' 2011).* Another similar product may well be on offer from rivals and the SME wants the buyer to choose *them* over the competitor. This approach is justified by the SME on the basis that it is offering for sale something that they perceive is of some value to the buyer, the buyer just does not realise this (Ingram *et al.,* 2010).

Many of the SMEs in this study neither have time, nor the financial resource to revisit clients over and over again, it is therefore important to overcome objections and put themselves in a position to make a sale on the day if at all possible. This is particularly apparent when SMEs are making lots of calls to smaller customers. *"I usually manage to get a decision out of them in one way or other… I try to get a decision because I do this myself… I say leave me a brochure, it goes on a pile and I keep putting it off BUT I try not to hassle people too much however I do try to come out with an order" (C1 'C' 2011). "We try to plan and think about what objections they might have. Try to seal the deal then and there if possible…" (H1 'H' 2011).*

For engagements with larger firms, the SME is acutely aware of the cost involved in coming back time and time again to meetings, edging towards the sale. There appears to be a disconnect between building a relationship (that takes time) as stated by Batchelder (2008) and Charabarty *et al* (2010), dealing with larger customers (whose objections need to be overcome), and the time the process takes to identify a need, reveal a problem and provide a solution. *"I think when you've got to the point of showing everything , there's not a lot of negotiation that you can do – it's either you have got to have persuaded them that the package (the product, price etc) is right or else you've got to go back in and find more information" (N1 'N' 2011).*

Price inevitably is part of the discussion, either in the early stage or later stage of the sales meeting. SMEs in this study state, that often but not always, an eventual sale comes down to price and that the role of the buyer appears to be simply to get the best price at the expense of the SME. This supports Reilly (2003). So despite a desire to listen to the buyer and understand better their needs, the SME is strapped for time and financial resource and needs to try to speed up the decision making process. For small transactional, low value sales this may be possible, but for bigger deals and where a measured response is required, this can take a lot of time and use up or sap valuable SME resources. *"Basically it's down to price, we go in with what we want and we never ever do below that line…" (B1 'B' 2011).*

In conclusion, there appears to be some knowledge of the importance of overcoming or negotiating through objections buyers may have, by preparing in advance (Campbell and Davis, 2006; Lee, 2007). This however is the exception and not the rule. There is a greater emphasis on endeavouring to persuade the buyer of the merits of the product being presented rather than adapting a product for a client based upon understanding more about what the buyer needs, or what a solution for a buyer might consist of, whatever the size of the customer. This suggests a leaning towards a sales-oriented and not customer-centric approach (Lehtimaki *et al.,* 2012; Hill, 2001). *"We're not terribly slick but we do try*

to help get the buyer to the outcome by knowing what that is in advance" *(N1 'N' 2011).* This step takes place during the presentation itself and forms in overall terms the actual meeting between seller and buyer. Therefore, Steps 3 (Approach), 4 (Presentation) and 5 (Handling objections) could be merged and referred to as the Sales Meeting step in the SME sales process based upon this study.

5.2.6 Close - STEP 6

It does not matter whether a sales person 'closes' after one sale or many visits and/or seller/buyer interactions, what does matter is – have the buyer's needs been satisfied and has value been added in the transaction/sale (Robertson, 2009). This win for the buyer is complimented by a win for the sales person through the mechanism of repeat orders, which usually suggests customer loyalty (Rackham and de Vincentis, 1999). This evolved part of the sales process, adding value and satisfying needs, and not simply 'closing', infers that buyer and seller both need to benefit from doing business together. In this study, SMEs add value in the relationship for example, by introducing new products and services that specifically assist the buyer drive their business. *"We are looking to make a material difference to value we give our customers"* *(J1 'J' 2011).* An example as part of a new selling task situation is helping the buyer with 'old' stock that is not selling by either taking it away or providing financial assistance to reduce the price to clear. *"We have been asked by customers in difficulty to take back a stockroom full of product and credit their account, and yes we did when we should feel no great sense of responsibility for their circumstances but still do" (J1 'J' 2011).* SMEs need to be careful not to go too far in helping the buyer to the detriment of themselves. This is more likely to happen when the SME sales person is given some authority to act, and is less likely to happen if it the owner manager themselves is undertaking the selling activity. Sometimes SMEs find themselves working for the customer as much as for their own firm. This concurs with research findings from Sheth and Sharma (2008). *"Our sales team are almost too interested in the customer's wellbeing… I sometimes feel like throttling the guy (sales person) who has offered a particular deal… but it ultimately pays*

dividend in the round for our business to be seen to be so service driven"
(J1 'J' 2011). "Long standing customers/ distributors know we'll put any
problem right if we can – if we've caused it." (H1 'H' 2011).

Moncrief and Marshall (2005) suggest that the traditional 'close' step of
the sales process is no longer quite so important, the opportunity to
'close' has not vanished but instead becomes the outcome gradually built
from a mutually advantageous relationship foundation. Ongoing, or
repeat business, does not necessarily require further face-to-face
meetings, though the building of the relationship might suffer from
infrequent communication (Tan and Steinberg, 2007). This study shows
that due to cost implications/constraints SMEs may not always get back
to a customer to further discussions, these need to be done differently.
For SMEs in this study the 'close' still appears to be an important part of
the process (Johnston and Marshall, 2012). This is particularly so for
those SMEs engaging with larger numbers of smaller customers who
cannot realisitically be visited on too regular a basis. So there is pressure
on the SME to get a result or at least an outcome that determines
whether a follow up to a first meeting is worthwhile or not, and whether
business is likely to come from that customer imminently. Many smaller
customers of SMEs are infrequently seen because of the lack of SME
resource. *''If they want to show to someone else (another buyer*
colleague), it's difficult to come back to, say, London (A1 'A' 2011).
"There's not time to go back … they've already chosen a product and
they know how it can be changed, so we can deal with this by phone and
sometimes I send them a sample (A2 'A' 2011).

The close step of the process, whenever it occurs, requires an exchange
of information confirming content of a meeting, the deal and a list of
action points. What is important however is understanding clearly an
agreed next action following the meeting. Five of the SMEs ('F', 'H', 'L',
'M' and 'Q') expressed the importance of making sure both parties, buyer
and seller, know what is expected of them after the meeting closes. So, if
a sale is not made, at least it is clear what the next step is. *"I do try to*
close a sale with an action point – been taught this on a sales course

once" (F1 'F' 2011). "At the end of the meeting we agree on the next action, depending on the customer that can vary – if it's a big customer we follow up with an email, if it's a chef and one site, then a phone call and find a good time to follow up" (M1 'M' 2011). "At the end of the meeting we agree on the next action" (M1 'M' 2011).

In this study, only one SME ('F') was able to verbalise a 'closing' technique, bringing a transactional sale to its conclusion on an 'action' point. Despite a number of SMEs requiring to make a sale at a first meeting or new selling task situation, there lacked any explicit knowledge of techniques such as using 'silence' as posited by Dwyer *et al* (2000), verbalisation of 'assumptions' as posited by Gitomer (2007), 'minor point', 'alternative' or 'direct' close, as posited by McCune (2004), 'summary of benefits' as posited by Willingham (2003) or 'buy now' closes (Pickens, 2003).

The SME, often because of the customer and challenges in being sufficiently resourced to visit again and again the same customer, leans towards a traditional 'close' step of endeavouring to conclude the deal when in front of the buyer. It is however recognised that this cannot always be the outcome, especially with larger buying groups and more complex sales. In any event every meeting has to have a 'close' of some description. This could be better referred to as Action Points from the Sales Meeting step since SMEs in this study did exactly this no matter the outcome of the Sales Meeting.

5.2.7 Follow up - STEP 7

Both linear and non-linear sales process approaches require ongoing customer relationship maintenance to help cement the relationship; follow up in the form of a list of action points for the next meeting or stage in the new selling task situation or a 'thank you' for the business. Follow up activity is not a one-off action but part of the ongoing process to build business rather than just a focus on addressing any problem encountered according to Moncrief and Marshall, 2005. Most SMEs in this study provide some evidence of what action they take after a

meeting with a buyer. All appear to agree that it is for the SME or selling company to provide the follow up. This follow up rarely, if at all, comes from the buyer. It is suggested by one SME that it is the industry or business norm for the selling firm to undertake the follow up, another because it is one less activity for the buyer to worry about (Hingley, 2005). If the SME wants to do business, it will provide the follow up. *"We do it because I suppose buyers are lazy" (H1 'H' 2011).*

In this study, the follow up note or contact from a meeting is generally undertaken within 24-48 hour time period. It takes the form of a letter (usually as an email) *"Follow up is by telephone or emailed down to buyers" (N1 'N' 2011) "We follow up every meeting with an email thanking them (the buyer) for their time, these are the points we have raised, some need action and we say what we'll do" (L2 'L' 2011)* or sometimes a call (Reilly, 2003) *"I follow up in 24-48 hours… get back to a buyer with a letter confirming the conversation, what's been agreed… and the date of next meeting... " (K1 'K' 2010).* New technology and access to Smart phones helps speed up the response time as posited by Ahearne *et al* (2007) is evidenced in this study*. "Technology plays an increasing part… we've moved from mobile phones to Blackberry SMART phone and the sales team are armed with laptops with instant access to emails – we don't go home now to a raft of emailing" (J1 'J' 2011).*

The bigger the customer the more likely the follow up will be a letter or email. If the customer is smaller then it is possible that a member of the support staff from the SME is tasked to follow up. *"At the end of the meeting we agree on the next action, depending on the customer that can vary – if it's a big customer we follow up with an email, if it's a chef and one site, then a phone call and find a good time to follow up" (M1 'M' 2011).* Those SMEs with lots of small customers tend not to follow up every meeting, it is simply too time consuming. *"For example we will have made 100 calls this week, so maybe 10 get or need a follow up email looking to reaffirm commitment that has been won during the customer visit" (J1 'J' 2011).* The content of the follow message varies

but usually includes points discussed in the meeting, those that require actioning and who will do what.

Action following a meeting between buyer and seller requires internal consideration of action points arising from a meeting. One SME explains the importance of actioning an internal meeting following a meeting with customers to ensure all points that require actioning are dealt with by the SME expeditiously. *"There's always a wrap up meeting... internal review of what happened at the meeting, what's come out and to be followed up and how we will do this, with endless email traffic after the meeting... if anything particular has been agreed then it would be formalised in writing by email to ensure any agreement met was clear between both parties" (Q2 'Q' 2010).*

SMEs consider it important to try to keep in touch, apart from the professionalism of a follow up with action points, there is also the challenge of relationship maintenance with buyers (Palmatier *et al.,* 2006) *"The follow up is just about keeping in touch and finding out whether there's any more info needed, another meeting required and whether a decision can be made at that meeting" (N1 'N' 2011).* SMEs regard it as important since there is a need to identify potential new business opportunity as stated by Stevens and Kinni (2007), increasing sales through promotion of product and general feedback to improve service given by the SME to its customer base. However, one SME has a different slant on relationship maintenance, the opposite from all others in the sample. This SME considers it unnecessary to court further contact with a buyer because the only reason as to why they may need to have contact in the near future would be for the buyer to try to exact a price decrease or to advise the SME that its product is to be de-listed. It is highly likely that should this be the intention of the buyer/customer, it would not matter if the SME did not make any contact, the buyer from the buying company would speak eventually to the SME. *"If the buyer really has an issue and asks to speak to you it's to tell you there's a major issue or they want to decrease prices. So you try to kind of ignore it" (B1 'B' 2010).*

Another form of relationship maintenance evidenced in the study is gift giving, what is given and the reason for doing this. SMEs have mixed views concerning gift giving to buyers. Some buying organisations have strict rules and policies concerning this part of the sales process, where it is frowned upon by some larger customers. SMEs respect this in the main while others accept gifts. Those SMEs who did not engage in gift giving, for example at Christmas time, cite being too busy as a reason for not taking part in the activity *"I don't send Christmas cards or presents to clients – I just don't get round to it – in the past when I had more time I did, some clients became almost personal friends – I know their children's names and their dogs' names so they have become more than a customer" (C1 'C' 2011)* and/or being dismissive of the buyers suggesting they put no relationship value on gift giving. *"We don't send Christmas cards, it's a waste of time, they just get thrown in the bin" (D1 'D' 2011).*

Most say they build good friendships with some of their buyers as posited by Swan *et al* (2001) and see Christmas card giving and present exchange activity as an extension of that relationship. Others have different motives, including the hope that the presenting of a small gift at Christmas might keep the SME in the forefront of the buyer's mind. One SME states that there would be an expectation that through corporate hospitality activity that it would be favoured in some way when business is being awarded in future, this is particularly true of larger customers. *"I give my top ten customers a bottle of malt as a present, I have pens with the company name on or diaries for other clients. It is partly a thank you as well as 'I hope you stay with us for next year' – more an expectation rather than a 'hint', I also take a table (hospitality) at a football match and take customers whose company I enjoy" (F1 'F' 2011).* For another it is a recognised part of the sales process with no ulterior motive. *"Giving Christmas presents is part of the process and in some cases unfortunately it is necessary" (H1 'H' 2011).*

In conclusion, the final step of the process is important whether a sale is made (usually to a smaller customer) or further additional meetings are needed to progress potential business (usually to a larger customer). It is important so that SMEs and their customers can keep each abreast of developments and keep relationships intact. SMEs are required to provide the follow up notes and action points as a rule, the buyer never offers to undertake this duty irrespective of the size of the customer. SMEs may organise internal meetings with other team members to allocate action points to ensure deadlines and agreements made at meetings are delivered on time and as agreed between parties. Relationships need to be maintained and a mechanism for this is ongoing contact whether a further meeting is required or is imminent. One method of keeping in touch is the act of gift giving particularly at Christmas time. Both small and large customers are given cards/gifts but usually only larger clients, hospitality. In the research there are mixed views expressed concerning the morality, necessity or usefulness of this activity. This final step is more than just a follow up, it is about maintaining contact through the follow up and a number of other actions as described in this study.

5.2.8 Summary of the steps of selling in the sales process
In this study of SMEs it is evident that a truncated version of the steps of selling best express the phases/stages SMEs experience during the sales process: Step 1 – Find Customer and/ or Revisit Customer (in literature known as Prospecting), Step 2 – Prepare for the Sales Meeting (in literature known as the Preapproach), Step 3 – The Sales Meeting (in literature known as Approach, Presentation and Handling objections steps merged), Step 4 – Action Points from Meeting (in literature known as Close) and Step 5 – Maintain Contact (in literature known as Follow up) (see Figure 7 on the next page).

Figure 7: The steps of selling (in the sales process) Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs

STEP 1	FIND CUSTOMER and/or REVISIT CUSTOMER
STEP 2	PREPARE FOR MEETING
STEP 3	THE SALES MEETING
STEP 4	ACTION POINTS FROM MEEETING
STEP 5	MAINTAIN CONTACT

(Douglas, 2012)

5.3 The Sales process and sales process dimensions

Sales process as previously explained is defined as selling activities undertaken by the selling function as stated by Churchill *et al* (1997) or executed by sales people (Moncrief 1986; Marshall *et al.,* 1999). Backstrom's (2008) investigation into a number of sales processes (Wilson, 1975; Shapiro and Posner, 1976; Plank and Dempsey, 1980; Persson, 1999) highlighted a number of dimensions that impacted sales processes including: The type of customer (big or small), the type of relationship (transactional or relational), the time perspective (short-term or long-term), the type of problem to solve (simple or complex) and the sequence of stages in the sales process (sequential/linear or simultaneous/non-linear). This section discusses these dimensions in relation to the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs from the data gathered during interviews.

5.3.1 Type of customer (large or small)

Irrespective of the size of customer (big or small) the prospecting step is required since not all SMEs can rely upon PCNs and networking to secure leads and guarantee pipeline sales. What differs is the research needed and resource involved in prospecting for small customers and

large customers. There are few large Food retailers, Foodservice distributors in the industry so prospecting or contact points tend to be quite limited (SFD, 2012). Conversely, there exists a multitude of potential smaller customers across the Food and Drinks sector to engage with so a combination of more selling resource via assistance from a third party agent or distributor or some degree of prioritisation needs to take place.

The Preparation step in the selling process is undertaken whether the customer is smaller or larger but this study reveals that larger customers have an expectation of preparation being undertaken by SMEs. The Sales Meeting, for a new selling task is not noticeably different when SME engage with smaller or larger buying customers. There is evidence from this study that there is a more comfortable relationship between SMEs and smaller customers than larger customers due to commonality of size and operating challenges. However, SMEs still endeavour to build relationships with larger cutomers, though this can be difficult due to access issues and resource constraints (Rackham, 1998). SMEs in this study tended to 'listen' but appeared not to 'hear' (Evans *et al.,* 2000; Lynch and de Chernatony, 2007). This study suggests SMEs push sales of their standardised products rather than meet the needs of their customers with customised products. The Action Points from Meeting step with smaller customers was sought in a first meeting, whereas with larger customers it was neither expected nor achievable, so the Action Points from Meeting step is protracted when SMEs engage with larger customers for that reason. Irrespective of the size of customer, SMEs maintain contact with as many customers as possible, though where SME have hundreds of customers only the more important ones get communicated with post-sale. All SMEs engaged with larger customers post sale.

5.3.2 Type of relationship (transactional or relational)

The study indicates clearly that SMEs engaging with smaller customers were operating a more transaction-based approach. While they would wish the customer to purchase again, there is no time to build a

meaningful relationship so the emphasis is on 'doing a deal on the day' just in case the SME cannot return for a follow up meeting or in case a competitor gets a chance to win any business that is on offer. This finding concurred with Brodie *et al.,* (1997) and Gilmore *et al.,* (2001) who state that SMEs with large numbers of clients and little resource and who are time-poor tend to transact and do not set out to build a relationship. Some though do achieve this as a by-product of the seller-buyer engagement. SMEs that choose to seek out and deal with larger customer set out to adopt a more relational selling approach. Everything they say and try to do from the data gathered in this study suggests they attach importance to this. However the ability for SMEs to build rapport and relationships is seriously curtailed due to the challenge to get in front of buyers, the infrequency of ongoing contact and the time lapse between subsequent meetings.

5.3.3 The time perspective (short-term or long-term)

There is variability in the duration of the SME sales process. The process is noticeably shorter in a new task selling situation when SMEs engage with smaller customers. The study reveals that SMEs simply do not have the time or the resource to return time and time again for face-to-face meetings with prospects with whom they fail to close a sale first time around, so the onus is on them to endeavour to do this. Sometimes follow up emails or phone calls are made but this is rare. SMEs move onto the next small prospective customer. Maintaining contact is hard.

The duration of the sales process is considerably greater and more drawn out when SMEs engage with larger customers. There is no expectation of an outright sale from a first encounter of a new selling task situation. SMEs in this study report returning time and time again to larger clients to following consideration of objections and have to often provide more information to help solve a problem before a sale can be agreed, sometimes with new information, better prices alternative promotions and bespoke products to try to get a listing. Every meeting has to end and when meetings with larger customers close, there is follow up and then the cycle repeats itself until eventually a sales is made

or not. There is no guarantee that by putting resource and time into a prospective large customer that the result will result in a positive outcome.

5.3.4 Type of problem to solve (simple or complex)

Shapiro and Posner (1976) discuss the relative importance of complexity of what a firm has to sell. In this study the variables could be summarised as: -

- Standardised product - product manufactured or distributed without any customisation… standardised product could be both an inexpensive item and equally a very expensive item

- Customised product – product that has some adaptation to make it unique for the customer… customised product could be both an inexpensive item and equally a very expensive item

- Seasonal product – product with high demand fluctuations at certain times of the year e.g. haggis for Robert Burns Night – seasonal products could be both standard and customised and both inexpensive and very expensive

SMEs in the study in new and modified selling task situations started the sales process by presenting to the customer (both large and small) a standardised product (both inexpensive and expensive). Customisation and the ability to supply a non-standard product invariably better suited large customers due to their power in the relationship and demands that they could place on SMEs. There is logic to this in that large quantities of non-customised product can make economic sense.

5.3.5 The sequence of stages in the sales process (sequential or simultaneous)

When considering the linear/non-linear sales process dimension, a more linear model as outlined by Dubinsky (1980/81) is practiced when SMEs deal with smaller customers, and a more non-linear model as argued by Moncrief and Marshall (2005), is practiced when SMEs deal with larger

customers, whatever the Food and Drinks category – Food Retail or Foodservices. Only three SMEs ('J', 'K' and 'M') in the study were able to articulate a coherent approach that they consider or understand to be the steps in the sales process (linear or non-linear). SMEs operate 'simply and haphazardly' and mimic behaviour identified by Carson *et al* (1995) in his study into SMEs' marketing style – the approach to selling appears to be no different.

What is clear from this study is that the first Finding a New Customer/ Revisit a Customer step, and the last Maintaining Contact step are consistently important for SMEs engaging both with smaller and larger customers. The preapproach exists but can be more appropriately named as the Preparation step as already explained. It is the steps in the 'middle' that are less defined sequentially; the Approach step and face-to-face Presentation step cannot be disentangled from the Handling of objections that occur during the sales dialogue. Problem solving and the nurturing of relationships also take place during the Presentation step. The 'middle' part of the process is definitely simultaneous and it is impossible to separate out sequential steps within this part of the process. At the end of the Sales Meeting step, the next step is sequential in the sense that every Sales meeting has a close, whatever the outcome which results in a number of Action points to address. This proceeds some follow up activity that is in effect a maintaining of contact activity.

5.3.6 Summary of the dimensions that impact the sales process

In this study of SMEs, it is clear that the type of customer being engaged; the relationship type; the length of time of the seller-buyer interaction; the type of problem to solve and the sequence of stages impact the sales process. Each can be viewed as related in some way to the other.

Where the SME's customer is larger, then the relationship type is more likely to be relational, with the duration of time taken up with the sales interaction extended to a number of meetings. The type of problem to solve is generally more complex in this instance where more than one

outlet is involved. The sequence of stages, or steps, in the sales process, is both sequential and simultaneous.

When the customer is smaller, it is more likely the transaction is completed in one encounter, with the subsequent time duration of the interaction shorter. A transactional, short time frame engagement is aligned to an uncomplicated sale. The sequence of stages, or steps in the sales process, is once more both sequential and simultaneous but towards the end of a Sales Meeting, the SME is more likely to be pushing for a sale (see Figure 8).

Figure 8:
Dimensions that impact the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs

TYPE OF PROBLEM
▼ complex
simple ▲

SEQUENCE OF STAGES
▼ simultaneous
sequential ▲

TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP
▼ relational
transactional ▲

TYPE OF CUSTOMER
▼ larger
smaller ▲

TIME PERSPECTIVE
▼ longer
shorter ▲
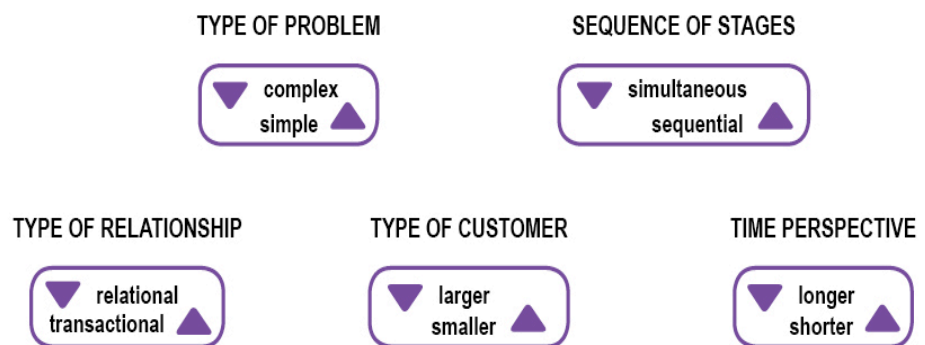
(Douglas, 2012)

5.4 Emergent themes

There emerged from the data gathered from interviews a number of themes that affect the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs during the operationalisation of the sales. These themes: Importance of the owner, degree of sales knowledge within the SME, role of technology, tolerance of the unequal relationship between seller and buyer and constraints and pressures on the SME due to the location of the business can be referred to as enablers and barriers to an effective sales process. These are now discussed in the final section of the findings and analysis chapter.

- Importance of the owner manager

- Degree of sales knowledge

- Role of technology

- Tolerance of the unequal relationship

- Geographic location constraints

It is important to look at each of these to understand their impact on the sales process in this study (see Figure 9).

Figure 9:
Emergent themes – enablers and barriers – to the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs
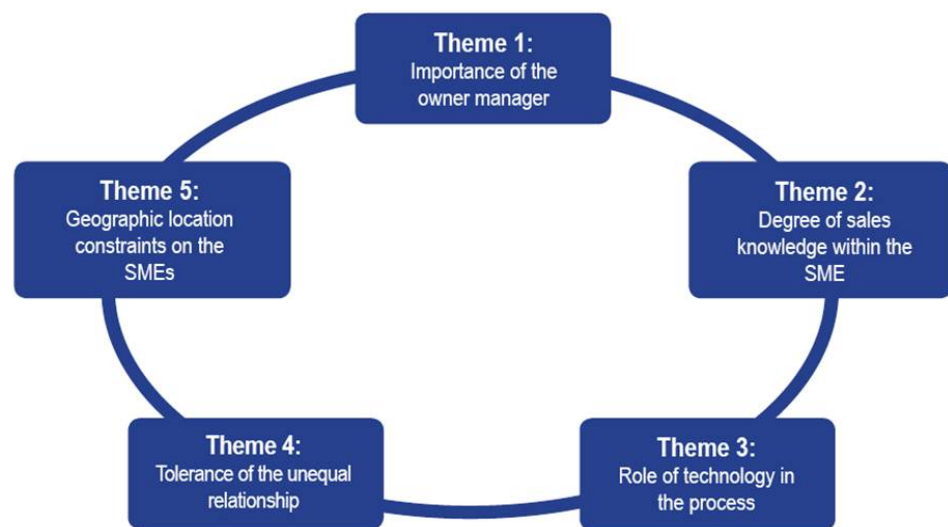
(Douglas, 2012)

5.4.1 Emergent theme 1 - Importance of the owner manager in the sales process

The following is the analysis of the 5 subthemes that are related directly to the importance of the owner manager in the sales process: visibility, personal service, passion, decision making and intuition.

5.4.1.1 Visibility

Owner managers see their visibility with buyers as important at the seller-buyer interface. Lack of visibility implies there is a fear of not being in touch and should an employed sales resource leave, the relationship between the SMEs and the buyer might be severed (Hill *et al.*, 1999;

Gilmore *et al.,* 2001). SME owner managers significantly influence the way in which their company is marketed. Some owner managers not only determine the marketing/selling approach, but are part of the marketing/ selling plan itself (Gilmore and Carson, 1999). Due to the scale of SMEs, the owner manager is the sales person, the only 'person' the buyer sees. The owner manager can be the embodiment of their firm; they very often are the business as stated by Hill and Wright (2001) *"I use me as a marketing tool for my business – that's what I sell us on" (C1 'C' 2011).* *"It's important in a business of our scale for customers to deal with the owner manager" (K1 'K' 2010).* Owner managers can be the last line of negotiation between the selling firm and the buyer. *"I think it is important I attend a buyer meeting every 12-18 months, I think it just adds to the gravitas... I can come and say this is the big picture and just in case the sales director wanted to 'slope off' we would not be starting from nothing…" (L1 'L' 2011).*

Some owner managers profess to getting too involved and often appear not to trust others who are employed to sell on their behalf. *"The customer end is the bit that you can't pull yourself away from quite so easily… perhaps we interfere in the sales side of it more than the people who are involved in sales would like us to if I'm blatantly honest" (N1 'N' 2011).* This does not stop them from being actively involved. In fact, it actively encourages them to take part. *"I'm bringing 'X' (the owner) – a sort of state visit. I can add value, but only if I come occasionally, otherwise you would be regarded as the alternative account manager and buyers might think – you don't really trust the agent" (L1 'L' 2011).*

5.4.1.2 Personal Service

The owner manager in the presence of a buyer promotes the importance of the notion that in their hands the buyer will be especially okay. *"I tell them the history of the company, the fact that we're a family company and they'll get personal service – they'll deal with me and not just anyone" (C1 'C' 2011).* The owner manager is able to provide a personal touch, be spontaneous as posited by Gilmore *et al* (2001) as they do not come to the relationship with the formality of a sales title. Several of the

SMEs focus on the personalisation of the owner in the selling role, emphatically declaring that because they are 'someone' and not just 'anyone' it matters more. *"I think it is good that they see that we as a business have got a personality and we should capitalise on that" (L1 'L' 2011). "'M' is about the owner – he's developed it the SME, it's his number that's left (with the buyer) and you can phone him if there is a problem – night or day" (M1 'M' 2011).*

5.4.1.3 Passion

There is belief from the owner manager that their passion has a positive effect on the buyer. Conversely, however the evidence suggests that passion in 'small doses' may be okay but when that passion overrides commonsense commerciality it is questioned by the buyer and the owner manager is challenged to consider whether or not they should step back a little and employ a dispassionate sales resource to manage the sales activity. *"Buyers want us to have good commercial person to take the emotion out of the conversations" (N1 'N' 2011).* The overzealousness of the owner manager can also affect rational price negotiations where the owner manager refuses to 'give way', and considers everything too personally. *"I tend to not want to give anything so that isn't really helpful so that's why it is better if someone else does it, I am too emotionally close" (L1 'L' 2011).*

The owner manager tries to ensure that others acting on their behalf can exude this immeasurable component of passion. There are mixed views from this study regarding whether or not this can be achieved *"If we were to get a sales person in, we would want somebody who was absolutely as passionate about the product we sell as we are (the owners), maybe not your average rep but somebody more passionate about smaller businesses and that side of things" (E1 'E' 2011).* There are mixed views as to whether or not this can be achieved. *"… passion is transferrable I think?" (A1 'A' 2011).*

5.4.1.4 Decision making power

The importance of the owner manager is further evident when the role of decision maker is articulated (Carson *et al.,* 1995). In this study, SMEs highlight the benefit in buyers dealing with a decision making owner manager, irrespective of other sales resource in the business. *"There are some clients who want something done and 'X' (the sales manager) is not too sure, so they may as well just speak to me direct. It's like a short cut if they speak to me directly (A1 'A' 2011).* It is the owner who can deliver the final word on any sales-related matter. There is evidence on one hand of empowerment, and on the other, control. *"Sales resource consists of a sales director, not a member of staff but given the title for appearances, so he can make seem to make 'big' decisions – his actual title would be key accounts manager… I hold quite a lot of power because ultimately I'm the one who decides the price. The agent will make proposals. The agent doesn't have full visibility of margins – I don't think he wants this… in terms of the 'nitty gritty' and sealing the deal, the sales director gets enough guidance from me about what is okay and what is not okay, a steer on price and then he goes and delivers it" (L1 'L' 2011).*

5.4.1.5 Intuition

SMEs indicate that operating using 'gut feel' rather than knowledge or facts is 'normal' behaviour. This is supported in a study by Matthews and Scott (1995). A SME in this study suggest through length of service, that an intuitive understanding of what to do and when and how, can be derived *"I've been in the business long enough to know which to connect with" (G1 'G' 2011).* The knowledge acquired over time (experience) through 'doing' selling manifests itself as a springboard which requires little discussion with others to consider another viewpoint. There is even an indication that intuitive 'guesswork' informs the process. *"Stick your finger in the air and say let's go with that" (A2 'A' 2011).* One SME was advised by an important buyer that intuition and instinct is all very well, but it strongly suggested the SME employ knowledgeable sales people to manage the sales activity of the business better. *"We have no experience and no training, we do it through gut instinct… that's why we need to find*

a 'corporate type' person… and retailers told us to go to other companies to find out how they did it" (N1 'N' 2011).

5.4.2 Emergent theme 2 – Degree of sales knowledge

The following is the analysis of the four subthemes that are related directly to the degree of sales knowledge residing in the SME: lack of sales knowledge, inconsistent sales process implementation, aligning the selling and buying processes and financial resource implications concerning alternatives to the owner manager being the sales resource.

5.4.2.1 Lack of sales knowledge

In this study, the majority of the SMEs declared they operate as a business with weaknesses in their sales process. Most indicated a desire to improve the status quo. *"We're not particularly systematic. I've no experience in knowing if you make a call, follow up with a letter, then send a brochure, and a free sample and every three months send them (buyers) a newsletter, and then you get a call and how you deal with it" (A1 'A' 2012).*

The lack of sales process knowledge appears to be directly correlated to not just the 15 SMEs as an entity in this study, but to the individual tasked with undertaking the sales role within the SMEs (Carson *et al.,* 1985; Chaston and Baker, 1998; Gilmore *et al.,* 2001; Hill, 2001; Verhees and Meulenberg, 2004; Liu, 2005). 12 of the 20 interviewees are owner managers/directors and eight have sales role titles within their organisation. 13 of the interviewees are directly involved in selling activities on a day to day basis, while seven are indirectly involved and undertake selling roles from time to time. Five of the SMEs rely quite heavily on third party agents and distributors as partners to help their firms undertake sales activities and 15 undertake their own selling.

For those with no sales experience, there is a both a recognition of lack of knowledge and an honest appraisal that confirms a lack of confidence in the ability to perform sales-related activities that underpin the sales process, particularly when dealing with larger buying organisations.

"Overall I am not very confident in the sales process. I'm more comfortable approaching smaller companies, I don't understand the process in bigger companies, for example 'X' asked us to send samples, we exchanged a couple of emails and I even phoned to see if they got the samples but we never got passed the gatekeeper… I don't have a particular plan" (C1 'C' 2011). "I do recognise that we have a weakness in our selling process" (F1 'F' 2011), "Like most SMEs we are disorganised and disjointed..." (H1 'H' 2011).

5.4.2.2 Inconsistent sales process implementation

Those that have some understanding of the process and know something of what is involved in implementation, acknowledge that practice, in their experience, is not always played out as the prescribed theory suggests. *"I think our sales process needs to be far more structured, we don't have a very good system" (E1 'E' 2012). "One downfall is not having a proper formal sales procedure" (H1 'H' 2011).*

Only eight of the interviewees in the study have previous sales experience and a good grasp of the process. But even where there is knowledge, there is a challenge in applying a consistent implementation of that process. *"We operate a structured four step process starting with preparation for a meeting, introduction, then a look at the product…then a look at the customer's product range - but all the sales managers are individuals and they apply the process in their own particular way but never wholly to my (sales manager's) satisfaction" (J1 'J' 2011).*

Another expressed confidently that the SME operated the following process: meet the customer, introduce the brand, agree on how we can move forward, the customer then agrees if that's what they want, they tick the box and the account is opened and service starts. This process was not carried out in reality, since the process was not embedded within the organisation "W*e don't provide a standard template for our sales reps to follow because it then becomes 'manufactured' " (M1 'M' 2011).*

5.4.2.3 Aligning selling and buying processes

Only three SMEs ('A', 'M' and 'N') mentioned that the customers buying process might have a bearing on the approach or sales process that they should consider espousing. In other words matching the sales process to that of the buyer's buying process (Manning *et al.,* 2012). One SME confirms that the right thing to do is to better mirror the buying organisation's structure and where resource permits, provide more focus on specific accounts. However, in probing further it is discovered that it is the buyer who is initiating this development and *not* the SME. *"We're going to align more to the customer… integrating sales and marketing and structuring by customer… buyers want us to have a good commercial person (N1 'N' 2011). "We need to align more to the customer". "It's all very unstructured, but the outcome is that you would like the buyer to say 'yes'… that would be our ideal outcome (N1 'N' 2011).*

5.4.2.4 Financial resource implications

Owner managers do the selling because there is either no one else to do it, the company is too small to have a specific functional resource as explained by Carson (1990) or they believe they can do the job better than a trained sales person. The cost of engaging a full time sales person is prohibitive, costing anything up to £50,000 per annum (Donaldson, 2007). *"There's me and my sons, there's no dedicated sales team, a dedicated sales person is too expensive" (C1 'C' 2011).* A number of SMEs have employed additional expert sales resource in the past but have not been happy with the outcome from a performance perspective, with the result that the owner manager reckons or calculates they can do better themselves at a lot less cost *"In different times over the years I have employed a sales person but it has been hard to justify and in my experience they have not brought in enough custom to cover costs" (F1 'F' 2011).*

Some identify that help is needed but at the same time acknowledge lack of financial resource to take this step. *"We need someone who actually*

knows how to sell but it is just not feasible, it's too expensive" (B1 'B' 2010).

5.4.3 Emergent theme 3 - The role of technology

The following is analyses of the four subthemes that are related directly to the role of technology in the SME sales process: Types, importance, use of and constraints of technology.

5.4.3.1 Types of technology

Moncrief and Marshall (2005, p.16) suggest that smart phones/laptops with data and/or sophisticated CRM systems have taken the place of hand written documents as a means of keeping customer records up to date. Types of technology used by SMEs in this study included mobile phones/SMART phones, laptops, emails, websites and Skype but CRM software packages were not mentioned *"Skyping the buyer will come... save hours of travelling... in the last 6 months I've been to Helsinki, New York, Connecticut, Amsterdam, Rome and London for meetings" (K1 'K' 2010).* EDI (Electronic Data Interchange), the structured transmission of data between organisations is commonly used by the Food and Drinks industry, particularly by buying companies to place orders on their suppliers remotely. It is more than just e-mail. Major supermaket groups, for example, insist that all companies both large and small must communicate via this technology.

5.4.3.2 Importance of technology

Seller-buyer interaction is pretty much inconceivable without the use of technology in business today. Without technology, interaction would grind to a halt. New technology is faster, more efficient and saves the SME both time and money. One SME suggested face-to-face selling, and the need for sales representatives was coming to an end. *"Face-to-face contact today is almost not necessary because of modern communications (email etc). Reps are surplus to requirements for us… in fact most people regard reps as a slight inconvenience – numbers have declined in our market" (H1 'H' 2011).*

5.4.3.3 Use of technology

The Internet allows SMEs to gain access to more information about prospects ahead of a first contact or phone call to try to arrange a first face-to-face meeting. It is the means by which SMEs can efficiently get background information to a prospect. *"We send an email with an explanation about our business, with a photo of our product and a DVD about the history of the business, they can look at our website… " (G2 'G' 2011).* The study revealed multiple uses for new technology. It is used for letting prospective buyers know about the existence of the SME as a potential supplier when prospects get referred. SMEs' websites provide information about a SME and what it can offer. *"People do often ask if they can see it (our website) so we have organised pictures of our (product) making process and the shape etc. so people can look at it" (D1 'D' 2011).* Yell.com is used to get contact details about potential prospects and Internet search engines are used for gathering background data about potential prospects to decipher whether they qualify as a potential prospects.

Small customers are more likely to place orders via the phone or by email *"As far as retail accounts are concerned orders come in via telephone or email wholesalers are generally telephone sales, we call them on a regular basis. We've got a call list and they obviously call in when they need extra stock" (L2 'L' 2011).* The larger the buying organisation the more likely orders will be processed remotely using Electronic Data Exchange (EDI). SMEs need to have these technological resources in order to do business with larger customers. *"Supermarket communication is all web-based but we're not on EDI yet but that's through choice… need to be 100% confident that all is working before making the switch… we have no choice, we will have to use EDI eventually" (L1 'L' 2011).*

5.4.3.4 Constraints of technology

The downside to new technology is that it systematically is replacing verbal contact and face-to-face sales dialogue. It is removing the personalisation aspect of the sales process, the rapport, relationship

building aspects of the seller-buyer interaction. Buyers are becoming a lot more anonymous to SMEs because of emails. In the study this is regarded as a concern. *"We know we'd prefer to be in front of our customers because email communication is less personal and makes it less easy to build a relationship – face to face affords a better link and you could do more business together" (G2 'G' 2011).*

Food and drink needs to be tasted and the packaging handled to be fully appreciated to aid the decision making process. Food is perishable and easily damaged in transit. With the exception of low cost, generic items, for example, basic foodstuffs for a chef in a restaurant, it is unlikely in the near future that a buyer would make a decision without seeing the physical product, packaging and the SME that is responsible for it especially in a new selling task scenario. *"I doubt that a chef would ever buy online without tasting it (the product) unless it was a lettuce or something" (A2 'A' 2011).* It is also important that the SME knows how to make best use of the technology that its customers are operating. There is little point in having a Facebook and Twitter link on a SME website if it is not used correctly. *"We now have our Facebook page and Twitter which I forget to do because I'm not a great twitterer – I can't think of anything to say" (C1 'C' 2011).*

5.4.4 Emergent theme 4 – Tolerance of an unequal relationship

The following is an analysis of the five subthemes that are related directly to the tolerance of unequal relationships in the SME sales process: limited communication opportunities, buyers are busy, the buyer determines meetings, sellers always help buyers and sellers are not important enough.

5.4.4.1 Limited communication opportunities

For SMEs one of the greatest challenges is communicating with buyers, particularly in a new selling task situation. *"It's difficult to get in the door…" (F1 'F' 2011).* Some fail to see the buyer again for a long time after the initial meeting whether or not this results in the award of business. *"… the last time I had a meeting with a 'X' buyer was 3 years*

ago" (E1 'E' 2011). The opportunity to communicate is limited due to buyers simply not returning calls, resulting in a barrier to communication. *"They don't answer their emails or answer their phones very regularly and it's really difficult to get in contact with them (N1 'N' 2011).* Good manners suggest buyers should reply to emails or return calls. Often SMEs come up against a 'gatekeeper' especially when making telephone calls. This person effectively 'protects' the buyer and filters and prioritises the calls.

SMEs tend to use email communication because it is cheap, quick and less invasive. Unfortunately the reason for doing this is linked to reticence on the part of the SMEs to have to speak to the buyer for fear of failing to get a meeting *"We use email a lot, in fact I'd use it rather than the phone because I feel it is less invasive than the telephone (C1 'C' 2011).* Another more recent development is the use of Skype. One SMEs anticipates the wider usage of this for seller/buyer interaction in the future *"Skyping the buyers will come... it will save hours of travelling" (K1 'K' 2010).*

5.4.4.2 Buyers are Busy

Part of the reason for the limited communication is simply because the buyer has a demanding job *"They (buyers) are the most busy people you'll ever meet" (B1 'B' 2010).* If you cannot speak to a buyer, appointments will not happen. This puts the onus onto the SME to decide how best to manage busy buyers. There is reticence on the part of some SMEs to pester the buyer by leaving excessive numbers of messages. Other SMEs leave multiple messages and are disappointed that buyers good practice does not extend to responding to messages *"…you can email a buyer eight to 10 times and you probably won't get a response which is professionally discourteous in my view because anyone who emails me gets a response, but if you are a buyer with 200 suppliers it must be difficult" (K1 'K' 2010).*

In recognition of buyers' 'busy-ness', SMEs try to contain meetings to specific times of year to fit in with seasonal patterns in business cycles;

key times when meetings might be most appropriate and useful. Buying firms have 'windows' when they change ranges of products on their shelves or in their wholesale catalogues. It is important that, not only are SMEs aware of these timings, but also push for meetings to coincide with these changes. *"Come range review time there is only two windows per year where you can secure that opportunity" (K1 'K' 2010).* In recognition of buyers being busy, some SMEs endeavour to keep meetings short and to the point *"I try to get out of their way as quickly as I can really" (C1 'C' 2011).*

5.4.4.3 Buyer Determines Meeting Arrangements

Buyers are busy and hard to access. SMEs do not pick times to have meetings with buyers, it is buyers that decide the 'when' and the 'where' (Hingley, 2005). *"It's hard to get time and an appointment due to 'busy buyers'. It's usually when they have time they'll see you and not the other way round" (P1 'P' 2011).* So, although it is the SME that usually requests the meeting, it is the buyer who identifies gaps in their diary and offers dates and times to suit them, and not the other way around. *"I always make sure the date is suitable to the buyer for a meeting… it makes it easier for them" (C1 'C' 2011).*

It is extremely difficult for a SMEs to secure a face-to-face encounter with a buyer for a new selling task situation. *"We usually ask for the meeting, don't always get when we want it – buyers have time constraints" (F1 'F' 2011). "It's difficult to get in the door and build a relationship" (H1 'H' 2011).* Invariably meetings take place at the buyer's office. The exception are visits to SMEs' factories, though this is very rare. This will be explored in emergent theme 5. Frustratingly for SMEs, buyer meetings get cancelled at short notice. This is aggravating on three counts; the time it has taken to get the meeting, the process has to start again and costs incurred which are usually not recoverable. *"The most annoying part of the job, you'd make the appointment, turn up and they've forgotten or the chef's taken the day off or something's happened… you've travelled all that distance… but that happens in any sales role" (A2 'A' 2011).*

SMEs in this study report a reduction in opportunities to get in front of buyers *"We have regular meetings with 'X' but opportunities to do these are becoming less due to availability of the buyers" (P1 'P' 2011),* or due to range rationalisation with some head offices determining/dictating what small branches can stock. On a positive note, one opportunity open to SMEs in Scotland is to take advantage of the SFD 'Meet the Buyer' events held reasonably regularly *"Through Scottish Enterprise, a lot of meet the buyer events, these are excellent, gave you 15 minutes with the buyer (B1 'B' 2011).* As reported earlier in this study, these had mixed results for SMEs.

5.4.4.4 Sellers always help buyers

The SMEs role according to this study, is not simply to sell but to listen to the buyer and to understand the buyer's concerns and challenges, and to help the buyer at all times. *"Confidence in us supplying is key to building the relationship. We support buyers, their necks are on the line so we will help back them up… we have good close relationships with all our buyers… we take our share of the burden of responsibility" (H1 'H' 2011).* Proactive ways of helping the chef in a restaurant is to widen his product portfolio without the chef having to work harder. This is done by producing quality product that looks as if the chef is the creator *"Wow that's amazing I've never tasted anything like that before… boxes are quite stunning, I'm going to find out where does he buy his product, is it made in house, how many pastry chefs etc. …and save the pastry chef's time" (A2 'A' 2011).*

Buyers are quick to pick up the phone to SMEs when there is something they require *"They call you in if they need to see you about something, an example of this is if we try to apply price increases, then they usually see us" (P1 'P' 2011). "A buyer calls you if there is a problem... a demand for money or arrange a special promotion" (R14 NO 2011).*

5.4.4.5 Seller is not important enough

SMEs find it easier to deal with smaller-sized companies than larger-sized companies (Rackham, 1998). In this study SMEs concur with Rackham (1998) and suggest that better chemistry can exist between similarly sized businesses. It is much more difficult to achieve this with larger buying firms, the relationship is unequal and 'tipped' in the favour of the larger buying firm (Hingley, 2005) *"We try to do business with similar sized companies... there is some sort of chemistry between us... sadly we can't do this in the grocery trade (big buying firms)... it's an unequal relationship… very difficult and stressful" (Q1 'Q' 2010).* There is a perception that SMEs are simply not important enough to bigger buying firms *"They're too busy and you're too small, they don't want to know… you're a drop in the ocean" (B1 'B' 2010). "You're not important enough to them" (L2 'L' 2011).*

5.4.5 Emergent theme 5 - Geographic location constraints

The following is an analysis of the four subthemes that are related directly to geographic location of the SME in the sales process: sending samples, planning appointments, effects on socialisation and factory visits are rare.

5.4.5.1 Sending samples

Either before a meeting with a buyer or immediately afterwards, samples need to be sent to buyers for tasting and/or sampling among colleagues as part of the process. This helps determine whether or not a meeting is worthwhile in the first place or a follow up meeting, or business awarded at a later stage in the process. The geographic location of the SMEs in this study present a number of challenges to SMEs that have both cost and logistics implications *"It's more different getting down south (we're based 45 minutes from Edinburgh)… we use parcel force but that's not ideal because it is not refrigerated – even if we were in London it wouldn't suit everyone" (D1 'D' 2011).*

It is easy for a buyer to ask for samples to be sent, but there is a cost to SMEs that needs to be importantly considered and calculated in terms of

whether the process of sending samples is likely to enhance the opportunity for a sale. *"The business allows me to make that decision (sending out samples), it can be relatively expensive and nothing comes of it, and you're upset by that because the only way someone's going to go with it (buy) is if they taste it or try it… you can't sell something to someone and not show it to them or get them to touch it or feel it… so it's a difficult one, you need to know when to draw the line (stop sending samples), who's being cheeky and who's really serious… (A2 'A' 2011).*

5.4.5.2 Planning appointments

Planning appointments when SMEs are located some distance from a prospect or customer is a challenge whether it is with a small-sized or larger-sized prospect and whether it is a first meeting or one in a series of meetings with a buyer. The meetings are mostly in the buyer's domain *"99% of meetings at the buyer's office... even the Scottish-based buyers... we go to them" (Q2 'Q' 2010).* Usually the SME tries either to organise a number of meetings on one day with small-sized customers or perhaps is prepared to stay away overnight and spread a number of meetings over, say, a couple of days *"I plan 2-3 days for calls in Scotland because they are spread out and I need to think about geography – because of the physical travel the time the distance and the cost, I need to make 20 calls to make this work , make the appointments and Google it so I've got all the directions… not sure if we do this because we are based in Scotland, so it's a geography thing, not sure whether this would apply if we were in (based) London… … there'd be a follow up phone call and maybe even an email" (A2 'A' 2011).*

Often, for larger prospects there is only one meeting organised due to the difficulty in securing the meeting in the first place and the fact that the larger Food retail headquarters tend to be in England, with the majority based in London and surrounding area. There is pressure on the SMEs to organise these meetings, *Generally there is a time allotted for a meeting, they're time is precious and usually we're racing to get back to the airport… you are aware of how much time you've got" (N1 'N' 2011).* Visits are expensive especially when flights are involved but also the

limited staff resource of SMEs has to be considered also. The more last minute the meeting, usually the more expensive the cost of travel *"We fly and sometimes drive to these meetings. There is the cost to consider because of where we're based. Low cost airline used to cost £20, now it could be £300 for a late organised round trip. (P1 'P' 2011).*

Many SMEs based in Scotland regard their location as much as a negative as a positive *"I'll just come round have you got 5 minutes – some things are better solved face to face, it would strengthen the relationship, it would save money, an awful lot of money, I mean the flights add up a lot, and it's stressful going down to London, going round the M25 and you 'lose' your staff for longer" (L1 'L' 2011).* The 'competition' are often more closely located to the buyer's headquarters *"Geography doesn't help us at all… on arranging meetings. A lot of our competitors are only 2 hours away so they've got a much stronger relationship with the buyer as a consequence" (N1 'N' 2011).* For another there is a view that no matter where a business is based it would never be ideal for visiting all its prospective customers.

5.4.5.3 Affect on socialisation

The building of relationships occurs through a number of activities including buyers and sellers spending time together socially. It is quite normal for SMEs to entertain buyers with business lunches even in new and modified sales task situations. The challenge for Scottish-based SMEs is that due to the geographic location of their business and limited face-to-face contact the chances of engaging socially are greatly reduced. Often personnel of SMEs are returning on pre-bought air flight tickets and have no flexibility or time to incorporate socialising activity *"There's not time to go back and sit in front of a really valued customer, because it's all been about building business rather than developing what we've already got… they've already chosen a product and they know how it can be changed, so we can deal with this by phone and sometimes I send them a sample" (A2 'A' 2011).* The effect of socialisation concerning seller-buyer relationships is unclear, this endorses the exploratory research from Oakley and Bush (2012) that

current knowledge on entertainment and relationships lacks empirical knowledge.

5.4.5.4 Factory visits are rare

Another category of good practice that delivers improved customer relationships is getting the agent/intermediate sales firm to visit the HQ of the SME and learn about the product, process and heritage. SMEs try to get prospective buyers to visit their place of origin and production facilities *"The agents come to our headquarters every year in January to visit – so everyone who is selling our product in the USA has been to the production facility – it's absolutely fantastic – we're the only people (in the sector) who have done this… they are then more passionate about selling our products" (E1 'E' 2011).*

Factory visits give SMEs the opportunity of securing something that is very difficult to achieve; the undivided attention of a buyer for a set period of time *"If we could get them to come to us we get more of their attention... no phones, nothing on the desk... but pressures make this not possible" (Q1 'Q' 2010).* Some SMEs use this visit as a means of discussing new product development possibilities, for launching a new product or presenting a seasonal range for example *"We prefer they come here… since we have a showroom and champagne, they're a captive audience" (H1 'H' 2011).* One SME expresses the notion that if a buyer were to visit they would appreciate not only how the product is made but why for example it might be as expensive as it is *"It is difficult to get a buyer to come here (our factory)… if they did they would really understand your point of difference, why we are more expensive – I don't want them thinking that just because they give me more volume I just turn the machine up, we're not that highly mechanised… understanding what we do and how we do it builds the relationship… one of our biggest selling points is that we have a factory and trying to get a buyer to visit here always puts us in a strong position… every time we have had a buyer on site he/ she has gone away with a greater understanding of us and our product" (L1 'L' 2011).*

This study confirmed that it is extremely difficult to secure commitment from a buyer to visit the headquarters of Scottish-based SMEs; the lure of Scotland and what it has to offer is not enough despite what SFD might hope *"Scottish food is worth an awful lot, part of the mystique of us (Scotland)… covered in snow, full of beautiful lakes BUT it does put them off coming here" (L1 'L' 2011)*. One business is dismayed to say that their biggest customer continues to promise to come to visit but never has. It is both disappointing and frustrating because the SME believes that the buyer benefits from not only seeing the owner manager's passion but learn about the capabilities of the SME; what it can do to perhaps skew development and production to better match that customer's needs *"We try hard to get customers to the factory. Try to get them to try new products. They can see the facilities we have; this is a crucial part of the sales process for us. If they visit they can be 'close to the Industry', even see the product boats, our £5 million investment in our facilities" (P1 'P' 2011)*.

5.4.6 Summary of emergent themes – enablers and barriers

Five themes and in total 22 sub themes were identified during the data analysis (see Table 8). In theme one, the owner manager of the SME cannot be separated from the sales process. Theme two discussed how SMEs are not consistent in their approach and execution of the sales process and that the degree of sales knowledge that resides within the SME can matter. Theme three showed that basic technology is being utilised by SMEs but there is a lack of understanding and usage of more recent CRM software technology. Theme four evidenced that the SME is subservient to the buyer/customer when it comes to arranging meetings; the buyer decides when the communication will take place suggesting an imbalance in the relationship. A fifth theme suggested that due to the location of Scottish-based SMEs a number of difficulties ensue including ease, speed and cost of access to buyers and the getting of samples to buyers, be they smaller local-based customers or larger customer based in England.

Table 8: Summary of Emergent Themes & Sub Themes

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	THEME 4	THEME 5
Importance of the owner manager	Sales knowledge within SME's	Role of technology	Tolerance of unequal relationship	Geographic location constraints
SUB THEMES	**SUB THEMES**	**SUB THEMES**	**SUB THEMES**	**SUB THEMES**
•Visibility •Personal Service •Passion •Decision making power •Intuition	•Lack of knowledge •Inconsistency •Process alignment •Financial constraints	•Types of technology •Importance of technology •Use of technology •Constraints of technology	•Limited Communication •Buyers are busy •Buyers plan meetings •Sellers help buyers •Seller not important	•Sampling •Appointments •Socialisation •Factory Visits

Douglas (2012)

5.5 Conceptual framework of the steps in the sales process

These five emergent themes of: importance of the owner, sales knowledge of SMEs, the role of technology, the tolerance of the unequal relationship and geographic location constraints both directly, and indirectly, affect the operationalisation of the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs in new and modified selling tasks situations. A holistic conceptual framework can now be constructed to capture the:

1. 5 steps identified in the sales process: prospecting, preparation for the sales meeting, the sales meeting itself, the actions points resulting from a sales meeting and the maintaining of contact with the buyer/customer.

2. 5 dimensions that impact the sales process: type of customer, type of relationship, time perspective, type of problem and sequence of stages.

3. 5 emergent themes (barriers and enablers) that both directly, and indirectly affect the sales process: the importance of the owner, sales knowledge of the SME, the role of technology, the tolerance of the

unequal relationship and geographic location (see Figure 10 and also for a clearer version see Appendix 8, page 196).

Figure 10: Sales Process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs (in new and modified selling task situations)
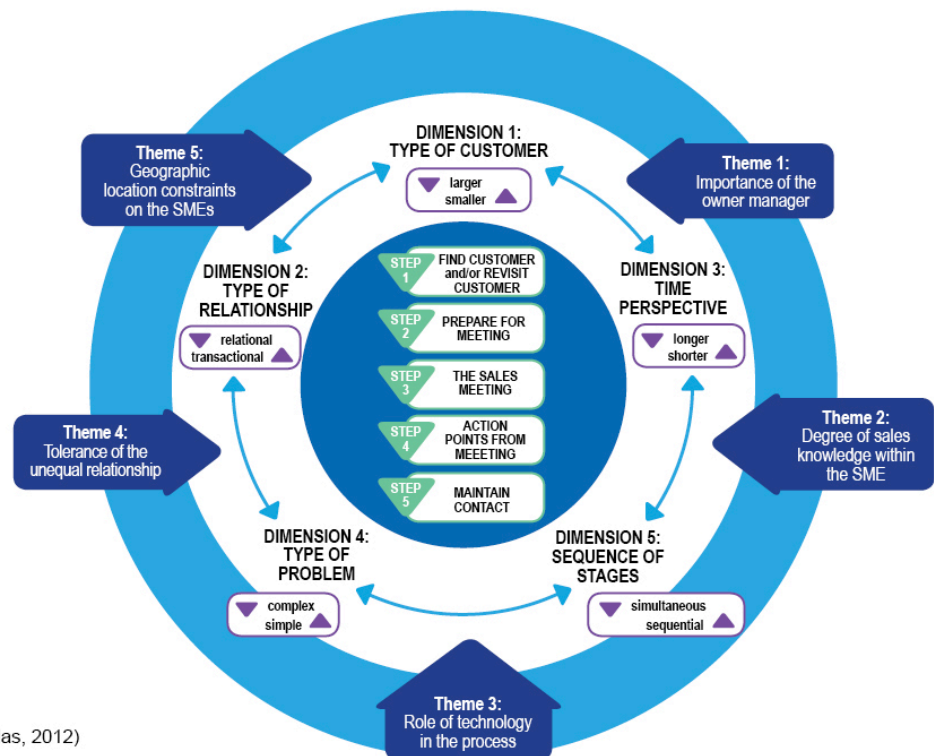
(Douglas, 2012)

5.6 Summary

This chapter concentrated on the findings and analysis from the data gathered for this study by analysing the sales process of SMEs based on the sequential 'steps of selling' (Prospecting, Preapproach, Approach, Presentation, Overcoming objections, Close and Follow up) as discussed by Dubinsky (1980/81). Then a number of dimensions that impact the process were discussed. Finally, five themes which are barriers and enablers that affect the operationalisation of the sales process in SMEs where discussed. Together, these steps, dimensions and barriers/enablers form 'The Sales Process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs: A Conceptual Framework'.

The next chapter summarises the research aim and objectives and summarises the overall findings of this study. Academic and practitioner implications of the findings from this research are summarised together with recommendations for further research and for SMEs in relation to the sales process.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter revisits the research aim, objectives of this study, provides a background to the study and a summary of the overall findings. A précis of findings from each of the three key areas is presented: steps of selling in the sales process, dimensions that impact the sales process and the emergent themes that are linked directly and indirectly to the sales process and affect its operationalisation. These together comprise the conceptual framework of the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs offered in the previous chapter. This final chapter also highlights the implications of the findings for both academics and practitioners and delivers recommendations for both and suggests future research in the area.

6.2 Research aim and justification

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs in new and modified selling task situations from the selling organisation's perspective. Since there is no previous research specifically into this area, primary data was collected from 20 people involved in selling activities in Scotland who are employees of 15 distinct SMEs. The SMEs were selected using SFD's database of Scottish-based Food and Drinks firms with some assistance from SE. A qualitative research approach was adopted using thematic analysis with primary data gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews.

This research is important because SMEs need to sell successfully to new and existing markets, not only to survive but also, to grow. Knowledge and an understanding of selling and the sales process should matter, not only to SMEs but also, to the Scottish economy to which they contribute. The sales function in SMEs is not given sufficient consideration, but is too often subsumed within, or regarded as a subset of the marketing role and function of a company. There is also little quality research into selling and SMEs, since the focus of research academics is about larger organisations. SMEs in the Food and Drinks

industry face huge challenges with the virtual unimpeded growth of large supermarket Food retailers and Foodservice distribution corporations. Many SMEs in the Food and Drinks industry are faced with a choice: service one or two large customers or distribute to large numbers of smaller customers. Either way, accessing and servicing both of these channels is fraught with difficulties. SE, and its funded industry body SFD, have been tasked with delivering sales of £12.5 billion by 2017. The Scottish government needs the Food and Drinks industry, and the SMEs who form a significantly important part of this industry, to continue to deliver sales success to meet these challenging targets.

This study has addressed the key research question raised in the research concerning selling, the sales process and the operationalisation of the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs (see Chapter 5 for the author's discussion of this). The findings have also answered the aim of the research which was to investigate the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs and also to identify barriers and enablers that present challenges during its operationalisation.

In achieving fulfilment of the research aim, through a critical evaluation of the literature and field research incorporating semi-structured qualitative interviews and thematic analysis of rich data, the study has met its set objectives (see page 20). It identified the number of steps and what constituted each step of selling, in the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drink SMEs. It investigated how a number of related dimensions affected the sales process in SMEs and discovered important themes, both barriers and enablers that impacted the operationalisation of the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs. Finally, in this chapter it will provide tentative practitioner recommendations to support a more effective sales process for Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

6.3 Key findings of the research

This study's findings suggest that the sales process practiced by Scottish-based SMEs in the Food and Drinks industry is a complicated phenomenon to understand. Each individual selling interaction in a new and modified selling task situation is unique. Studies into SMEs are notoriously not straight forward according to MacCartan-Quinn and Carson (2003) and it is a difficult area in which to undertake research due to, for example, unclear structures and recording procedures according to Curran and Blackburn (2001). The barriers to this study's research were no different. Nevertheless, once 20 people with sales responsibility from the 15 SMEs were interviewed, a clearer understanding of the steps in the sales process became evident, as did the impact of a number of dimensions on the sales process. Alongside this was the emergence of the importance of some enablers and barriers to the operationalisation of the sales process and this was achieved using thematic saturation. Steps of selling, dimensions in the sales process and enablers/barriers affecting operationalisation are summarised in sections 6.3.1/ 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 respectively.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the majority of SMEs in the study lack consistency in their sales process and that SMEs without sales trained resource particularly lack sales process knowledge. SMEs approach B2B selling in a haphazard way in both new and modified selling task situations. Several SMEs do consider the importance of trying to align the sales process to meet customer/buyer needs and there is recognition of the importance of relationship building as posited by Rackham and De Vincentis (1999) which is done, both, proactively or reactively. However, it is evident that the main focus of all SMEs is to get in front of a buyer/customer and to try and make a sale (Carson *et al.,* 1995). The focus is both sales-oriented on this basis but also client-focused by necessity; each situation and encounter customer-specific (Hill, 2001a; 2001b). The nuances and subtleties of adapting sales presentations to buyers' preferred styles as posited by Saxe and Weitz (1982) for example, is evidenced by only a few interviewees. Overall there is clear recognition that undertaking personal selling activities are

important to the furthering of business dealings as discussed by Melia (2000; 2001), despite the difficulties expressed in carrying these out by SMEs in this study. Literature extols both the virtues of, and challenges in marketing and selling collaboration (Donaldson, 2007) but for SMEs in this study, the term selling and marketing are interchangeable with many expressing the view that 'selling' is 'marketing' (Oakey, 1991; Murdoch *et al.,* 2001; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003; Marcatti *et al.,* 2008).

In this study, SMEs express an overall positive attitude towards their customers. However, despite extensive references to the importance of the relationship and what that means in business terms, none of the interviewees of the SMEs utter the expression of a 'win-win' approach, though this mutual gain was implied from some data gathered. None of the SMEs in this study talk about value creation as posited by Wotruba (1991; 1996), yet SMEs did appreciate the benefits that valuable relationships bring. Trust in relationships is particularly important to the SMEs in this study. Many SMEs express difficulty in accessing, and keeping in contact with buyers/customers. There appears however, a general acceptance that this was how it has to be and there is little they can do about it, apart from being persistent and resilient. SMEs in this study express frustration, but in the main desist from being overly negative about prospecting for new customers, and interacting with existing customers.

6.3.1 Findings – Steps of selling (in the sales process)

In this study, the steps in the sales process are neither wholly specifically sequential (linear) nor simultaneous (non-linear). What is evident is that finding new customers in some shape or form starts the process, be it of a proactive or reactive nature, and a follow up or maintaining of contact of some kind occurs at the end of any one sales meeting, but this does not necessarily signal the end of the process. Finding New Customers and/or Revisit Customer is therefore Step 1 in the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

The traditional preapproach before a sales meeting and the plans for how to deliver a sales presentation/meeting can be more precisely labelled as Prepare for Meeting step, Step 2.

The presentation step, that includes the initial few moments of social contact, the outlining of features and benefits, or marketing the product as referred to by Moncrief and Marshall (2005), cannot be disentangled from problem-solving and the handling of objections during the presentation/meeting itself. Relationships are nurtured at two steps in the process; one of them is during the face-to-face presentation/meeting. So, the presentation stage encompasses a number of 'traditional' steps and activities that occur simultaneously. It does not simply consist of the presentation or demonstration of the product, though this is, of course, very important. The Sales Meeting is therefore Step 3 in the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

Every meeting has a 'close' step or ends with a list of actions to undertake. A sale is made, or a sale is still possible where the SME has to provide more information and/or return for a further meeting or no sale is made. In the final scenario the SME needs to decide on its priorities as to whether or not to revisit the prospect at a later stage to start the process all over again. Action points from the Sales Meeting, is, therefore Step 4 in the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

The maintaining contact step is vitally important, is driven by the SMEs and occurs whether a sale is made, deferred or there is no immediate prospect of a sale being completed. After every sales presentation/meeting a SME needs to decide how much effort can, or should be put into the follow up activity. It depends upon the priorities each SME sets itself for each customer/buyer. The follow up step, is another step that particularly, and importantly can involve relationship building through keeping in contact with the customer/buyer. Maintaining Contact is therefore Step 5 in the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

6.3.2 Findings – Dimensions that impact the steps of selling (in the sales process)

The selling process has a number of dimensions that impact it. The type of transaction varies, from being relatively simplistic with standard product, to being a little more complex with customised product or seasonality ranges that bring specific challenges. It varies from being a straight forward shorter-term transaction that either achieves a sale or not, usually with a smaller customer, to being a longer-term process with a larger customer, where a close does not necessarily constitute a sale but a further iteration of the process, that eventually achieves a sale or not.

This study reveals that the emphasis on the sequential and simultaneous steps/ approach in the sales process or steps of selling when SMEs engage with smaller customers is not markedly different to when they engage with larger customers. There is a time perspective difference between the two sizes of customer, and differences in emphasis between types of relationship (transactional and relational) and types of orientation (sales and customer).

Dimensions that impact the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs can be summarised as follows. If the SME's customer is larger (a supermarket Food retailer or national Foodservice distributor), then the relationship type tends to be more relational, with the time perspective being extended due to not just one but a number of meetings before a decision to proceed (or not) can be taken. The type of problem tends to be more complex with product being distributed to a number of outlets and not just one or two outlets. The sequence of stages, or steps, in the sales process, is more likely to be both sequential and simultaneous. Whereas if the SME's customer is smaller (one or two independent outlets, for example, a delicatessen or café), then the relationship type tends to be more transactional, with the time perspective being limited often to one meeting where an outright 'yes' or 'no' decision is preferred due to lack of resources. The type of problem

tends to be simpler with product being required for only one or two outlets. The sequence of stages, or steps in the sales process are sequential and simultaneous.

6.3.3 Findings – Enablers and barriers that present challenges (in the operationalisation of the sales process)

The study evidences that there are five important enablers/barriers that present challenges to SMEs during the sales process. They either directly or indirectly affect the effective operationalisation of the sales process in SMEs. In theme one, it is evident that the owner manager of the SME cannot be detached from the sales process. Theme two uncovers just how inconsistent SMEs are in their approach and delivery of a sales process and how this depends upon the sales knowledge that rests within the SME. Theme three evidences support for the use of basic everyday technology but, discovers, that SMEs in this study lack awareness of how CRM software technology can help deliver an improved sales process. Theme four discovers that the buyer is 'king' in the seller/buyer relationship in every sense; the 'piper' calling the tune to which the SME must 'dance'. A fifth theme emerges concerning the challenges SMEs face because of their location in relation to their customer base. Access to smaller customers and to bigger Food retail and Foodservice buying offices is particularly difficult from a Scottish base. There are considerable costs attached to this as well as implications for building important seller/buyer relationships.

The owner manager of the SME is inextricably linked to, and therefore has some considerable involvement in the sales process. There are positive and negative outcomes associated with this. Owner managers, actively engage in the sales process in SMEs either by necessity (there is no one else to do the role or it is too expensive to hire someone else) or, where there is other resource, to keep a watching brief over buyers as well as their own sales team/resource. Their involvement appears not in question (from their perspective), in fact their presence or visibility in the process enables them to bring enthusiasm and passion that they believe is difficult to replicate in employed staff or outsourced/third party agents or distributors. Their instinct and intuitive feel for their business as

emphasised in Carson *et al* (1995) adds value to the process. Very importantly, they control the 'purse strings', are the final arbiter of how their product looks, where it is offered for sale and how much it can be sold for. With the role they play come 'downsides', in the form of relationships with their own sales resource (some resistance to being overriden) and what value the buyer and/or buying organisation places on the owner manager's involvement or interference (a need to be more professional in their approach).

Sales knowledge in SMEs was generally underdeveloped. Only those SMEs whose owner manager had some sales experience or who engaged professional sales people or agents were able to present a credible explanation for a sales process. Despite this, those SMEs who did express an understanding of the sales process and the importance it might play in more efficient sales effectiveness failed in most cases to deliver a consistent sales process. Only three SMEs were able to articulate the benefit of aligning the selling process of the SME to the buying process of the customer (Manning *et al.,* 2010). Several SMEs expressed a strong desire to employ professional sales resource but most confirmed an inability to afford the expense at this time.

When it comes to use of technology, SMEs in the Food and Drinks sector have not yet embraced many technological advances as outlined by Piercy (2010). CRM software packages can be very useful. Though many of the SMEs recorded the importance of recognising who the target B2B customers are, and the gathering of information about them, not one of the SMEs interviewed expressed an interest in, or has invested in CRM systems and technology to assist in the relationship selling process though some were using Skype (Tanner *et al.,* 2009).

There is a clear imbalance in power reported in this study between SMEs and buyers which appears to be tolerated or accepted as the norm, whether that buyer be a national supermarket buyer as suggested by Hingley (2005) or a chef in a restaurant. So, both Food retail and Foodservice sectors and both smaller and larger customers evidence

and expose this imbalance or inequality. The buyer is in charge; he or she always 'calls the shots'. The SME can decide whether to deal with smaller customers, more like they are, or bigger firms who can make considerable demands upon a SME, stretching its resources. Either way, the buyer controls the decision to meet, to develop business, how much communication takes place in the relationship and how this is carried out operationally. Tolerance of seller-buyer power imbalance is the 'price' SMEs 'pay' to engage in business relationships. The imbalance or inequality however does not necessarily preclude the ability for SMEs to develop and maintain good working relationships and profitable business with buyers/customers; it is just hard for them to get that first meeting and to start the process. Scotland Food and Drink plays its part here with 'Meet the Buyer' events but mixed results were reported in this study.

Geographic location of the SME and the location of the customers they seek to serve, place strains and constraints on how SMEs go about their business. In this study, the geographic location of Scotland provides some specific challenges for SMEs whether they are engaging with buyers from major supermarket accounts based in London (or further afield) or are having to deal with multiple smaller clients nearer home. There are significant hurdles to overcome and costs involved in organising business visits to buyers with requisite planning and time constraints challenges. Constraints are also placed on the socialising potential of the SME due to geography and this impedes their ability to build relationships. This is further aggravated when buyers see Scotland often as a trip too far to make, despite the advantages to the SME of securing such a visit.

6.4 Implications of the study
This DBA study has enabled the researcher to investigate and understand the sales process adopted by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs from an academic viewpoint. The findings provide new knowledge concerning the steps of selling in the sales process practiced in SMEs and factors that affect the operationalisation of the process.

Academic researchers in the fields of sales and SMEs, together with owner managers of SMEs (as practioners within the Food and Drinks sector) and particularly SFD, who is tasked with encouraging and supporting SMEs, should find the research findings of this study useful. The conceptual framework which outlines the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs will hopefully encourage academics to pursue further studies in an area that lacks empirical evidence. The key academic implications of findings from this research are described first and then a short section to offer ideas as to how practitioners can benefit from the findings follows.

6.4.1 Academic Implications

In the literature review there is no peer reviewed, empirical evidence of research done into the sales process in SMEs. There is also no research available on sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs. The SMEs and people interviewed admit to inadequacies in their approach to, and implementation of a sales process. The findings provide a strong indication that SMEs would embrace more guidance and help with the formulation of their sales process. The emergent theme data and findings provide some new knowledge/evidence/literature about important enablers and barriers that affect the operationalisation of the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs. The information gathered in this study delivers a conceptual framework for the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs. This conceptual framework could now be tested in SMEs in other geographic territories and in SMEs in other industry sectors.

This new knowledge helps fill a gap in current SME selling literature. There is a paucity of texts that are academically underpinned and which deliver instruction on the sales process in SMEs. Findings from this study could usefully inform instructive academic publications. These include: Case Studies, a new small academic text book on SMEs and Sales Process and could also usefully be distilled into a chapter in SME texts, for example Deakins and Freel (2011), which for new edition brings new and topical themes in Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses to its

pages. Additionally, it could usefully provide learning materials for existing and new modules in Entrepreneurship, Small Business, Marketing and Sales subject group areas for Schools of Marketing and Management within University Business Faculties to impart new knowledge to students.

Academic Journal Articles are a means of disseminating and sharing new knowledge from this study to other academics in the fields of Small Business and Marketing and Sales. This could provide the stimulus for further research into Sales Process and SMEs. Likely publications would be the Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (JPSSM), the European Marketing Journal (EMJ) and the Small Business Journal. The findings from this study could inform a number of academic papers that could be presented at conferences across a number of disciplines, for example, Entrepreneurship, Small Business, Marketing and Sales. Conferences that could be targeted are the Academy of Marketing (AM), The Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE), the European Marketing Academy Conference (EMAC) and the Global Sales Science Institute (GSSI).

6.4.2 Practitioner implications and recommendations

The contribution to practice can be summarised as twofold. Firstly, for SMEs and the owner managers of SMEs who are looking to improve their sales and profitability. Secondly, for SFD, the agency funded and tasked with the encouragement and development of improved performance across businesses (of all sizes) in the Food and Drinks industry sector.

The interviewees expressed concerns relating to SMEs lack of understanding of sales process and sales activities that underpin the sales process. Highlighted during interviews were requirements to improve communication skills, listening skills, needs analysis skills, and how to best overcome objections during negotiation. Some SMEs, due to lack of resource and time pressure, would not always get back to see a customer for a second time. The ability to close a sale is therefore crucial

and evidence from this study suggests most SMEs could do better at this.

Also, there is a need to overcome any reticence to engage proactively in telephoning prospective and existing customers. One challenge identified is the struggle to get in front of buyers in the first place. SFD plays its part with 'Meet the Buyer' events but mixed results were recorded. The study suggests therefore that other help might be required.

Although this study reveals that SMEs did actively engage in some form of follow up after a meeting, the emphasis is on a brief summary of outcomes from the meeting, rather than a clear plan for building a longer-term relationship by delivering exceptional after sales care.

The role of the SMEs owner was clearly identified as important, at least in their own eyes. This study reveals that while intuition and instinct and enthusiasm and passion brought some benefits to SMEs in the sales process, the downside was an over reliance on these to the detriment of hard facts gained through gathering robust data on customers for face-to-face meetings. So, a more professional approach is required to be instilled in some SMEs.

Not all SMEs had sales knowledge within their firm. Many expressed a desire to not only improve their sales knowledge but also to engage professional sales people to assist them. A programme of sales training might assist in this area of sales deficiency.

This study highlights an underdeveloped understanding in the role and usefulness of CRM software and how best to captialise on the opportunities to utilise social media/technologies in B2B communications. Again, some form of sales training/ learning (one to one or workshops) could be considered either directly with SMEs or via SFD with monies or part monies provided by the Scottish Government who have an interest in helping SMEs better their potential in this area.

The research underscored that it is the buyers who are in charge and SMEs struggle to be heard against the multitude of products vying for shelf space in a crowded market place. Rapport building and relationship selling is being activated by some but not all SMEs in the study. This is a specific challenge for SMEs that are clearly underdeveloped. Only two SMEs in this study engage in regular weekly contact with their existing customers. SMEs clearly need guidance in how to improve their approach to relationship selling.

SMEs in this study report a challenge based on their geographic location. Sending samples is expensive, delivering orders from more remote areas, organising multiple buying trips to smaller customers or one big meeting with one big buyer in say London are difficult and costly. Help is available from SFD in this area, but most results were mixed and different initiatives need investigation to help SMEs reduce costs in doing business. Perhaps 'Meet the Buyer' events need to be scrutinised to better determine what aspects of this intervention works, and what aspects do not.

It is therefore evident that an acceleration of sales training/ learning (one-to-one or workshops) could be considered either directly with SMEs or via SFD with monies or part monies provided by Government who have an interest in helping SMEs improve their sales effectiveness.

6.5 Research Study Limitations

There were many limitations in the carrying out this research study. Each semi-structured interview required not only one hour to fit into busy SME owner manager/sales people's diaries but also the time resource and financial cost to cover the length and breadth of Scotland to ensure a coverage of geographic areas and sales channels. To help ensure as much reliability as possible, the researcher undertook all interviews himself putting the onus squarely on the researcher's time and financial resource. This approach however did enable the researcher to identify, and probe a number of emergent themes that related to the sales process that may not otherwise have been revealed.

The researcher came to the study with 25 years of prior experience and knowledge of the Food and Drinks sector which potentially might have affected the research. The researcher dismissed more objective forms of inquiry in order to access deeper and richer qualitative material - employing a professional transcriber to transcribe the digital recordings to ensure as much objectivity as possible prior to the analysis phase. The author argues that any axiology 'baggage' has assisted in the unearthing of some deeper, and rich understanding of the sales process in this study. Only 20 interviews taken from 15 SMEs could be another limitation, however more SMEs could have been interviewed but the researcher was satisfied that thematic saturation was achieved. The relatively new technique of thematic analysis was chosen over other more traditional methods of analysis due to the lack of relevant quantitative data on SMEs being available. The phenomenon of the research and it's research methodology means that it will not be possible to repeat this study and replicate its findings. However, the process that has been adopted does provide a basis for future research outlined below.

6.6 Future Research

Research into SMEs is limited (Curran and Blackburn, 2001). Peer reviewed, empirical evidence concerning selling and the sales process in SMEs is simply not available. This provides a large gap in scope for further research into all aspects related to selling and the sales process and SMEs. There is some limited research that exists concerning challenges faced by Food and Drinks SMEs when engaging with large supermarket groups; but no literature specifically on SMEs, selling and the Food and Drinks industry specifically. The conceptual framework of the sales process practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs offers a starting point for more examination, investigation and understanding into themes relating to the sales process, SMEs and the Food and Drinks industry.

In addition, the researcher, during the period of time while studying for his DBA has amassed interview data from other Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs connected with his work for SE. The researcher also conducted interviews with large food manufacturers and with large food retail buyers.

A number of areas could therefore be further investigated/ researched. These are:

1. The findings from this study and the Conceptual Model could be tested in another region, for example, England with Food and Drinks SMEs

2. A study into the mapping of Marshall *et al's* (1999) identified groupings of selling activities to Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs and their key sales resource.

3. A study into any differences or similarities experienced by different categories of SMEs (micro, small and medium) in the sales process practiced.

4. A study specifically into the sales role played by the owner manager in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

5. A study specifically into the role of CRM and social media in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

6. A study specifically into the power imbalance between SMEs and buyers from the food services channel in the Food and Drinks sector.

7. A study specifically into geographic location challenges of SMEs in other remote areas of the UK particularly concerning costs and relationship building.

8. A study of the sales process in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs from the buyer's perspective in both food retail and foodservices channels.

9. A study of any differences and/ or similarities in the sales process practiced by large Food and Drinks firms versus Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

10. A study into the effectiveness of SFD 'Meet the Buyer' initiatives in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

11. A study into one or more specific steps in the linear/ non-linear sales process e.g. a focus on Effective Sales Presentations that make up the 'main body' of the sales process (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005; Futrell, 2006; Cicala *et al.,* 2012) in Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs.

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APPENDIX 1 - Summary of steps of selling/ sales process in academic texts

TEXTBOOK	CHAPTERS	SALES STEP/ PROCESS	TOPICS
Sell	5	Strategic prospecting	Importance & planning methods
Ingram *et al.,*	6	Planning presentations	Sales communication formats
(2010)	7	Sales dialogue	Effective dialogue, buyer feedback, customer value, engaging buyer and product claims
	8	Addressing concerns	anticipating and negotiating concerns, solutions to confirm benefits and Securing close commitment
	9	Customer relations	Customer satisfaction, follow up with technology, maintain two-way communication and collaborate and add value
Selling	5	Prospecting	Prospecting
Hopkins *et al.,*	7	Making a sales call	Getting an appointment, making a first impression, approaching a customer and before opening a presentation, using attention getters and the biggest sales mistakes
(2008)	8	Elements of a great sales presentation	The importance of the presentation, components of a presentation, solution presentations, adjuncts to a presentation and proof devices for effective presentation
	9	Responding to objections	Negotiating buyer concerns, common sources of buyer concerns, steps for negotiating and specific steps in negotiating
	10	Closing a sale	Guidelines for closing, closing techniques and dealing with 'I want to think it over'
	11	After the sale	Building long-term relationships, customer service methods, preplanning your service strategy and getting referrals
Selling Today	9	Developing and qualifying a prospect base	Prospecting, prospecting requires planning and sources of prospects
Manning *et al.,*	10	Approaching the customer with adaptive selling	Developing a presentation strategy, planning the pre-approach and developing the 6 step presentation and converting the prospect's attention
(2010)	11	Creating the consultative sales presentation	Transitioning from the approach, needs discovery activities for value, selecting solutions that add value and need satisfaction
	13	Negotiating buyer concerns	Win-Win relationship strategy, buyer concerns, negotiating buyer concerns, creating value and working with buyers trained in formal negotiation
	14	Adapting the close and confirming the partnership	Adapting the close, guidelines for closing the sale, closing clues, methods for closing and confirming the partnership when the buyer says yes
	15	Servicing the sale and building the relationship	Building long-term partnerships, customer service and partnering with an unhappy customer
Relationship Selling	6	Prospecting	Prospecting
Johnston and Marshall	7	Communicating the sales message	Presentations
(2012)	8	Negotiating for Win-Win solutions	Negotiating
	9	Close & follow up	Closing and Follow up

APPENDIX 2 - Interview questions

Please can you provide some background about your company? Its origins, trading history, current performance, key personnel etc.? Do you have any company literature?

What sales resource does the company have? In house, outsourced? What skills level, knowledge of selling does the company have? Does training take place on selling? If there are others involved in the sales process would you mind if I interviewed them too?

Can you tell me your view on what marketing and selling means to your company?

To whom do you sell your products?

How does the company go about introducing its products & selling its products to buyers? Is the approach the same for each buyer?

How do you prepare for a meeting/ presentation with a buyer? Is it the same for every buyer?

What happens at these buyer meetings?

What happens after the meeting/ presentation?

What relationship exists after the sales process is complete?

How would you describe your relationship with the buyers?

What role does technology play in how you go about selling to buyers?

APPENDIX 3 - Interview guide

Tony Douglas DBA Interview Guide	Date/ Time: Company: Interviewee:
Company background	
sales resource	
marketing versus selling definitions	
sales channels and target buyers	
buyer meeting preparation	
meeting dynamics	
post meeting activity	

APPENDIX 4 - Interview information document

Date of interview: XXXX

Length of interview/ start time: 1 hour/ XXXXX

Location of interview: XXXXX, company offices

Anonymity statement:

Digital recording request:

Name of interviewee:

Position of interviewee in the SME:

Name of SME:

Age of company:

Size of company (micro OR small OR medium):

Location of company:

Category of company

Sector of operation?

     Outlet type?

Local sourcing?

APPENDIX 5 - Introductory letter

Edinburgh Napier University

Date

To Whom It May Concern

This is to introduce Tony Douglas, lecturer at Edinburgh Napier University who has held a number of roles in the Food and Drinks industry in businesses large and small as buyer, product manager, sales director, business consultant and mentor. I am currently undertaking doctoral research in the field of SMEs and the sales process.

Ultimately by means of this case study approach I hope to explore and critically investigate the sales process practiced by Scottish-based SMEs operating in the food and drink sector. The objectives include evaluating what the steps are in the process, are these linear, why these are important and useful to SMEs, what knowledge exists in the SME about the sales process, if there are any differences and similarities between small and medium-sized SMEs in their approach to the sales process? I will ultimately evaluate and analyse my findings with the current available literature and empirical evidence available concerning large organisations and the well documented sales process/ steps of selling.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could give about 1 hour of your time (at a time convenient to you) when I could interview you using open-ended, semi-structured questions. Your cooperation would be most helpful as it is hoped that evidence gathered from my study will unearth findings that in due course could be used to provide training and support to SMEs in the area of the sales process.

I will contact you in the next few days to ask if you can agree to take part in my study. Your name and the name of your organisation will remain anonymous if you so desire. An electronic copy of my final thesis will be made available to you as required.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Douglas

Edinburgh Napier University

APPENDIX 6 - Coding scheme for interviewees

Code trained	Position held	M/F	Sales involvement	Sales
A1	owner-manager	M	Indirect	No
A2	sales manager	F	Direct	Yes
B1	owner-manager	F	Indirect	No
C1	owner-manager	F	Direct	No
D1	owner manager	F	Direct	No
E1	owner-manager	F	Indirect	No
F1	owner-manager	M	Direct	Yes
G1	owner-manager	M	Indirect	No
G2	sales manager	M	Direct	Yes
H1	owner-manager	M	Direct	No
J1	sales director	M	Direct	Yes
K1	owner-manager	M	Indirect	Yes
L1	owner manager	F	Indirect	No
L2	sales administrator	F	Direct	Yes
M1	sales manager	M	Direct	Yes
N1	owner manager	F	Direct	No
P1	sales director	M	Direct	Yes
P2	nat accts mgr	F	Direct	Yes
Q1	MD	M	Indirect	No
Q2	nat accts mgr	F	Direct	Yes

APPENDIX 7 – SME sample details

SME	Size	Sector	Location	Sales person	Channel	Outlet	Customer size	Product	Customer Type
'A'	Micro	Confectionery	Perthshire	Owner	Foodservice	Gift	Small and	Expensive	Existing
				manager	Retail	Food &	Large	&	but
				& Sales	Wholesale	Speciality		Complex	mostly
				manager	Domestic	deli			new
					Export				
					Hampers				
					Food boxes				
'B'	Micro	Confectionery	Fife	Owner	Retail	Gift	Small &	Cheap	Existing
				manager	Wholesale	Food &	Large	&	but
					Hampers	Multiples		Straight	mostly
					Food boxes			forward	new
'C'	Micro	Preserves	Dumfries	Owner	Foodservice	Gift	Mostly	Relatively	Existing
		Chutney	&	manager	Retail	Food &	small	expensive	& new
		Sauces	Galloway	&	Wholesale	Speciality		with some	
				Two sons	Domestic	Deli &		customisation	
				& Sales	Export	Other			
				agents	Hampers	retail			
					Food boxes				

'D'	Micro	Dairy	Glasgow	Owner	Retail	Speciality	Mostly	Relatively	Existing
			&	Manager &	Wholesale	deli	small	expensive	&
			Clydeside	Father &	Domestic			mostly	new
				Agents	Export			standardised	
'E'	Micro	Alcoholic	Scottish Borders	Owner	Foodservice	Gift	Small &	Relatively	Existing
		beverages		manager	Retail	food &	Large	expensive	&
				&	Wholesale	Multiples,		standardised	new
				Agents	Domestic	Speciality			
					Export	deli &			
					Hampers	Other			
					Food boxes	retail			
'F'	Small	Fruit &	Highlands	Owner	Foodservice	Local	Small &	Relatively	Existing
		vegetables	&	manager &	Retail	Multiples,	Large	inexpensive	&
			Islands	Van sales	Wholesale	Other		& seasonal	new
					Domestic	retail			
'G'	Small	Fish &	Aberdeen	Owner	Foodservice	Gift	Mostly	Relatively	Existing
		seafood	City	manager	Retail	food,	small	expensive	&
			&	&	Wholesale	Speciality		&	new
			Shires	Sales	Domestic	deli &		seasonal	
				manager	Export	Other			

					Hampers	retail			
					Food boxes				
'H'	Small	Bakery	Stirling	Owner manager & sales agents	Foodservice Retail Wholesale Domestic Export Hampers Food boxes	Gift food Multiples, Speciality Deli & Other retail	Mostly smaller	Relatively inexpensive some customisation & seasonal	Existing & new
'J'	Small	Non-alcoholic beverages	Edinburgh & Lothians	MD, Sales manager & sales reps	Foodservice Retail Wholesale Domestic Export Hampers Food boxes	Gift Food, Speciality deli & Other retail	Mostly smaller	Relatively inexpensive & standardised	Existing & new
'K'	Small	Alcoholic beverages	Fife	Owner Manager, National accounts manager	Retail Wholesale Domestic Export Online	Multiple, Speciality deli & Other retail	Small & Large	Relatively expensive standardised	Existing & new
'L'	Medium	Meat	Edinburgh and Lothian	Owner Manager, Sales	Foodservice Retail Wholesale	Gift food, Multiples,	Small and Large	Relatively expensive & some	Existing & new

				Director, Sales Manager & Wholesalers	Domestic Export Hampers Food boxes	Specialist deli & Other retailers		customisation & seasonal	
'M'	Medium	Meat, Poultry & Game	Ayrshire and Arran	Owner Manager, Sales manager & Reps	Foodservice Wholesale Export	Multiples, Speciality deli & Other retail	Small and Large	Relatively expensive some customisation & seasonal	Existing new
'N'	Medium	Food ingredients	Angus & Dundee	Owner Manager, (to appoint Commercial Manager)	Foodservice Retail Wholesale Domestic	Multiples & Other retail	Mostly larger	Relatively expensive & seasonal	Mostly existing but Some new
'P'	Medium	Fish & seafood	Aberdeen City & Shires	Sales Director, National accounts manager	Foodservice Retail Wholesale Domestic Export	Multiples, Other retail	Mostly larger	Relatively inexpensive, standardised & seasonal	Mostly existing but Some new
'Q'	Medium	Bakery and cereals	Edinburgh & Lothians	MD & National account managers	Foodservice Retail Wholesale Domestic Export Hampers Food boxes	Multiples, Speciality deli	Mostly larger	Relatively inexpensive & mostly standardised	Mostly existing but Some new

APPENDIX 8 – Conceptual Framework for the Sales process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs

Figure 10: Sales Process Practiced by Scottish-based Food and Drinks SMEs
(in new and modified selling task situations)

(Douglas, 2012)