

Classic Upsell

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Key takeaways

- Fundamental structure: "You don't want X without Y."
- Tactic: the "no sale sale" — salvage a no by offering a different, smaller free or low-cost solution that leads back to a sale.
- Give thing A for free (or present it as free) to drive purchase or continued use of thing B, or give A free while encouraging purchase of B, or give A free only while they continue using B.
- Classic upsells work for one-time offers and recurring services, provided recurring margins are high enough to cover the free item.
- Upsells can be chained (primary product → natural accessories/add-ons → higher-ticket refinements).
- Turning a declined sale into a different sale can produce higher average ticket values (example: customers who initially declined services then bought supplements averaged a higher ticket than those who bought services first).
- Practical real-world examples demonstrate the pattern: furrier earmuffs → coat storage/conditioning; gym thumb drive + free nutrition consult → supplement sales; lemonade → ice-cubes / stainless steel container / donation + refill discount; storage unit → locks, boxes, hand trucks, insurance (very high margins).

Checklist

1. Identify the primary offer (X)
 - Define the core product/service customers come for (e.g., fur coat, gym membership, lemonade, storage unit).
 - Explanation: Knowing X lets you find the natural complementary item Y that customers "can't imagine having X without," which is the basis of the upsell.
2. Find natural complements (Y) that feel necessary
 - List accessories, maintenance, or companion items people assume go with X (e.g., coat conditioning/storage, earmuffs, fries/Coke for a burger, lemonade ice cubes, stainless to-go mug).
 - Explanation: Complementary items make the upsell feel logical and necessary — "you don't want X without Y" increases acceptance.
3. Frame the offer with the "you don't want X without Y" structure
 - Phrase the upsell so the buyer assumes Y is a natural part of owning or using X.
 - Explanation: This framing reduces resistance because the add-on reads as an essential part of the purchase, not a separate hard sell.
4. Use the "no sale sale" to salvage declines

- If the prospect declines the main offers, present a smaller free or low-cost alternative (e.g., at-home thumb drive workouts + free nutrition consult) that still brings them back into your funnel.
 - Explanation: This converts immediate rejection into a later opportunity to sell; it also builds goodwill and creates another touchpoint to close at a higher average ticket.
5. Offer a free A that monetizes B (three variants)
 - Variant 1: Give A for free in exchange for buying B.
 - Variant 2: Give A for free and actively encourage purchase of B.
 - Variant 3: Give A for free only as long as they continue to use/pay for B.
 - Explanation: Each variant turns a perceived freebie into a driver for the paid product; choose the variant that fits your margins and customer behavior.
 6. Design an upsell chain (tiered / sequential upsells)
 - Build logical secondary and tertiary upsells (e.g., lemonade → ice-cubes → stainless steel mug → donation + refill discount).
 - Explanation: Multiple, natural upsells increase average order value without feeling pushy — each step answers an unmet need from the previous one.
 7. Monetize "free" promotions with high-margin add-ons
 - If you present a "free month" or similar, ensure front-line add-ons (locks, boxes, hand trucks, upgraded insurance) are available with high margins to capture value.
 - Explanation: The free entry point draws customers in; high-margin extras are where profitability comes from (example: storage unit lock and insurance margins, and overall 90% margin on certain add-ons).
 8. Make easy-to-buy "magic pill" options available if customers want shortcuts
 - Offer convenient, perceived-easy solutions (e.g., supplements for weight loss customers who want a shortcut) while still advising best practices.
 - Explanation: Customers often choose the path of least resistance; providing a "magic pill" option captures that spend and can increase average ticket even if you still recommend the full solution.
 9. Use follow-up touchpoints to close upsells
 - Schedule or promise an appointment/consult (e.g., nutrition consult) after offering a free/at-home alternative so you have another chance to sell.
 - Explanation: Follow-up meetings convert at similar or better rates than first visits and can yield higher average tickets.
 10. Ensure recurring offers have margin to sustain free items
 - If the free A ties to a recurring B, model margins to confirm recurring revenue covers the cost of giving A.
 - Explanation: Classic upsells can work on recurring streams but only if margins are sufficient to support the free incentive long-term.

Examples:

- Furrier: give free earmuffs to get customers to store and condition their fur coats (you don't want a fur coat without storage/conditioning).
- Fur coat inventory observation: coats priced ~\$200 with 7,000 coats in warehouse = \$1.4M worth of coats (context demonstrating value in the model).
- Coat store tactic: hand customers earmuffs, then imply additional services ("you don't want anything else, do you?"), resulting in storage conditioning and a \$30 storage fee for the muffs.
- Gym: offer an at-home thumb drive and a free nutrition consult to people who decline services → many return and buy supplements; customers who initially declined services then bought supplements averaged \$300 ticket vs \$200 for those who bought services first.
- Lemonade stand: free cup upsells — ice-cubes to avoid dilution, stainless steel to-go container for better experience, donate \$1 + 20% off refills as an incentive.
- Storage unit: free month priced at \$127; sell required lock for \$47; offer on-site boxes, hand trucks, and extra insurance (e.g., \$10/month for million-dollar coverage) — owner reports ~90% margins on some add-ons.

Notes:

- This method works for one-time and recurring offers, but recurring versions require high enough margins to subsidize the free item or service.