

How to Sell More by Reducing Risk

**The Inaugural Ebook from
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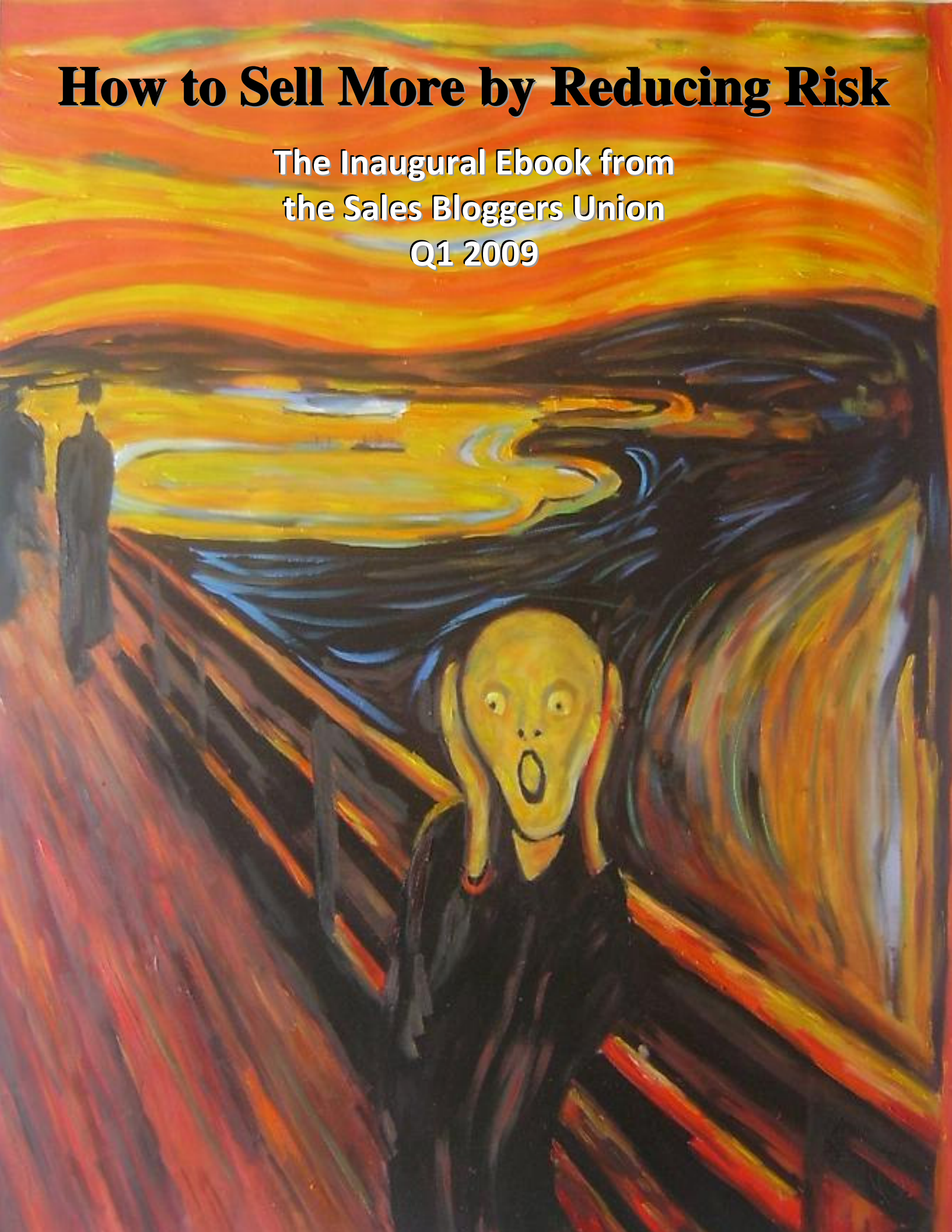


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How to sell more by reducing staff turnover!

By Brad Trnavsky

If you are a sales manager and your organization is anything like mine you have a tough road ahead of you and not just because of the economic times. Think about it for a minute... Whatever you sell this year you have to do 10% more each quarter next year, and 10% more again the year after that! I honestly believe that many of the top executives in companies come from sales because we have been tested by fire and lived to tell about it.

Our employees can be arrogant, strong willed, and frequently we manage them through the phone and e-mail. In addition to that, we are constantly chasing tougher and tougher goals year after year but have you noticed that the best managers never complain?

How do they continue to hit ever increasing goals year after year? The answer is simple. Retention of top talent! Keeping those very same sales people who have come through that test of fire. That's it... It really is that simple.

While going through my MBA I had the pleasure of doing some advanced statistical analysis of my peers to determine what traits made the most productive sales people. I only came up with two statistically significant findings, first was tenure in the company (not time selling similar products) and the other was the frequency of training. Other than those two things there was no correlation between sales volume and any other traits. To be sure I surveyed level of education, sex, race, years of industry experience, years of sales experience, marital status, zodiac sign, the list went on and on, and test after test only two factors turned up time and again - **tenure and training**.

So as a manager what I took away from this study was **hire good people, train them well, and retain them**. There is still a lot more to being a successful sales manager, but these three principles will set you up to do well in the long term and not be just a "flash in the pan" manager that has moved on to a new company after a year or so.

Hiring the right People

Hiring is miserable! I'm not afraid to say it. I hate it because it takes a lot of my time and attention away from my team, and their success is my number one concern in any given day. That being said, I am very careful when I hire. My hiring process is as follows:

- 1 Phone conversation
- 2 Web based assessment
- 3 Group interview (for people who pass the assessment)
- 4 Web based assessment
- 5 Interview with me (30-45 minutes)
- 6 Web based assessment
- 7 Interview with me (15 minutes) then interview with 3-4 of my staff members (5-10 minutes each)
- 8 Final interview with both myself and my Boss.
- 9 Offer meeting

I think everyone will agree that is a lot of work. I lose people simply because they are too lazy to go through all the steps, but the secret is I **want** to lose those people! They are the people that will show up work lackadaisically for a few months and then move on to something easier. This process is designed to give me every opportunity to separate the wheat from the chaff. My normal process takes me from 60-70 people down to two VERY quickly and I feel good that I have the BEST two every time.

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I may hate this process because it takes time and it keeps me away from my other commitments but the important thing to consider is that I want to hire the right person, and so I will do all I can to make sure that this happens.

Training Your Sales Force

The next step once you have hired the best people is to train them well. My team members go through a three week training and orientation process that is planned out and well organized. It includes interviewing all of the functional managers, observations of their team mates during all of the stages of the sales cycle, a series of web based training tools, and role play with me and my staff. All of this ends with both a written test, and a final role play for certification on our sales process with failure of any stage potentially resulting in termination. If your training program involves a three ring binder, a video, and a ride-a-long you seriously need to rethink this process.

The most important thing to remember with training is the process never stops. I hold training at 9:30 AM for 1 – 1.5 hours **every** Friday of **every** week. My staff does not even ask if there will be training any more. If I call in sick or am out of town I have a senior rep or someone in another department lead it.

The key to weekly training is to make it fun, and make sure they learn. This is not your chance to gripe at them or complain about a lack of activity. This should be an uplifting and positive experience or people will try to get out of it any way they can. The other key to success is not to get too fancy. Save the advanced techniques for your one on one meeting's with senior reps. These training sessions should cover the basic skills (the blocking and tackling of sales) like opening calls, leaving effective voice messages, call mapping, closing, product knowledge etc.

There are two objectives to these regular training sessions. Firstly, it increases the retention of information – you remember what it was like learning at school, you had to revise and practice, sales training requires the same. Secondly, it helps create a greater collaborative spirit within the organization which helps foster greater team ethics and co-operation.

The next stage of my training program is where I start to bridge the gap between training them and retaining them. Every week I have a 30 minute one on one meeting with every member of my team. These meetings are structured as follows:

- 1 10 minutes of whatever I want to cover
- 2 10 minutes of whatever they feel they need (work related)
- 3 10 minutes to chat about whatever they want (football, family issues, really anything)

This strategy gives me the opportunity to not only share things in private I may not want to make public, but it also gives me a chance to connect deeper individually with each rep. By doing this I gain insight into their lives I may not otherwise get allowing me to be not only more effective but more understanding of their individual needs without appearing “soft”.

Retaining Your Sales Force

My final step in my retention strategy revolves around building community. This starts in my hiring process. Every member of my team knows that they are great, that they are not easily replaced, and that I value them

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as an individual and as a team. I try to make sure every action I take every day reflects that. It is also made clear to them that I value the team and their opinion because every interviewee is screened by roughly half of my team and their opinion regarding ability - and more importantly - their ability to integrate into the team culture is taken very seriously. But that is where community begins not how it is maintained. I try to have regular BBQ's at my house, nights out, lunches, potlucks, and other opportunities to relax and have a good time together so we start to mesh like family. It's important as a manager to understand that the majority of people that leave an organization do so because of interpersonal issues, not pay and benefits.

That being said... there are two hiring philosophies out there with regards to pay. You can either (A) low ball each candidate and negotiate to the minimum price they are willing to work for, or (B) you can offer the best pay you can afford to offer and give them two choices 1. Take it or 2. Leave it. I personally choose option B. I truly believe I am hiring the best people available so why would I low ball them on the salary? I have never had a single person deny an offer of employment from me based on the salary offered and I can assure you we do not offer the best pay in the industry!

In closing I have but a few remaining points to make... Do not spend all your time trying to find the superstar. I am not looking for "the one" who can single handedly close 40% of my sales quota, and make the rest of my team feel like dirt. I am looking to assemble a team of solid players that play well together. Half of my team can fail to make quota and I can still make MY goal so the point isn't to have 1 superstar and 10 scrubs. You are far better off from a risk management standpoint to have 11 players that are solid base hitters than ones who occasionally hit a grand slam but also strike out frequently. What happens if you lose "the one"? The trick to long term success is to build a real team that is well trained, experienced, motivated to succeed, and where every member is treated as equally valuable.

Brad Trnavsky is a sales coach and trainer that specializes in assisting top sales people transition into top sales managers and helping current sales managers achieve greatness. He also hosts and administrates the site [Sales Management 2.0](#).

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Sell More by Reducing Risk

By Colin Wilson

For this series of articles we have decided to write about reducing risk... but whose risk are we reducing and what is the risk?

Well, in order to help answer those couple of questions we first need to agree the fundamental law of buying... it's what every buying decision is based on... it's the final decision criteria that has to be met... and that is... *does it feel right?* If the decision to buy does not feel right then the buyer is unlikely to buy. Therefore, as the 'how does it feel for you' phrase evokes the emotion element of decision making, we can firmly say that all buying is based on emotion... and perceived risk plays on that emotion.

All Buying is Based on Emotion

You may already agree with me that all buying is based on emotion and if you do that is great in which case you can skip this short section and move on to the buying process. However, if you are a little sceptical (Or come to that even largely sceptical) about this fundamental law of buying then read on.

Let me prove to you that buying is based on emotion. Think back to when you bought your house... or made some other very large and important buying decision. Think back to the exact time you made the decision to buy. Make a short movie clip in your mind of the exact moment you made the decision and then play the movie... you only need 5 seconds of movie before the decision and 2 or 3 seconds after. Look at yourself in the movie and make sure you have the right section. Rewind the movie and play it again and make sure you see yourself. See everything that was around you at the time and hear everything that you heard. If need be do this a couple more times to make sure you have the right movie clip.

When you are happy that you have the right 8 seconds of movie, I want you to rewind it to the beginning and play it again in your mind, but this time instead of watching yourself I want you to step into the movie and experience that decision as though you were there. You are now seeing through your own eyes everything that you saw; hearing everything you heard, smelling everything you smelt... and at the exact moment you decided to buy... search your feelings... did it feel right?... I bet it did, and you may even have said to yourself that it feels right!

Every corporate buying decision is based on emotion, it's the final part of the buying criteria and it is this informal criterion that will override any of the formal criteria of the transaction... and most of the time it is operating at a subconscious level.

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The Buying Process

To fully appreciate how we reduce risk I want to make sure everyone is up to the same level of understanding the buying process.

Ask a customer to explain their buying process and most will probably explain their buying activities. They'll talk about putting a request for proposal together, looking for potential suppliers, putting a decision process in place, and so on. This is activity however, and is not to be confused with the buying process.

Most customers won't be able to define the buying process in terms of discrete actions but there are four stages that we all go through, whether we're buying chocolate bars or space rockets. (I don't know about you, but I've had a lot more experience buying chocolate bars than space rockets but that's neither here nor there.) It is only the degree of risk and the time-scales involved that change. Here are the stages:

- Need.
- Requirements.
- Solution.
- Deal.



Through normal questioning, that all good salespeople do, you will understand where the customer is in the process. However, the decision to buy a chocolate bar can be reached almost instantaneously. (See the sidebar for a description that takes longer to read than it would take you to choose your snack.) It's a low risk decision: A wrong choice has few detrimental consequences and can be made with relative peace of mind.

When it comes to more expensive purchases the degree of risk increases, as does the amount of time taken to reach a decision. The same stages of the buying process are followed. It just moves at a much slower rate.

When you've determined where your customers are in their buying process, you can determine where you should be from a selling view point.

You know you're hungry but you're not sure what you feel like eating. Do you want a main meal or a snack? Hot or cold? Sweet or savoury? You know you need to eat but you're unclear about exactly what you want. To progress you have to **Understand your Need.**

Answering these questions helps you to **Determine your Requirements.** You decide you don't want a main meal: A snack will do. More answers narrow it down further, leaving you wanting a cold, sweet snack.

Your favourite kind of cold, sweet snack? Choosing chocolate allows you to **Finalise the Solution.**

Your eyes range across the chocolate on offer at the shop counter and you select the Mars bar – you **Agree the Deal.**

Sell More by Reducing Risk- continued

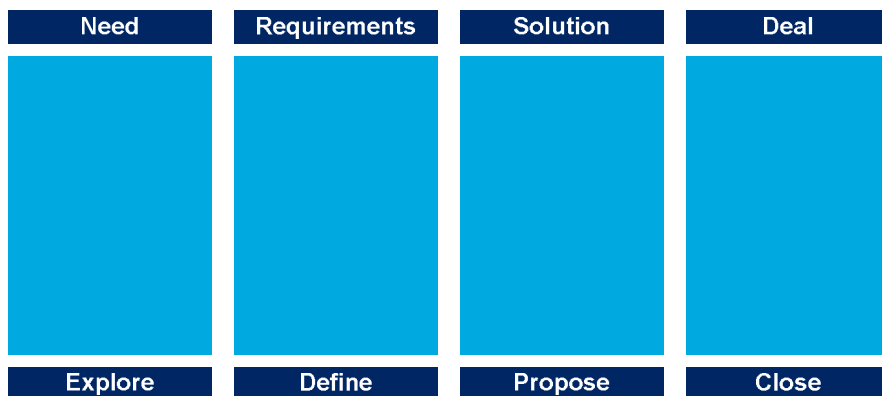
By Colin Wilson

On the selling side you follow equal and opposite stages to the buying process. The selling stages are:

- Explore the Need.
- Define the Requirements.
- Propose the Solution.
- Close the Deal.



The diagram below shows how the selling stages and the buying stages are linked and how they move in parallel as a deal progresses. The key point here is, that if your prospect is at the 'understanding need' stage for example, it's obvious that you cannot propose a solution: you don't have sufficient knowledge of the requirements. This is mirroring at the process level.



Let's face it; if your process is no more sophisticated than seeing a customer and offering them a solution without any understanding of their needs and requirements, you may as well be manning a market stall... or take the label of a 'walking talking brochure'.

There are obvious benefits to knowing where the customer is in the buying process. If you've been asked in to provide a solution, for example, and by use of some judicious questions you discover that the customer hasn't fully analyzed their need or requirements, you can build a relationship of trust that begins by helping them to

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understand their needs. The alternative is to propose a Rolls Royce for a customer who tells you they want a car. All well and good, but if they have budget for a second-hand Volkswagen then you're wasting your time and theirs.

What is at Risk?

So, the buying process has been broken down into four stages and as discussed is used if you buy a chocolate bar or a space ship, but the time through the process differs widely between the two extremes because of the degree of risk involved... so what's at risk?

The risk of making a wrong decision, that's what's at risk. If you buy a chocolate bar and you make the wrong decision then correcting that decision is not costly. Making the wrong decision when thousands of dollars; hundreds of thousands of dollars; or even millions of dollars are at stake makes the consequences of wrong decisions far greater.

For big buying decisions it is your career, your job and for some decisions your way of life which is at stake...and all therefore feature on the emotional curve of buying. So what do buyers look for to reduce risk?

Reducing Risk

I would like you to think of this scenario...

You have a medical condition that requires you to undergo a tricky and delicate operation... the surgeon only has one chance to get it right... if he does not, then you will be, let's say, medically challenged for the rest of your life. It's a tricky and delicate operation... and therefore this would suggest above-normal skill requirement. If it goes wrong, it can't be corrected, and so the surgeon has one chance. How do you reduce your risk?

The answer is quite easy... you make sure you have the best damn surgeon out there who has performed the same operation countless times with 100% success rate... and if the best is not available you make sure you don't get the novice... let him practice on someone else... it's not your problem he has to learn!

Experience

So, one way of reducing risk is to make sure you go with experience. Without the ability to look forward into the future, experience is the closest you are ever going to get to hindsight. Make sure the customer knows this and show the value of the experience... it's going to reduce the customer's risk.

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Confidence

However, experience without confidence limits its value. Do you want to be operated on by a surgeon who clearly demonstrates a lack of confidence or would you prefer to be operated on by a surgeon who exudes confidence without a trace of arrogance?

The point is, if the surgeon is not confident, then why should you be?... if as a sales professional you do not exude confidence in your solution, then why should the customer be confident?

As with laughter, confidence is infectious. Be confident, it reduces perceived risk

Be Congruent

What you say is what you mean. If you don't mean it, don't say it. It's why we often don't believe second-hand salesmen... it's because what they say is not what they mean... and as humans we can pick up consciously and sub consciously the fact that the words they use and the tone they use are not congruent with their non verbal signals.

There are three words that I always tell my delegates to remember... it's the best piece of advice I can give... it's the difference that makes the difference in communication... behavior follows intention. You don't have to worry about this if you have the right intention, but if your intention is wrong and you are trying to hide it, then you could be in deep trouble.

Whatever your intention, it will come out in your behavior and you can't stop it. You will be saying too much or not enough... the tone of your voice, volume, pitch and timbre will begin to give away your true intention... and all your non verbal messages that you will be giving out will not be congruent with what you are saying.

If you want to build trust and confidence with your customer, be congruent... it reduces perceived risk.

Help the Customer to Buy.

Behavior follows intention... if your intention is to sell, then this will come out in your behavior and the customer knows that selling is to your benefit, not theirs. However, if your intention is to help your customer to buy, then this equally will come out in your behavior and buying is for the benefit of the customer. Helping the customer to buy puts their interests above yours and therefore you become a more credible and trusted advisor. Think about it... would you accept advice from someone who has their own interests above yours?

Ask Great Questions

Sell More by Reducing Risk- continued

By Colin Wilson

There are many different activities that you need to do in sales... you have to qualify, you have to understand the customer, you have to provide information, possibly provide product demos, ask some questions... but nothing will raise your credibility more than asking great questions. A great question is one that requires the customer to think for at least 30 seconds before answering... by getting the customer to think you are helping them solve their problems. However, to be able to ask great questions you have to be very knowledgeable about the customer's organization, their industry, your organization, competitors, etc, etc

The fact that the customer has to think means you have found something that they have not thought about before... and this adds value to them, raises your credibility, builds trust and confidence and ultimately reduces their perceived risk.

Be in Sales Rapport

This is a combination of helping the customer to buy and understanding the buying and selling process. If the customer is at the Requirements stage of the buying process and you, without reference to them, think you are at the Propose stage of the sales process then you are not in rapport with your customer. Your behaviors and actions will not be aligned to where they are in the buying process and it will not 'feel' right for them... and when it does not feel right we know what happens!

Have you ever met someone and you wouldn't trust them as far as you could throw them? Well, if you have then you know what it feels like when rapport is missing. Equally, have you ever met someone who you would trust with your life and you may have only known them a few minutes? Again, if you have and I'm sure you have, then you know what being in rapport feels like.

Being in sales rapport means the customer knows you understand them and that you are not trying to bully them into an early decision... this builds trust and trust reduces perceived risk.

References

There is nothing new here... we all know that references are important... but what is the most valuable reference you can have... the one that says everything went swimmingly or the one that said there were problems?

The very best reference you can have is one that says there were problems... and they are a reference because you stuck with them and sorted the problems... you can be trusted in a time of crisis... and that is far more valuable to know than a reference who says everything was sweetness and light!

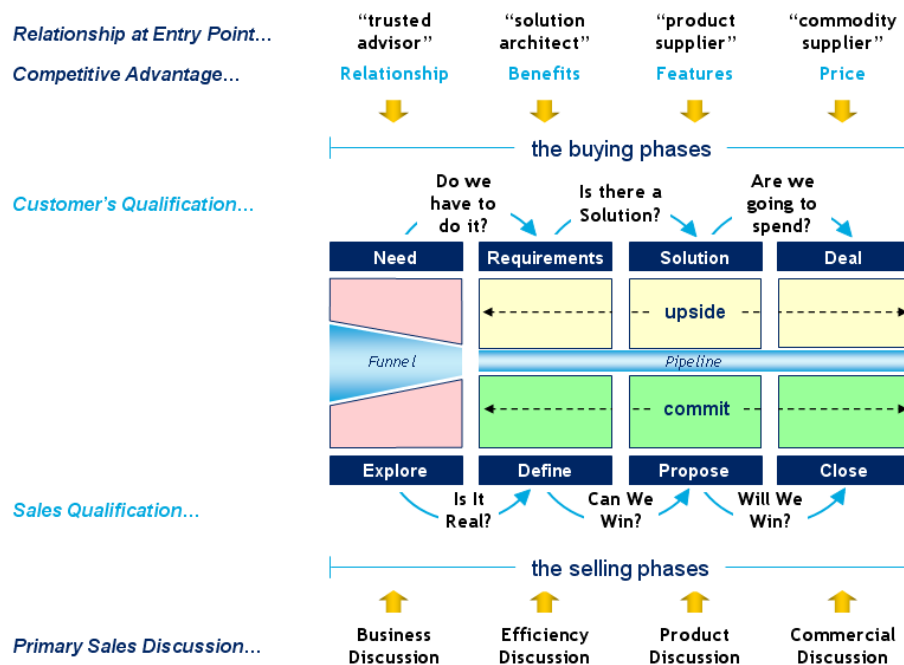
Prospects know that there will be problems and what is important to them is knowing that you will pull out all the stops to sort their problems... knowing this reduces the real risk and perceived risk.

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By Colin Wilson

Be Proactive

The diagram below shows the buying and selling phases combined together to portray the sales pipeline. Deals can enter the pipeline at any stage in the process, however, the later in the buying process then the lower your value to the customer and therefore conversely the earlier in the process, the higher your value.



If you are proactive in finding opportunities then you can start the process right at the beginning where the customer is reviewing their need... explore their need... and if you can do this then by definition you are the trusted business advisor.

Being trusted reduces the customer's perceived risk and by the fact that you can operate early in the cycle then you are delivering value and therefore you have to be very knowledgeable about their situation... this reduces the actual risk because you can make informed recommendations.

In Summary

There we have it... risk is both real and perceived and it is the perceived risk that determines decisions, because perceived risk plays on emotions and as we have already agreed... all buying is based on emotion.

Sell More by Reducing Risk- continued

By Colin Wilson

Therefore, to summarize, the 8 point plan to help reduce perceived risk is...

1. Experience – make sure you can back up what you say with experience.
2. Confidence – if you or any of your colleagues involved in the deal are not confident, then why should the customer be confident?
3. Congruent – behavior follows intention – make sure you are congruent between what you say and what you believe.
4. Help the Customer to Buy – helping the customer to buy demonstrates you have their interests above yours... it can be a very compelling way to reduce perceived risk.
5. Ask Great Questions – make the customer think and you will be invited back. Helping the customer to think reduces their risk because it shows you understand... you can't ask great questions if you don't understand!
6. Sales Rapport - being in sales rapport means the customer knows you understand them and that you are not trying to bully them into an early decision... this builds trust and trust reduces perceived risk.
7. References – use the ones that give the warts and all stories and how you saved them when things went wrong... it's how you perform when things go wrong that reduces risk.
8. Be Proactive – Helping the customer early in the process can only be achieved if you are the trusted business advisor. Being trusted reduces the customer's perceived risk. By operating early in the cycle then you are delivering value which requires that you are very knowledgeable about their situation... this reduces the actual risk because you can make informed recommendations.

There we have it... happy selling!

Colin Wilson is the founder of Firstborder Limited a sales consultancy and training company to leading corporations around the world and is also the originator of the sales pipeline methodology – Focus... the methodology that Firstborder's customers use to achieve forecast accuracy of greater than 95%.

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Using the Sales Process to Overcome the Perceived Risks in Buying Professional Services

By Ian Brodie

For a client buying professional services – be they consultancy, legal, accounting, architecture, engineering or other services; three key risks loom large:

- The *competency* risk: will the service provider be able to "do the job" successfully.
- The *compatibility* risk: will the client's team and the service provider's team be able to work together effectively to ensure the engagement is a success.
- The *solution* risk: will the work the service provider is being engaged to do actually solve the client's problem or deliver the results the client is looking for.

Since the work the service provider is being engaged to do is usually highly important to the client – often mission critical – these risks are not trivial. A failure to get your business strategy right, to design your new facility, or to handle a major litigation case: all these have huge impacts way beyond the fees being paid. Often the perceived risk is so high that unless it is overcome, the project or engagement simply won't go ahead. Let's look at each of these three risks in turn to see what the service provider can do during the sales process to decrease the perception of the risk – and hence increase the chances of a sale.

The Competency Risk

Will the service provider have the technical capabilities to actually deliver the project or engagement successfully? This is the risk that most professional services buyers and sellers focus on in the sales process. Complex, multi-stage procurement processes concentrate primarily on evaluating the technical capabilities of the potential vendors. And professional service firms themselves obsess about how to prove their credentials – almost as if this was the only criteria their clients used for selection.

The reality is, however, that technical capabilities are usually not the biggest risk that clients face when buying professional services – although it might not seem so at times. In practice, a professional firm will rarely make it through door of a client and certainly won't make it onto the shortlist for a major piece of work unless they have already established their technical credentials.

In some circumstances, however; the risk of the professional firm not having the required technical capabilities is important.

If the professional assignment is particularly complex and specialised then, of course, technical capabilities rise in significance. If you're a management consulting firm bidding for an assignment developing a market entry strategy to an Asian market, for example, and you aren't known as specialising in that sort of work – then clearly the client will want to check out your detailed knowledge of the local markets. Case studies of similar work and references from clients who faced similar situations and were helped by the firm can help reduce the perceived risk in these cases.

For a large professional firm, one major risk which their clients will be concerned about is that although the firm itself may have the necessary technical capabilities; the specific individuals who will be working on the assignment may not have.

For this reason, the more the firm can involve the key delivery staff in the sales process itself, the more comfort the client will have in their capabilities. In fact clients frequently ask for the delivery team to be part of sales

Using the Sales Process to Overcome the Perceived Risks in Buying Professional Services - continued

By Ian Brodie

presentations so they can get a feel for their capabilities. Of course, this mustn't just be the sort of "involvement in name only" so often seen – where the junior staff sit around the table at presentations and take notes but have no active part in any presentations or discussions. That adds no value to the client, and does nothing to raise the client's confidence in the team on the ground whose performance will actually determine the success of the engagement. But if the delivery team are truly involved in key client interactions – in roles mirroring what they will do on the project if sold; then the client can feel comfortable with your competence.

The Compatibility Risk

A key perceived risk which is often much more important than competence is that of compatibility. Will the professional service provider be able to work effectively with the client's staff to achieve the desired-for results? Will their respective styles, personalities and working practices gel together to form an effective team?

Only a few of the more insightful clients will look for this explicitly in their procurement processes – but it will always come into play implicitly. Whether it's an individual hiring an accountant for their small business, or a major corporation bringing in a large consultancy team for a major project; the "chemistry" of how the two sides work together is vital to a successful outcome.

An exercise I've done many times in training sessions with professional firms is to ask them why their clients hire them. The most frequent responses are the rational factors: "our experience", "our knowledge", "our expertise", "our ability to get things done".

But ask them to think about the last time they themselves hired a professional and why they chose the one they chose and a different picture emerges: "we just seemed to click", "I trusted her", "it seemed like we could work well together", "it just felt right".

These seem like irrational, emotional factors. And while they are definitely emotional – they are certainly not irrational. As human beings we have a keenly developed sense of who we will get on with and who we won't. Being able to sniff out this compatibility has real survival value in evolutionary terms. In a business environment, the same wisdom applies – if we can't work well together, the chances of the project or assignment being a success is minimal.

For work of a sensitive nature, this rises even more to the forefront of decision-making. In most cases of family law, for example, the client is usually more interested in someone who will empathise with them and provide support than they are in someone who will fight their case in the toughest and most technically effective manner in the courts. A consultant called in as a coach by an executive to help him with his leadership style will be selected more for his ability to partner and be a trusted confidante than on his knowledge of the latest leadership techniques and theories.

Yet most professional firms seem to overlook this when positioning themselves to win work. They forget that clients will – often subconsciously – be making major judgements about whether they have the right "chemistry" together. Not getting the right feeling will set alarm bells ringing for the client and alert them to the serious risk that the engagement might fail due to a lack of client-professional compatibility.

How can a professional firm mitigate this perceived compatibility risk?

Using the Sales Process to Overcome the Perceived Risks in Buying Professional Services- continued

By Ian Brodie

Well, rather than claiming that "our people are our greatest asset" or "we work closely in partnership with our clients" as many firms do, you need to actually demonstrate your ability to partner with your potential client. Third party references from other successful clients talking about how good you were to work with can help. But even then, since every client is different, the prospective client can't tell if your approach will work with them.

The only way they can really tell whether you will work well together is to see and feel it happen in practice. For existing and previous clients, this happens naturally of course – and that's one of the key reasons why you're much more likely to win repeat businesses with an existing client than a new one.

But for new clients the only hard data they have to assess what it would be like to work with you on an assignment is what it was like to work with you during the sales process. This means that your key sales leads – your partners and business developers – must find a way of interacting with the prospective client in a way that simulates the engagement you are selling. And if at all possible, bring in the staff who will actually be working on the project to do this too.

So whenever you have a sales meeting, work together with the client in a way that demonstrates your compatibility. At bare minimum, listen to them, make the meeting a pleasant experience, do your follow-up efficiently, turn-up on time, etc.

Instead of a sales presentation – do an interactive workshop with the client so they can see your team in action working with their staff (and if you do a workshop with the client's team, don't do it in isolation - make sure the client's decision-makers witness how well your two teams work together).

And, of course, if you want to demonstrate to the client that you can work with them in a way that is compatible with how they want to be worked with – you are going to have to find out what that way is. Early on in the sales process you need to identify not only what hard deliverables they want to buy – but how they want them to be achieved. In the consulting world for example: are they looking for an independent advisor to give them tough messages to "shake them up"? Or do they want someone to work more closely within their culture to make sure the messages are accepted by their management team? This knowledge can only come from good questioning – for example asking them what style of partnership works best for them and discussing some alternatives – and from good observation of the way they seem to interact with each other.

The Solution Risk

One key risk which is often overlooked by both clients and service providers is the risk that the solution the client is asking for won't actually achieve the goals they have in mind. Perhaps the sales training programme the client wants won't really help increase sales – because the bottleneck is not the sales skills of the team, it's the number of new leads coming in to the organisation. Perhaps the new work areas the architect has designed won't make the office more productive – because the issue was one of morale not workspace tools.

In some cases this risk is explicit. If the client has a business problem but doesn't know how to address that problem – then part of the selling/buying process will always involve identifying potential solutions and those solutions will be evaluated (at least in part) based on how well they solve the business problem.

But often the client comes to the professional firm with a solution already in mind. "We need to redesign the order fulfilment process", "we need to implement XYZ system", "we need some sales training" (by the way – if

Using the Sales Process to Overcome the Perceived Risks in Buying Professional Services - continued

By Ian Brodie

it seems that most of the examples so far are consulting related that's no accident – it's in consulting where this challenge is most prevalent).

In this case it's very easy for the professional to ignore the underlying business issue and focus only on trying to sell what the client is asking for. It often feels that if you were to start questioning the client on the deeper business goals then you might "open up a can of worms" and put the sale at risk. In fact sometimes the client may actually resist your attempts to discuss the underlying issue – an indication that they view you as a vendor and not yet as a business partner or advisor.

But failing to tie the work to an underlying business goal almost always damages your chances of selling. Even if your immediate client doesn't see the need to do it, someone in their organisation will. And that someone is usually their boss, the CEO or the CFO who signs the cheque. They will see the risk immediately and your chances of selling will plummet.

Using a process of gentle and respectful questioning it should be possible to draw out the key business reasons for the request; and preferably to be able to quantify the impact of the work. If that doesn't prove possible then in reality that's a signal that the "opportunity" needs some thorough qualification to test whether it really will pan out into a sale.

And through that process of questioning you will again be demonstrating your competence and your compatibility – and potentially identifying how your solution needs to be shaped to meet the real underlying needs.

Bringing it All Together

There's a common theme running through all the actions I'm recommending to mitigate the perceived risks in buying professional services:

Each of the actions involves the professional firm working with the potential client in a way that mirrors how they would work together if they were hired.

To overcome the perceived Competence risk – find a way to demonstrate your competence through your interactions with the client in the sales process.

To overcome the perceived Compatibility risk – find a way for you and your team to work effectively with the client in a "real world" situation prior to the sale.

To overcome any perceived Solution risk – work with the client to identify the real underlying benefits being sought – and show that the solution meets those needs (or reshape it until it does).

In all cases – demonstrate don't claim.

The risks the client perceives when considering buying professional services are very real. And because the product is so intangible and is so dependent on the performance of the people delivering the service, the client

can never fully rely on the words and opinions of others to make their decision. If you want to reduce their risks and persuade them to buy from you, you must find a way to allow the client to experience what it would be like to work with you.

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Bursting the fear bubble – The strategic reduction of risk required to sell the new

By Karl Goldfield

If you are comfortable in your current position and your client list is large enough, this article is not for you. If you work for a company that has not changed their offering in a decade and you do not see it changing anytime soon, please feel free to move on to the next book on the shelf.

If your company is trying to maintain a competitive advantage by releasing innovative products, if you are hungry to build your client list, or if you work for a startup, then this article is for you.

Some of you might think this a strange way to start an article; however some of you may have realized that I have immediately narrowed my target audience to the appropriate prospect for my message. This article is for the Sales Evangelist, the dreamer who wishes to continually build their skill set and master the art of selling the new. By establishing this right up front, I know that my objectives are now not in convincing, but in sharing the appropriate information to allow you to make an informed decision. The message is tailored from the beginning to eliminate the waste of time for you, my reader (the buyer), and me, your writer (the seller).

What is the point in trying to convince you that this article is for you if you really have nothing to gain from reading it? No matter what I suggest, if you are not the right person for the message, you will never be as receptive as necessary to buy what I am selling.

This is the first critical lesson in bursting the fear bubble. Pop the bubbles that have a thin layer of resistance, and forget the ones that are not meant for you to pop. As stated in the title, reducing the perceived risk of purchasing the new requires a strategy. If you start in the details, the tactics of convincing or pitching, then you are charging windmills with a silly straw. Even Don Quixote would not have bothered with that.

The Sales Evangelist takes the basic steps of moving a lead through the sales process and enhances each stage with a heightened strategy. My earlier explanation of who should be reading this article is the ideal example. Not everyone is going to become a customer of the new. If you expect the people that are most resistant to change to hear your message, you should rethink your expectations. Strategically, what you want to accomplish is a simple method for weeding out those that are not ready to embrace your offering. In the early stages of getting an unknown lead to become a qualified and viable opportunity, here are some tactics to build into your strategy.

Build a list of leads based on early adoption:

1. E-mail
 - a. If your marketing department is not building a lead cultivation campaign, you should set one up on your own. Reach out to people with a generic message clearly outlining the ways others perceive the value of your product.
 - b. Create a multiple message plan that then shares each unique value point another client has appreciated. These messages are designed to find a specific solution to an objective. If your lead sees your offering as a possible fit, you have already eliminated some fear.
 - c. Have your company provide access to a proper e-mail marketing system. You want to deliver professional e-mails following all of the appropriate rules to avoid being seen as SPAM. Make sure the system allows for easily loaded contacts and makes it simple to send messages. The goal is to reach out to many in an easy manner.
 - d. Have your company deliver qualified e-mail addresses from a reputable source. Have them provide either an opt in list, tradeshow leads, or a list from a list renting company that provides relevant leads.

Bursting the fear bubble – The strategic reduction of risk required to sell the new- continued

By Karl Goldfield

- e. When you receive a positive response, do not just jump into calling and pitching your offering. It is imperative to continue to cultivate and uncover what really will create viable dialog. First, take that person out of your queue and send them a personal e-mail that is tailored specifically to them. The more you pay attention to a company and their unique situation, the more you mirror their needs with your solutions, and the more likely you can open dialog that will bring in real opportunity.

2. Calling campaigns

- a. Create a set of scripts to deliver live and to voice mail. Use the selling points from your e-mails to present unique messaging.
- b. Deliver these messages on a consistent basis until you get shot down or you begin to create interest. Let go of the people that do not respond to a session of 8-10 voice mails. Eliminate anyone that responds to your request with a viable lack of interest.
- c. When someone is receptive, make sure they understand the highest level value points of your offering. Share with them the experiences of your clients. Relate their concerns with those of others, and really push the question of if your product is a fit, or not a fit. Remember a fit for your prospect. You want to disqualify those that really will not engage in a valuable conversation about what you offer. Just because someone is willing to listen, they are not automatically a quality lead. Disqualify those that you cannot get into the pipeline effectively, as the time you spend working with them is better served on the willing.

3. Research

- a. This is one of the most neglected tools in the Sales Evangelist toolkit. People will spend numerous hours organizing, contemplating, and procrastinating. They rarely spend hours sourcing the innovators and early adaptors that should be on their target lists through research.
- b. The simplest way to find those that embrace the new is to research companies that offer the new. Most of these companies promote their client lists on their website. They often publish press releases when they sign a new client. Call on the clients of other people offering the new. Finding these “first to embrace” organizations can lead you to C level executives that can see the value in staying in front of the competition.
- c. Read the news sites and set up Google alerts that relate to your industry or sector. As my colleague Craig Elias points out, trigger events are a major factor in what starts the buying process. A trigger event is anything that causes a company to change the way they are doing things. If you can uncover what events would create interest in your offering, you can create a healthy lead source.

Developing those leads into prospects:

Here is where many sales people fail in taking a generated lead and make some viable progress. When someone shows initial interest, they are still a lead. Before pitching and trying to force the lead through the sales process, you must determine if there is really a probability of a sale. If the probability is low, then it is better to move on to the next lead.

To qualify an early adopter you should look for:

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1. A quick study that tends to understand what you are trying to offer. They will start to see the value of the way in which you can make a difference. If you have to explain everything to your lead, you probably are not dealing with someone who lives on the cutting edge.
2. There is a constant exchange and many questions digging into why change is necessary. They do not seem apprehensive to change, but want to understand the advantages of change. This shows a necessary intuitiveness that helps the early adopter evaluate risk.
3. They ask who else is using your offering and are looking for competitors. This seems less for comfort and more for the possibility of gaining a competitive advantage.
4. They are not at all concerned about the price. People that foray into the new do not worry about price when they are trying to understand what is being offered. Price pushers are usually not going to buy something before everyone else has it.
5. You get excited talking to them and leave each conversation with a little more information about how they operate. The early adopter could also be called a buying evangelist.

The communication between you and your lead will be thought provocative if there is really a chance for success.

Turning prospects in opportunities:

Let's say you managed to get that quick meeting or a conference call. It is time to strut your stuff. You want to learn then share, learn then share, all the while holding back and not giving away everything. Again, premature presentation can be a deal killer. It is time now to engage in just the right amount of discovery with a similar mix of explanation. Do not turn the meeting into an interview. Remember, the early adopter will want to understand what they are getting into.

1. Share the value of a product, and even if they are techies, avoid the deep dive. Leave them with the benefit of using the product, not merely the data. Data can add fear for lack of understanding.
2. Give them facts: Facts from testing, facts from case studies; and facts in the form of customer quotes. It is hard to fight facts. Therefore, facts reduce fear.
3. Exude confidence. It is not often that an early adopter will patiently listen to the unsure fumble about and shakily share information. If you truly are the one to take the company on your back, you must believe it. If you are the passionate deliverer of the new, you have to live it.

Forget the ridiculous 80-20 rule of sales communication. Forget all the tricks of turning questions around. This is not a game. If you deflect the prospect's questions and leave them without answers, you are denying them

the required data to let you pop that bubble. To convert the non-believers, a sales evangelist must start with the most curious. The curious will inquire and sharing with them the benefit of working with you will deliver again and again. Fear is a strong barrier and once it is gone, sales happen in high speed acceleration.

Karl Goldfield is passionate about developing teams for emerging companies. For the past fifteen years, he has shown the ability to deliver beyond expectations through continual innovation. By establishing a plan then testing the boundaries of that plan, Karl provides methodologies that help to address particular challenges. He delivers strategies that allow startups to mold sales teams from the clay of their own attributes.

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6 Ways to Deliver Trust in Computer Aided Sales Systems - An Olympic Feat?

By Nesh Thompson

In this year's Beijing Olympics, we saw an intriguing and entertaining contest between the fittest and best athletes competing in multiple disciplines from all around the world. For some, this was the culmination of four years of preparation, training and disciplined competitive trials. Yet how many of us saw what preceded the actual contest. What we saw was a momentary finale, a fleeting snapshot if you will, that determined whether those four years had been successful or not. Afterwards, we perhaps thought "How talented and gifted that person is, how naturally fast, how amazingly athletic". How many of us pondered "I wonder what training facility that athlete used, or what kind of aerodynamic helmet that cyclist was wearing, or even what kind of shoes that sprinter wore?" We are clever enough to realize that tools aren't the reason why a person wins. Will I win the 100m final if I wear the same shoes as Usain Bolt? - Of course not. I'll bet the athlete knows how important their aids and tools are, though.

In sales, some of us are utterly confused about the importance our sales tools play in our personal and organizational development.

This book focuses on reducing risk by building better relationships. One of the most important relationships (other than the one you have with the customer) is with things that you have access to on a daily basis i.e. phones, pda's, web sites, computer aided sales tools etc. Internally, if there is little reciprocal positives from your relationship with the tools that you use then this will affect the potential you have in increasing your sales performance externally.

Here are some things to consider when using computers to aid sales performance. Much is based on larger corporate business to business models but some elements are appropriate in business to consumer selling.

1. Developing an Efficient Training Regimen Through A Joint Venture

More often than not sales systems are brokered between IT companies and the management of an organization. In depth negotiation happens and many 'solutions' are looked at before the right system is unveiled to the sales force from a beaming and hopeful upper management. Unfortunately, this is when sales force skepticism makes or breaks the venture. Management expends energy in persuading 'buy in' to the system rather than using the system itself.

In the athletic world, there is a symbiosis between the trainer and athlete in increasing performance. They both realize that they are aiming for the same goal. The negotiations that happen prior to business system procurement rarely involve those that it is affecting the most. The 'solutions' explored are mostly for the benefit of those that are spending the money i.e. Management. In this situation, skepticism from the sales force can't therefore be unseen.

In theory, the objectives of management and the sales force aren't dissimilar to that of the trainer and athlete; they both want to improve and achieve the same goals. A Managers function includes the making of important decisions but that doesn't mean that they have to make those decisions alone. Including the sales force in exploring 'solutions' is a great way to explore future collaboration and promote 'buy in' when those important decisions have been made.

The sales force is more likely to adopt new systems if they feel they are a part of the process.

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By Nesh Thompson

2. Generating The Right Expectations - There Is No A.I.

Making a sales system work requires the right amount of perspective in what is expected from both the system and the people using it. Successful rowing teams use state of the art streamlined boats and oars, but the boats don't win the race. On the other hand, nor can the oarsman win the race without the boat. Similarly, technology can be a serious help but there is a tendency to over anticipate the return that the tools are going to give.

This has been stated many times before, but I think that it is worth re-iterating. Terms like 'Sales Force Automation' and 'Customer Relationship Management' are misleading. Any definition of a system which suggests that parts of the sales process are taken over is unhelpful in gaining the right attitudes in use by the sales force.

Because we live in a highly digital age, there is a dangerous overlap in assumptions of what computers can do and what they actually can do. Computers give the illusion of intelligence and so in some circumstances there is an over anticipation of what a system supplies. A possible consequence of this misjudgment is a decrease in the sales person's own productivity.

A sales system is not a substitute. It is not an extra salesperson. It has vast potential in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of sales people but it requires the dedication and perseverance from that sales person to put the effort into using the system.

3. Sabotage By Micro-Management

Sales people aren't stupid, they know that systems are intended to be used by management to understand and increase performance. They know that they have targets and that they will be measured upon those targets. What is unappreciated is the way that some managers will use the information inputted into the system to continually check up on performance and increase the pressure on sales people.

For the sake of improving the effectiveness of the sales force, it is generally a good idea to have an understanding of all sales information when it happens. There is advantage to having the ability to review information like, the cost of sale, the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, and the average performance of sales people through the sales process. The openness of providing this information is beneficial to the company, but in having transparency there is the temptation to use the information as a policing tool.

If the sales force is dissuaded from engaging due to over-pressurization then no matter how beneficial the sales system is, it won't work.

Clear guidelines on how information will be used by management must be drawn up. Information must be treated with respect and used to promote improvement. Over reliance of systems as enforcement tools will dissuade sales force usage and negate the benefits of the system.

4. What's In It For Me?

As has already been stated, of the many 'solutions' explored in procuring a sales system, most avenues of negotiation usually involve exploration at managerial level. Because of this non-inclusion in the buying process,

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the sales person is not inclined to use the system because they only see benefits filtering through to those above them, rather than themselves.

It is perhaps inconceivable that any system would be implemented that only benefited upper management. However, any such organizational improvement that excludes the opinions of those affected could possibly result in resentment and suspicion. Two ways to improve the uptake of any system implementation include:

I. **Inclusion in the buying process** - Engaging and getting input from the sales force throughout the buying process of a sales system will be both beneficial in finding out what the sales force actually needs and should increase inclusion.

II. **Highlight personal benefits** – Sales people are concerned with their own business. They want to know how they are going to improve on their sales quotas. They may not be interested in the 5% increase that Company A will improve in their cost of sale, but they will be interested in being able to improve their own personal sales processes so that they can achieve more commission.

Whatever the benefits are for the company as a whole, sales systems are going to be used by sales people and therefore should be all about them.

5. Conforming To Expectation And The Individuality Of The Business Model

Are all athletes the same? How different is a cyclist to a high jumper? Even in similar disciplines how similar are 100m sprinters to 1500m runners? Even in the same discipline how similar is one competitor from another? Do they train in the same facilities, use the same regimens? Of course they don't.

Are all businesses the same? Do they all have the same sales processes?

If we were to accept the idea that companies, even ones selling similar products, have different ways of selling that have developed over many years, why adopt generic digital sales aids? Is it because everyone else is doing the same thing? Just because something works in company A, does it mean that exact same configuration will work in company B?

Athletes aren't afraid of developing a regimen unique to their own strengths and character, but that same fearless attitude isn't as prevalent in the business world. If appropriate, why not have a system that is tailored to your business rather than the generically marketed global brand name.

A company's individuality would be ideally reflected by a sales system that echoes that individuality.

6. Having The Right Tools

The quandary that organizations face is that in creating stability the organization is loathed to enact change. This is none truer than in the case of using sales systems within an organization, especially the use of the internet which can be used for lead generation and relationship building.

6 Ways to Deliver Trust in Computer Aided Sales Systems - An Olympic Feat? - continued

By Nesh Thompson

Let us go back to what we said earlier in realizing that tools aren't the reason why a person wins. We can say that they are an enhancer of potential as well as being a psychological advantage if used right. The use of the wrong tools can hamper progress and be a psychological disadvantage. Take for instance modern swimmers who in the Beijing Olympics smashed so many records. Much has been said of the design of the pools and the new materials made in providing even more streamlined swimsuits. Imagine the winners of those events swimming in Edwardian/Victorian woolen costumes, would they still have won? Some of them might have, but their performance would have been severely hampered.

Despite studies proving the benefits of sales software,¹ there are companies and sales professionals who still only believe in gut instinct and their own selling skills. In the same vein as the Olympic athlete, no detraction is made about the ability of sales people when implementing sales systems². The use of sales tools in enhancing those abilities throughout the organization is paramount in gaining that competitive advantage that could mean the difference between a company getting gold and missing out on a medal.

No doubt there are many companies who have implemented systems to aid their efforts but who also view upgrading and updating these systems to be less important. There are some who pay lip service to the benefits that software can serve but whose usage of these systems is rarely used to their full potential. There are also some whose systems are clearly wrong and because of the apparent lack of benefits accrued, belief in what can be achieved is diluted resulting in less ambition to explore change.

There's an old saying "if you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got". If your goal is to be better at anything, then something needs to change. "Change" may be a buzz word for politics, but it is also a state of mind. Outdated, incompatible, and unused systems cannot hope to achieve this change. Improvement and a constant desire for perfectionism will keep a business using the right systems at the right time.

There must be a belief in the benefits that sales systems can offer the business and individual. IT systems are never a replacement for skill and can only enhance and augment those abilities. Of those who have systems in place, constant questioning and improvement must be a constant intention. Sales systems are a long term sales aid that requires long term commitment.

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¹ Accenture Study into "How organizations use enterprise systems to achieve business value and high performance." 2005 - 2006

² Though streamlined performance throughout the organization will identify quicker those who don't have the necessary skills

Reduce Risk by Creating Exceptional Clarity

By Skip Anderson

Every customer has had a bad experience with at least one salesperson and at least one company in their history of purchasing products and services. These negative experiences have created an attitude of fear which now permeates the customer's thinking whenever he is considering the new purchase of a product or service.

Similarly, every salesperson has had a bad experience with at least one customer because of a lack of clarity about which product was ordered, or a particular product specification, or a detail about the product. These negative experiences can take a toll on the salesperson's confidence in his dealings with any new prospect, and when problems arise, additional time must be committed to the situation to remedy it.

The Element of Fear

This fear illustrates an element of risk that exists for both the prospect and the salesperson. "What if I get the wrong product again?" thinks the prospect to himself. "What if this customer causes problems for me?" thinks the salesperson.

Although some people are more risk tolerant than others, everybody feels increased comfort whenever the fear of risk is reduced. This is true of customers (regarding their comfort level with a product, a salesperson, and a company), and it also is true of salespeople.

Exceptional clarity can be the catalyst to reduce the risk that prospects fear when considering a new purchase, or working with a new company, or changing supplier for an ongoing purchase. This clarity can also remedy the salesperson's fear that some issue could arise after the sale to cause confusion or require financial or other resources to be dispatched to remedy the situation.

The Need for Exceptional Clarity

The need for exceptional clarity exists in the buying/selling process in three forms:

1. The *prospect's* exceptional clarity about her needs and desires. How can the prospect make the best purchase decision if she doesn't understand her needs thoroughly?
2. The *salesperson's* exceptional clarity about the prospect's needs and desires. How can the salesperson make recommendations if he doesn't understand the prospect?
3. The exceptional clarity that both *prospect and salesperson* share about the details and specifics of the products or services purchased, and also the fulfillment of that purchase. How can the salesperson meet the expectations of the prospect if the salesperson and prospect aren't on the same page?

With exceptional clarity existing in these three areas, the salesperson can benefit in three ways:

1. Exceptional clarity can create a problem-free fulfillment of the customer's order, which saves resources of time and money (and also saves frustration - and perhaps financial costs - on the part of the buyer).
2. Exceptional clarity during this interaction can help earn repeat business from the customer.
3. Exceptional clarity during this encounter can help the salesperson to receive referral business from the new customer.

Reduce Risk by Creating Exceptional Clarity- continued

By Skip Anderson

It's clear that exceptional clarity can play a significant role in the salesperson's mission of creating profitable revenue for him and his company!

How to Create Exceptional Clarity with your Prospects

I. Create exceptional clarity in the mind of the customer.

Vagueness that exists in the prospect's mind during the sales process can cloud the issues surrounding the potential purchase and even derail the transaction. When *needs vagueness* is replaced with *exceptional clarity* about his needs, the prospect has an opportunity to zero in on his precise buying motivations rather than settle for a cursory understanding of his general, or generic, needs and therefore, his precise purchase motivations.

Here are the symptoms of a lack of exceptional clarity of needs on the part of the prospect:

A. Making incorrect assumptions. The salesperson's perceptive processes must be set to high-receive so she can recognize and identify faulty assumptions being made by her prospect. Incorrect assumptions can be managed, but only when the salesperson is highly attentive to recognizing the prospect's language of clarity. When that language is absent from the interaction, there is great likelihood of incorrect assumptions being made on the part of the prospect.

When the prospect makes incorrect assumptions, exceptional clarity does not yet exist.

B. Not listening carefully. In a company I used to work for, we would quote a delivery time of 8-12 weeks on a particular product category. This range was a realistic estimate of time to fulfill a customer's order.

But problems were commonplace when customers would mentally absorb the "8" part of the range, but almost immediately forgot the "12" part of the range. So a customer's order that arrived in eleven weeks, which was clearly in the stated range of 8-12 weeks, was *three weeks late* to some customers. This isn't a good thing for any salesperson or any sales organization, nor is it good for the customer.

In an effort to create exceptional clarity, I've often suggested to clients that they use this format for explaining lead-time on an order: "12 weeks or less." If you *must* give a product arrival estimate, start with the higher number first (as in "12-8 weeks") since many buyers remember the first detail they hear but forget the subsequent details. If there are objections that the lead-time is too long (on the front end of the transaction), great! It's much easier to deal with an objection like this when the order is placed, than when the angry customer calls you to find out where your order is, and then begins to knit-pick to find other areas of dissatisfaction with you, your product, and your company.

Again, the salesperson's mind must be set to high-receive to identify prospects who aren't listening carefully.

C. Not addressing issues that need to be addressed. I did a ride-along coaching session once with a salesperson who had a customer who was concerned about the color of her product. She eventually bought; but even after signing on the dotted line, the customer kept saying, "I hope it's not too yellow." This comment should have been a cause for concern on the part of the salesperson, because selling a product to a customer that is that concerned is risky. To take this a step further, imagine a situation where the customer was *think the color was too yellow* but wasn't verbalizing it to the salesperson. This is even less clarity about the product meeting the needs of the customer.

A helpful guideline here is that salespeople must address issues that are on their customers' minds even if the customer doesn't verbalize those issues. The salesperson must also address that little voice in their own mind

Reduce Risk by Creating Exceptional Clarity- continued

By Skip Anderson

that rears its head from time-to-time (you know, that little voice that tells you something isn't right, or that there is an underlying concern but you can't quite put your finger on it?).

Too many salespeople don't listen to that little voice, and they're rewarded by either a "no sale" or a problem down the line if the customer *did* place their order. If, during a customer interaction you have a little voice saying, "Ooooh...that could be a problem!!!" it's best to address it immediately so that you can understand the problem, find out the scope of the issue with your prospect, and then proceed.

2. Create exceptional clarity in the mind of the salesperson.

It's easier for a salesperson to position her product to fulfill the needs of a prospect if the salesperson has a crystal clear understanding of the prospect's needs. The enemy of this exceptional clarity starts in one of three areas:

A. Making incorrect assumptions. Never jump to a conclusion...always test your guesses. The skilled sales professional is on a constant mission to *not assume*. Sure, even if you do make an assumption, sometimes you'll luck out and you will be correct. But at least half the time your assumption will be incorrect, and that can be disastrous.

B. Not listening carefully. I recently observed a salesperson-prospect interaction. The salesperson wasn't listening to the prospect. The salesperson was trying to figure out what product to present, but the time wasn't right for that yet. The customer was trying to get her some information to the salesperson, but the customer was getting frustrated with the salesperson. Everything about the salesperson (her body language, her facial expression, her eye contact) made it clear that she was not living in the moment with her prospect, but was instead in deep thought about the product as it applied to this customer.

In the sales profession, there is *never* a time when listening carefully is not vitally important.

C. Not addressing issues that need to be addressed. Some salespeople suffer from *Sweep it Under the Rug Syndrome* (S.U.R.S.), the affliction that causes issues to be ignored in hopes that they will go away. This is a strategy which will cause you to fail repeatedly. For fear of upsetting equilibrium in the relationship (or a fear of upsetting the customers), every day salespeople shy away from meeting sales challenges head-on.

Take the direct approach: look your prospect in the eye and address the issue you must address. Don't hint; don't suggest; don't beat around the bush. Communicate! This communication encourages the creation of exceptional clarity.

3. Create exceptional clarity in the minds of both prospect and salesperson about the details and specifics of the products or services purchased, and the fulfillment of that purchase.

A. Put it in writing. When possible, put your details in writing and have the customer sign-off. Whether a formal contract or something less formal, this will help create clarity. When a formal written agreement is not possible or appropriate, consider sending an email that states something like this: "My understanding is you want delivery on a Tuesday, so we will proceed accordingly. If this is incorrect or doesn't match with your expectations, please let me know today." That way, if something goes wrong, you've got a record of your communication (and also a record of *no response* to that communication from the prospect).

B. Review details often. Review the details of the order several times, for example, maybe it makes sense to review the customer's payment schedule before the customer purchases, and also when the customer is consummating the transaction, and again after the purchase.

Reduce Risk by Creating Exceptional Clarity - continued

By Skip Anderson

C. Ask if the prospect has questions frequently. A great deal of confusion can be cured with customer questions, so encourage them. Questions lead to answers and answers lead to exceptional clarity.

Exceptional clarity isn't a coincidence; it is crafted by the sales professional to reduce the customer's risk and also reduce the risk of the seller. Both are admirable missions! Create exceptional clarity with your customers.

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Trust Me!

By Tibor Shanto

Recently I was watching one of the Sunday morning talkfests on one of the news networks, where once again (or is it still) the pundits were discussing the most minute and inconsequential aspect of the 2008 Presidential elections in the States. One commentator did make an interesting observation, and we paraphrase:

“The challenge for Obama is as follows, people like Obama, people may not like McCain, but people trust McCain and they don’t yet trust Obama. Obama’s dilemma is that people will likely vote for someone they trust”

This was before the main parties had their respective conventions, so the discussion turned to what had to take place for Obama to win. Based on his observation, of course he saw the key for victory lay in Obama developing trust among voters. In typical news network fashion, as things were about to turn meaningful and specific, they had to go to commercial break, and the road to Obama’s trust building drifted off into a detergent or nasal spray pitch.

After reflecting on how my shirts can now be whiter than white, I began to think about the question on the table, if it is not enough to be liked, and it takes trust to get people to buy into your message, how does anyone accomplish that, how can they get people to follow them across that bridge. It made me think about the challenges sales people face having to also develop trust in order to get prospects to engage with them, choose them, their solution, give them money, and in the process their trust.

Too many sales people rely too much or solely on being liked; we all have met reps who are personable, instantly likeable. They are very able to strike a positive response in people they meet; they appear to have instant rapport. In many cases this rapport may be fleeting and is not enough to carry them to the next phase of the sale. They lack the ability or substance to sustain and expand the initial “likeable” impression and they fail to convert it into trust and as a result the prospect to a customer.

So let’s take a look at some of the attributes of trust and things one needs to do to develop nurture and maintain trust. First thing is to understand and define trust, according to the dictionary trust is:

- 1 a:** *assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something*
- 2:** *to have belief or confidence in the honesty, goodness, skill or safety of a person, organization or thing:*
- 3:** *acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation.*

One of the challenges sales people have is living up to the full definition of trust, they fall into the enticing trap of believing that if they strike a rapport with the prospect, getting the prospect to like them based on the way talk, present themselves and their product, the product will take care of things, success will lead to trust. Believing that the reputation of their company, their brand and product will to a great degree address the prospect’s willingness to accept what they say as fact and limit investigation of facts and encourage the buyer to rely on testimonials or rehearsed references for evidence. At times despite everyone’s better intentions, the whole procurement process tends to perpetuate if not legitimize this approach.

In many ways the sales rep is guided to do just that, not just by their manager and company, but by the whole profession and institution of “sales”. Very few sales programs out there address the specifics of assured reliance, strength of character, conveying confidence and honesty.

In fact some leading programs do the exact opposite. Not by design, but through application. Trust after all is a bond, not in the “I am bonding with you so it is safe to buy from me” way; but in the financial and traditional sense of “my word is my bond” way. In the process of execution, they in fact achieve the former more often than the latter.

Trust Me! - continued

By Tibor Shanto

Sales, like economics has many schools of thought and related beliefs, and depending on which you belong to and adopt will determine how you view things, act and react. I always liked the substance over style school, where it matters less how polished you are, what really counts is what you are trying to accomplish. Stated a different way, and this was taught to me before I entered sales, people will see your intentions and react to those directly, over and above your technique, approach or methodology. Just think of the old expression "I can see through that".

This is true in a very specific and consistent way and is more than just a visceral reaction. It is due to something that is at the core of trust and more importantly something you can manage to everyone's advantage. Core to trust is values, personal values, business values and corporate values. Values drive our outlook, the filters we use to evaluate things, sets our state of mind. When there is a disconnect with values, trust is at risk; this disconnect can present itself in a number of ways, let's look at a couple that are common and can be easily resolved.

Often when you visit companies, at the offices or their web sites, they will present their "Mission Statement" or "Value Statements" right there for all to see. The great thing about a mission value statement is they serve to remind employees at all levels why the company exists, what the original people who created the company had imagined and hoped the company would be and stand for. It also tells suppliers and customers what the company stands for, what it's core values are; it is that social element, a clear indicator of the corporate culture, the social contract that extends the financial contract into a true relationship.

It also presents a potential trap for a lot of companies, because it also provides a measure or standard of sorts that the company has allowed itself to be measured by, it exposes a moral compass that can be a real plus or real danger in the case of an obvious deviation from the stated values or mission. Let's look at a couple of examples (the names have been changed to protect the innocent, which is me):

XYZ's mission is to "Be the best in the eyes of our customers, employees and shareholders."

Or

To be the providers of A.B.C. strategies and services, which deliver long term commercial benefits, based upon our clients key business requirements. The strategies evolved should be economical, efficient, durable, flexible, and allow the organizations to respond rapidly to both market and customer needs.

Or

Our Core Values

We commit to uphold the following values as we pursue our mission and vision:

RESPECT - We demonstrate fairness, consistency and compassion in our interactions with others.

INTEGRITY - We conduct ourselves at all times in a professional and ethical manner. Honesty, openness and transparency are the hallmarks of the way we conduct our business.

LEADERSHIP - We foster leadership at all levels. We encourage innovation and promote excellence through continuous learning and increased knowledge and development.

TRUST - We are reliable, dependable and accountable for our actions.

Many companies are really good at managing two potentially conflicting forces maximizing value for shareholder and delivering best of breed solutions and economic value to clients. They can even balance this with an environment where employees can grow, thrive and as a result reduce turnover, further fuelling the process that validates the mission or value statements. By staying true to their values and using them as a guide in the way they acquire and treat their customers, they create an environment of trust that is constantly reinforced for the prospect/customer.

Trust Me! - continued

By Tibor Shanto

On the other hand there are also a lot of companies that do not live up to their mission statement. We are not even talking about those companies that are knowingly out to bilk their customers, but the many good companies that find their sales process, and some of their sales people at odds with their core values. There are a number of organizations where sales leaders, VP and directors drive sales at all cost, creating an environment where reps are told to bring in the deal at any cost. While we tend to associate this with telemarketers of a certain breed, say lawn care, window replacement at times credit card providers, these practices are prevalent at many blue or turquoise chip companies.

Let's face it, it's not hard to see why this happens. Pressure starts on Wall Street, where public companies are severely punished for missing numbers. This then shows up in monthly or semi-monthly finance meetings where forecasts and numbers are scrutinized and falling short and variance are not tolerated well; it then cascades down to the front line rep through the line manager, and bam, it is now in the face of the customer. The customer who can sense and sometimes clearly see the disconnect in values espoused and values demonstrated.

Just think of the traditional month end ritual of driving deals, the frenzy of activity that is driven not by "customer needs" or "long term commercial benefits, based upon our clients key business requirements", but by the need to bring in the money, hit your targets meet or exceed forecast. There are many other examples of this, and no matter which ritual it is, the way it unfolds just serves to delegitimize the value component of trust.

At the point of contact between the sales rep and the prospect, there are often conflicting signals and realities between what the rep says and presents, and the intent behind their actions. While on the one hand the talk is about a solution unique to the client's need, the pitch is a standard product. While "probing" and asking "insightful questions", some only listen to answers that serve their needs to close a sales and filter out those that don't fit the filters. Sadly often the things ignored could lead to better or bigger sales, but they take effort and time. Effort and time that may build trust, but the sales may materialize in the next quarter, so they ignored, rationalized or brushed aside, along with trust or the chance to build some.

I worked with one service provider with a sale cycle of 6 weeks, but they still insisted that sales be completed in a month. Prospect they initiated the first 10 days of the month had a different experience that those in the last 15 of the month, and by extension, their level of trust that defined the relationship was vastly different as a result. The ones who came in to the process early in the month were generally pressured into buying by month end, or were offered a discount last minute. If pressured, they would always remain suspect of the "vendor" who was rarely able to be viewed more than just a series of transactions. For those that came in to the process late in the month, and could properly go through the 6 week cycle, there was little pressure, there was the ability to realize and build full value, and trust that paid dividends as the relationship evolved from that first transaction to mutual reliance. The first group even if not pressured, but were enticed by a discount, still had difficulty trusting because of the adverse impact on trust. If it was \$10 last week, why is it only \$6.50 now that we are at the 27th of the month?

One last example, often when we ask sales people what a rep needs to be successful, one of the strangest yet regularly offered responses is "we need to act empathetic". The fact that it is an act, as opposed to sincere empathy, and a genuine desire to help their customer, destroys trust. What many fail to realize is their intentions come across very clearly, no matter how good the act. Clients will always be able to tune in to your intentions and then base judgment on that, and if they feel that what you say is at odds with your value, or how you act is not genuine, then they will not be able to trust you until that alignment is re-established.

So as the old saying goes: This above all: to thine own self be true. If not, the client/prospect will know, and fail to trust or buy from you. As stated earlier, this is truly manageable and avoidable.

I bring over 20 years of sales, executive, leadership and sales operations experience in financial, information, content management and professional service industries. Prior to Renbor, I spent 10 years with Dow Jones, including 5 with its subsidiary Factiva. As Principal of Renbor Sales Solutions Inc., Tibor works with Canada's leading corporations helping these organizations realize sustained revenue attainment through improvement in sales strategy and execution.

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Minimize Risk by Alleviating Concern

By Tim Rohrer

As a buyer of goods and services, I am constantly trying to reduce my risk. A couple of years ago when I was shopping for a widescreen TV, I was really concerned about purchasing something that A) Would work for a while and then break and B) Would be outdated long before the amount of use justified the cost. As I shopped, I kept my concerns in mind and worked hard to make sure I minimized my risk. As a result, I purchased the TV from a retailer that offered a long-term warranty, a reasonable price on a service agreement and employed someone that taught me the ins and outs of digital and HD TV. By the time we closed the deal, I felt that my risk was minimal. This was good for my peace of mind but it was really good for the seller of the TV! If I didn't feel that the risk had been minimized, I wouldn't have been a buyer.

While the customer is always working to minimize his own risk, a savvy seller discovers the buyer's concerns and actively tries to help him reduce his risks. Sellers reduce the risks to a buyer in order to increase the buyer's confidence and sell more.

Most purchases come with an implied benefit that must be met or else the sale is void. A basketball must bounce, a mattress must support your weight, a refrigerator must keep things cold and a TV must display broadcast signals.

But, the implied benefit of personal services or intangible products is more difficult to discern. If I'm not happy with the way the lawn service cut my grass, there is nothing to take back to the store. The benefit implied by a lawn service is that they will do a professional job of manicuring my lawn. However, my inference of their service is that I will be satisfied. The gap between their implication and my inference is the risk I take when I hire them. It is the "risk gap".

The risk gap exists even if the lawn service has expressly stated that it will manicure my lawn in a professional manner and even if I have told them I am happiest when the mulch circles around my trees have a radius of exactly four feet. This is true because words are interpreted differently by those who say them and those who hear them. A lawn service that offers a "professionally manicured" lawn may mean something entirely different than what I expect.

Media sellers have to deal with the risk gap all the time. Buyers of media have an expectation that something positive will happen to their business because of the media that was purchased. Foot traffic will increase to a retail store because of the insert in the Sunday paper. The number of phone calls will go up because of a television commercial or the number of visits to a web page will soar because the right key words were purchased from a search engine. The risk that none of these things will happen make buying media a scary proposition for most clients.

As a result, media buyers have put various safeguards in place to reduce their risk.

One way that media buyers have reduced their risk is to **commoditize media** by finding a common way of valuing all competitors within a medium. The circulation of magazines are compared to each other so that ads can be purchased based on **cost per thousand reached**. Radio station's ratings are compared to each other so that ads can be purchased on a **cost per rating point** basis. Internet networks are purchased based on cost per thousand or for an even less risky approach – **cost per click**. Commoditizing a product to reduce the inherent risk of buying it is commonplace.

Minimize Risk by Alleviating Concern- continued

By Tim Rohrer

The effect of commoditized pricing is detrimental to media sellers and must be resisted. When media buyers find a way to compare the price of each supplier within a given medium, they are one step away from effectively setting the price. If a medium can not remain independent of commoditized prices, its sellers become less valuable. One can easily see that if the commoditization of price is the only way for a buyer to reduce her risk, sellers of that medium will suffer financially. So, the question for media sellers is **“How do you reduce the risks of buying your media and sell more of it without succumbing to commoditized prices?”**

There are lots of ways.

Use Qualitative Data

Not too long ago, the president of NBC-TV was quoted declaring the viewers of his network to be of a higher quality than the typical television viewer. He cited qualitative data that indicated NBC viewers were more likely to be home owners and more likely to have higher incomes. He was working hard to find an aspect of his product that made it unique. In effect, he was saying that you can't buy his ratings points for the same price as the other's guys because the people behind the ratings were worth more. While network TV may have been new to this argument, radio stations and magazines have been familiar with it for some time.

Qualitative data separates one set of ratings points from another. As a result, qualitative data reduces the risk of buying one member of a medium at a higher price than another

Add Value That is Unique to You

Can your magazine produce a seminar that attracts high-net worth investors? Does your radio station have the best known personality in the market doing endorsements? Does your TV station have special access to a celebrity who could be convinced to make a special appearance? Does your newspaper have a bunch of signed books from a popular author sitting in a closet just waiting to be distributed as gifts to valued clients? Can your website allow a picture of a car to come racing across the page, slide to a stop and have the driver pop out and address the viewer?

These are all examples of value that you might be able to add to the media buying experience; value that is unique to you and can't be matched by the competition or commoditized by the customer. By adding this type of added value, you are reducing the risk associated with buying your media and pointing out the possibility that your competition represents a greater risk.

Offer Referrals

Nothing reduces the risk for a buyer like a referral. When my wife and I decided to finish our basement we called the contractor that had been sending us postcards for two years. We were concerned about inviting a stranger into our home for eight weeks. We were concerned that the quality of the finished product wouldn't match the quality of the rest of the house. Our concerns were allayed by our neighbors who acted as referrals for the contractor. Not only did they vouch for him in writing but they invited us to visit their homes and see the finished product.

Media sellers should gather testimonials from satisfied customers and trot them out whenever they ask a new prospect for money. Referrals from your satisfied customers reduce the risk for your new customers.

Offer Performance Guarantees

Minimize Risk by Alleviating Concern- continued

By Tim Rohrer

Nothing has hurt traditional media as much as the performance guarantees of new media. Media buyers desire, no demand, accountability and they are getting it from everyone. If you promised that an ad would reach 10,000 people and it didn't, then you need to offer additional advertising to make good the difference. If your performance guarantee is in writing, your buyers will perceive a dramatic reduction in their risk and buy more from you.

Execute Flawlessly

Customers appreciate that you are offering them a good deal. But, it doesn't matter if you don't run their advertising as purchased, forget to perform the added value and then get them an inaccurate bill in an untimely manner. Even though media buyers have tried to commoditize media prices, they are always willing to pay a little bit more to the outfit that executes flawlessly.

The opposite is true, too. There is no way that a media buyer will consider investing money with you if the risk that you might execute in a sloppy manner outweighs the cheap deal you've put on the table.

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