



Shorten Sales Cycles by Capitalizing on Trigger Events

By Craig Elias

Jed keeps getting what sound like positive buying signals with his prospecting calls. Somehow, though, he doesn't get very far.

"People tell me to call back in two months, four months, six months, when they will be looking at this problem," he says, perplexed. "When I call back, people tell me how glad they are that I called, but my close ratio is low, and my sales cycles are way too long. What's going on?"

When you cold call someone in an attempt to sell them something, you're interrupting that person's day. The dominant instinct is always going to be for that person to find any reason to get off the phone and get back to what he was doing before you interrupted him.

Your goal has to be to maintain your poise and get past that first 15 to 30 seconds of the initial call, which is always going to be a little bumpy.

You're riding out those first 15 to 30 seconds not so you can try to turn the person into a short-term prospect on the spot. You're doing it because you're trying to discover if this person has experienced a trigger event. If there has been such an event, you want to find out what it was and when it happened. The trigger event could have taken place quite a while ago, it could have happened only recently, or it could still be on the horizon.

Trigger events typically fall into one of these categories:

- **Bad experience:** the buyer has a bad experience with a service, with people, or with a provider. For instance, there may have been a service change that creates dissatisfaction.
- **Change/transition:** the buyer has a change or transition in people, places, or priorities. For instance, there may have been a change in the buyer at an account.
- **Awareness:** the buyer becomes aware of the need to change for legal, risk-avoidance, or economic reasons. For instance, the person may have a new understanding that buying from someone like you is less risky than continuing to buy the existing service.

During the first minute of your call, use the opportunity to understand which of the following three buying modes the buyer is in:

1. Status Quo

The buyer is completely happy with what he currently has. There has not been a trigger event in the recent past, but there may be one on the horizon. You may think this person is a waste of time, and you may want to move on to the next person on your list. But if this person has money, authority, and influence, this is a great long-term opportunity. With this type of call you want to start the relationship-building process. You should also check back on a monthly basis to see if a trigger event has recently happened.

[Learn More about Trigger Events](#)

[Use Triggering Events to Improve Your Chance of Making the Sale](#)

[Fair Game: 8 Principles for Making Your Competitors' Clients Your Own](#)

2. Searching for Alternatives

This person is unhappy with what he has, has spoken to several suppliers, and probably already has a favorite. A trigger event took place a while ago, and he's already taken action on it. You may think that this is a short-term opportunity because the buyer is actively talking to several potential suppliers. This is, in fact, probably a medium-term opportunity because it is highly likely this buyer already has a first choice.

Selling to buyers under these conditions typically results in a lower close ratio and a longer sales cycle—exactly the problem that Jed is experiencing. A strategy for this type of call is to position yourself as the buyer's number-two choice—so you get called first if the buyer's current favorite falters. You should check back every other week to see where you stand.

3. Window of Dissatisfaction

A trigger event has recently taken place, and this buyer knows what he currently uses is no longer sufficient but has not yet done anything about it. He tells you to call back in two months, four months, or six months, and you make a note to do that and move on to the next person on your list. Wrong answer! This is actually a short-term opportunity because the buyer is not talking to your competition—yet. When you call back a few months later, even if you call a few weeks early thinking it will give you an edge, it's very likely he will already be talking to your competition.

The strategy for this type of call is to identify the business opportunity and pursue it immediately—with as much happening on the initial call as possible and future contact taking place in the very near future. You must find a way to push a little bit and learn more about the trigger event, then try to set a near-term course of action.

As it stands, Jed is focusing on people who are already talking to his competition—and missing the biggest opportunities: those buyers in the Window of Dissatisfaction who recently experienced a trigger event and have not started talking to his competition. That's why his numbers are as bad as they are; that's also why his sales cycles are so long.

It's imperative that you "stay on your feet" for the first 30 seconds or so of the call—long enough to ask a couple of questions that will help you learn whether the person:

- Has not experienced a trigger event in a long time
- Experienced a trigger event a while ago and is already doing something about it
- Recently experienced a trigger event and has done nothing about it—yet

Once you learn if, and when, a buyer has experienced a trigger event, you can apply the appropriate strategy. When you do that, and focus *first* on those people in the Window of Dissatisfaction, who recently experienced a trigger event and have not yet done anything about it, you will have a much higher close ratio—and you'll have much shorter sales cycles.

Craig Elias is CEO of SHiFT Selling and the creator of [Trigger Event Selling](#). You can contact Craig by phone (403-874-2998), Skype ([Craig.Elias](#)), or [web](#).

RainToday