
SECTION 6

PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING
PROCESS

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TROY WAUGH

UNCOVERING PROSPECT PROBLEMS

In order to sell services, a professional must have a command of all the potential problems of a prospect. Businesses hire professionals to help solve problems. Many of those problems are needs, but some are not.

Identifying Problems People Will Pay to Solve

Discovering problems can occur in many ways during the discovery and differentiation phase of selling. There are many ways to discover problems:

- existing clients may have a series of problems similar to those of your prospects,
- your prospect may belong to a trade association to help solve certain problems,
- your prospect's problems may be discussed on the Internet,
- your prospect may mention her problems, or
- you might discover problems through a business analysis.

Prior to meeting with a prospect, you will find it quite helpful to review your files on similar clients or talk to your clients, associates, or partners who work on similar businesses. Your job at this point is to list as many potential problems as you possibly can.

Trade associations are excellent sources for discovering the problems associated with companies in that industry. Executives in trade associations are most always aware of regulatory, tax, and competitive problems. You might also find industry performance statistics for an association of businesses that would apply to your prospects.

Mark Schultz, a partner with Dugan & Lopatka uses an established process to identify client problems. It is a sophisticated benchmarking tool developed by PriceWaterhouseCooper called Advanced Middle Market Business Intelligence Tool (AMMBIT).

Conclusion

When you have created a list of all the possible problems a prospect might have, then formulate questions about the problems. Design questions that will demonstrate your knowledge of the company and its industry. This is much more effective way of showing your knowledge than simply talking. Unless you address the problems with the prospect, in a nonjudgmental manner, your meetings will only be a low-level commercial visit.

GOOD QUESTIONS UNCOVER PROBLEMS

There is a major difference between good questions and average questions. Many sales experts advise you to ask “open-ended” questions. That is good advice, so long as the questions are related to a problem. To encourage prospects to tell you their problems, you may have to design powerful questions that demonstrate you are a person worthy of the answers. I like dialog questions.

Dialog Questions

Have you watched Barbara Walters interview people? She uses dialog questions to show knowledge, empathy, and sincerity, and to encourage interviewees to tell intimate details they may have never told anyone before. Asking good dialog questions is easy once you have the framework down.

A dialog questions contains three parts:

- an observation
- a contrast or comparison
- a request for an opinion

Here is an example: “Mr. Jones, I noticed that you have 15 people in your accounting department (Observation). We have other clients in your industry of similar size who only have 8 to 10 people working in accounting (Comparison). In what ways do you find the additional people to be helpful? (Opinion)”

Dialog questions that confirm or eliminate problems are good questions for discovering problems. For example, “Mr. Jones, I was reading an article in *Manufacturing Today* about the companies that are moving their production to other countries. When we came in this morning, we noticed you were adding on to your facility. How are you successfully fighting the trend toward moving production offshore?”

Conclusion

Being informed enough to ask the right questions is the professional way to develop a sales relationship. Dialog questions will give you a way to ask good questions in a comfortable manner.

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LISTENING: A KEY TO UNCOVERING PROBLEMS

While good questions are crucial, they are not the only important way to uncover problems. The single most important skill in discovering problems is to listen and pay attention to the answers. Attentive listening is demonstrated in two ways: physically and psychologically. How attentive are you?

How to Show You're Really Listening

Keep the following pointers in mind when meeting with prospects:

Face the prospect. Facing the person tells her you are physically present to talk about the issues directly and openly.

Be open. Have an open smile and convey a sense of receptiveness. Crossing your legs, crossing your arms, and tilting your head back tells the prospect, "I am closed to your thoughts."

Lean into the conversation. Leaning toward your prospect tells your prospect that you are keenly interested in her and the subject matter.

Maintain good eye contact. Looking at the person tells him psychologically that you are on the same level with him.

Relax. Just like a duck swimming along, demonstrate a relaxed demeanor while paddling like crazy to listen care-

fully, understand, ask follow-up questions, and take good notes. When selling in teams, assign one person to take notes so the others can focus on the prospect,” says David Morgan of LBMC, Nashville, Tennessee. Don’t forget, prospects respond to both verbal and nonverbal feedback. It is important to give feedback, even if it’s only an “uh uh” or “I see” from time to time during the conversation.

Listen and Learn

As you listen to your prospect, pay attention to what the prospect says and does not say. In business conversation, the unsaid is often more important than what is said. Your prospect may imply there is no problem or you may infer from what was said there is no problem. When you are in doubt, ask a follow-up question like this, “Sarah, in the situation you just described I expected you might say this, but you didn’t. Can you tell me the key reasons that this is not an issue with you?”

A key element in listening is to periodically feed back what the prospect is saying to you. Say something like this, “Jim, this is what I understood was your difficulty ... is this accurate?”

Expert listeners can hear with antennae other than their ears. You can listen with your eyes and your heart. Watch for emotional responses from the prospect. This will tell you the issue is more important. A face turning red, a louder voice, or a grin are all signs that you are onto something.

Conclusion

Many professionals have limited training and experience in listening. If this is you, take some courses or read some articles or books on the subject. Commit to improve your listening ability to become better at discovering prospect problems.

RESEARCHING YOUR PROSPECTS ON THE INTERNET

by Drew Crowder, Vice President, Waugh & Co., Inc.

One of the most powerful tools to learn about your prospects' business and industry is the Internet. Before the online information explosion, you were limited to marketing materials and traditional media coverage to get a vague idea of the problems facing your prospects. Now much more and varied information is available to you with the click of a mouse.

The Prospect's Web Site

The first thing you should do before pursuing or meeting with prospects is review their web sites. Few viable businesses today do not have a web site and those that are unwilling to establish a web presence will have to be approached carefully to determine why.

Many web sites today go far beyond the "brochure-ware" of the early days of the web. Because of the affordability of the medium, most companies put far more information about the company on the web than they do in printed marketing materials.

Search Engines

Virtually every entity is mentioned on the web somewhere and more often in a number of different web sites. Most popular modern search engines such as Google will have billions upon billions of cross-referenced web site entries. This means that if a prospect is mentioned on a web page, even if the page has little to do with that company, that address will show up on most search engines. You might also want to search message board postings (on Google, click the “Group” tab above the search entry box. Here you can find out what customers, suppliers, employees, and others are saying about the company.

Effective use of Internet search engines can be the difference between satisfaction and frustration when searching the web for prospect information. The way to do effective searches is to be specific about the information that you are looking for and use the standard tools of the search engines to focus your search (such as placing a “+” by the words that you want included in the search, “-” in front of words that you want excluded and quotations around exact phrases that you want to be found; if you’re not familiar or comfortable with those conventions, an additional way to narrow your search on Google is to click the “advanced search” link to the right).

Industry-Specific Sites

There is no substitute for industry knowledge when prospecting within an industry niche. Clients want a professional who knows their industry intimately. Many clients will pay a premium to have one. Every industry that has been large enough to support printed periodicals has a comparable web offering with information you can use.

(Drew Crowder, MBA, is Vice President of Waugh & Co. Consulting.)

YOUR BUSINESS PHYSICAL DEFINES PROBLEMS

Just as your physician might ask you to take a series of tests during your annual physical, a solid business professional will diagnose carefully before prescribing. A “business physical” might cover all aspects of a business: environmental, regulatory, tax, financial, personnel, legal, management, and strategy. The Financial Physical process consists of four activities: preparation, the prospect meeting, needs assessment, and presentation. The first three steps are all part of a “discovery” phase of selling.

Preparation

The first activity involves gathering data and preplanning the meeting. Several tools may be used to assist this effort, including the annual financial operations review and other industry and functional checklists. It is imperative that the team understands how the prospect makes money and what the key ingredients are for success. This requires an understanding of the business and the industry.

The Prospect Meeting

The initial meeting should include members of the service team and other specialists who will be involved in the on-site part of the Business Physical. Because the Business Physical

can take up to three days and requires some intrusiveness, the primary goal of this meeting should be to make the people whose work you will be interrupting believe in the value of the Physical. The secondary goal is to create a plan for locating and assembling the information you will need to make meaningful recommendations.

Needs Assessment

The focus of the needs assessment should be on key ingredients for this prospect's success and your ability to provide assistance in achieving it. You need to have a thorough discussion with the prospect about current issues and problems.

Presentation

Once the prospective client's problems and needs have been identified, you are ready to make recommendations. There may or may not be actions that your firm can take to remedy problems you identify. Don't force your services. The generation of goodwill now could reap unforeseen future benefits.

(At Waugh & Co. Consulting, we have developed a complete process for conducting a Business Physical. If you'd like a copy, please send your check for \$29 to Waugh & Co. Consulting, Box 1208, Brentwood, TN 37024 or call 1-888-797-RAIN (7246)).

RELATIONSHIP PHASE	CLIENT'S BUYING PROCESS	PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING PROCESS
Discovery	Becoming Aware	Prospecting
DIFFERENTIATION	Understanding You and Your Firm	Qualifying
		Gaining Access to Decision Makers
		Identifying Decision Makers
	Considering Alternatives	Discovering Problems
	GROWING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS	Developing Needs
		CREATING WANTS
		Building Like and Trust
Decision	Deciding to Engage	Demonstrating Capabilities
		Handling Objections
	Making the Decision	Persuading Decision Influencers
		Minimizing Risk
Delivery	Becoming a Repeat Client	Building Loyalty
		Building Profits
	Partnering for Business Success	Offering Dessert
		Soliciting for Referrals
	Strategic Directions	Becoming an Insider
		Strategic Directions
		Final Thoughts
		Appendix

RELATIONSHIP PHASE	CLIENT'S BUYING PROCESS	PROFESSIONAL'S SELLING PROCESS
Discovery	Becoming Aware	1. Prospecting
		2. Qualifying
	Understanding You and Your Firm	3. Gaining Access to Decision Makers
		4. Identifying Decision Makers
DIFFERENTIATION	Considering Alternatives	5. Discovering Problems
		6. Developing Needs
	GROWING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS	7. CREATING WANTS
		8. Building Like and Trust
Decision	Deciding to Engage	9. Demonstrating Capabilities
		10. Handling Objections
	Making the Decision	11. Persuading Decision Influencers
		12. Minimizing Risk
Delivery	Becoming a Repeat Client	13. Building Loyalty
		14. Building Profits
	Partnering for Business Success	15. Offering Dessert
		16. Soliciting for Referrals
	Strategic Directions	17. Becoming an Insider
		18. Strategic Directions
		19. Final Thoughts
		Appendix