

7 Surefire Ways to Guarantee Your New Offering Flops

By Jill Konrath

New products and services are the lifeblood of organizations. The sales force eagerly awaits their arrival, hoping for a short-term competitive edge in a cut-throat marketplace. Yet when new products or services are launched, many sellers become their own worst enemy. They make these seven critical mistakes that slow down or even totally derail their best sales efforts.

Mistake 1: Ungrounded in Reality

If a salesperson isn't totally familiar with how customers handle things without their new product or service, they're at a major disadvantage. If they don't understand the likely problems customers experience because of their current product or method, as well as the implications for their business, their ability to create value is severely hampered. Without knowledge of the pay-off customers get from using the new product or service, salespeople aren't able to sell with confidence or handle tough obstacles.

Mistake 2: Questionable Practices

Good questions drive the sales process. They don't just emerge from thin air when a sales rep is sitting in front of a prospective customer. They take time to develop. Salespeople omitting this critical step invariably flounder during customer meetings. Uncovering dissatisfaction or pain with status quo is difficult. Discovering gaps between the customer's vision of the future and their current state is a formidable challenge. Building a business case to make a change is next to impossible.

Mistake 3: In Pursuit of Glory

Calling on top prospects first can be a big mistake! The first time salespeople sell any new product or service, they often screw things up. Their knowledge of the customer's situation may be spotty and their presentations ragged. Unanticipated questions and obstacles cause them to stumble. Their overall effectiveness is much lower than it would be if they had a few practice sessions with "B" prospects under their belt.

Mistake 4: Faulty Premises

Setting up meetings to update customers about the new product or service can lead to trouble. Arranging the meeting isn't the mistake - just its premise. If sales reps tell customers they're bringing information about the new product or service, that's exactly what customers expect the meeting to be about. Sellers then find it exceedingly difficult to switch into a questioning mode - an essential step for determining valid business and financial reasons for changing. Instead they're expected to talk, talk, talk - and boy, do they ever!

Mistake 5: Leaning Forward

Laugh all you want at this one, but it's a killer. When salespeople lean forward, they're pitching - pure and simple. It usually happens after they hear a problem they can solve. Consultative selling behaviors immediately evaporate as the salesperson leans forward to

start talking about the new product or service. Customers quickly erect barriers, protecting themselves from the onslaught. A major sales delay is guaranteed.

Mistake 6: Brandishing Brochures

Designed to be a sales aid, marketing collateral has been the death of more sales than anyone dares to imagine. Their improper use in early meetings with prospective clients, focuses discussion on two deadly areas: product/service features and pricing. Needs are forgotten. Because value has never been developed, the cost is always too high. Vendors are ruled out based on irrelevant capabilities that have minimal impact on achieving the desired end result.

Mistake 7: The Road to Nowhere

Without a clearly defined next step implanted in their brains prior to the call, salespeople are doomed. Just sharing exciting new product information gets sellers nowhere. Unless they have a clearly defined objective before the call and are ready to offer logical next steps, they'll be left sitting by the phone waiting for it to ring.

Next time your company introduces a new product or service, make sure your sales force avoids these common yet often catastrophic mistakes. It'll make a big difference in your sales results!

Jill Konrath, author of *Selling to Big Companies*, helps sellers get their foot in the door of large corporations, create demand and win profitable contracts. Get a free *Sales Call Planning Guide* (\$19.95 value) when you sign up for the Selling to Big Companies e-newsletter. Just send an email with "subscribe in the subject line to jill@sellingtobigcompanies.com . For more info, visit <http://www.SellingtoBigCompanies.com> .