

Slow Down to Speed Up Your Sales

By Jill Konrath

After months of trying, you land an appointment with a major account who uses your competitor's products. Like many reps, you probably feel an overpowering urge to cram as much as possible into this one meeting. You need to tell them about your company's new directions, latest technologies, state-of-the-art products, competitive advantages, top notch service, and more - so much to cover and so little time.

The Speed Backlash

Whoa! Slow down. Prospects who receive massive information dumps unconsciously erect barriers to slow or even derail your sales efforts. How? They tell you everything is fine, even if they're dissatisfied with their current vendor. They rule out doing business with you if your product lacks a minor capability. Your pricing is never good enough. Or they simply thank you for the update and promise to contact you when the need arises.

Sound familiar? It's the result of trying to convert long-standing vendor relationships in one sales call. Prospects distrust motives when they perceive a lack of concern for their needs. And that's exactly what happens when you spend most of your time doing all the talking.

Slower Strategies for Faster Results

Top sellers realize that replacing an incumbent is a slow, deliberate process. They understand it takes time to demonstrate value and develop strong relationships. Knowing this, they put together a one-step-at-a-time account entry strategy that actually advances the sales process much faster than if they tried to do everything in a single call. The steps:

Do your homework

Learn as much as you can before your meeting. Review your prospect's annual report and website. Look for gaps between where he is and where he wants to be. Identify his primary initiatives. Figure out how your product helps him achieve his objectives or ties in with his critical business drivers. For example, if "Earning Customer Loyalty" is mentioned repeatedly, determine how you can contribute.

Think and talk results

Your product is a tool - nothing more. People buy it because of what it does for them; make sure you know what that is. Talk about the business results customers achieve when using your product. Explain how he can reduce time to market, increase operational efficiency or improve sales.

Establish a logical next step

Before your meeting, determine how you want it to end. A successful advance might be an information-gathering meeting, an analysis of current work flow or a presentation. Most sales to large accounts require multiple calls, so build this into your planning right from the beginning.

Plan your questions

Questions are key to your success. They demonstrate interest and concern. Prospects feel you are more knowledgeable when you ask good questions. Questions provide valuable insights into customer needs and the decision-making process. They are the basis for developing a strong relationship. Plan at least ten questions ahead of time.

The sales process can't be short-circuited. If you go too fast, problems are guaranteed to arise. Your opportunity will evaporate into thin air.

The Big Meeting

At last it's time for the big meeting. Get down to business fairly quickly, minimizing chit chat. Start by stating your purpose. It's enough to simply say, "I'm here today to understand your organization better and see where we can improve your business results." Next share a short story about how your company helped another client and the specific results they attained. Talk results, not products!

Explain your process in working with accounts. Tell your prospect it's essential to fully understand his objectives, needs, issues, and challenges in order to determine the value you can provide.

Transition to questions and spend the bulk of your time investigating. Ask about the current situation: "Tell me about your workflow." Find out about any problems, challenges, or difficulties he has. Explore his answers by asking about the ramifications of these problems and the value of eliminating them.

Even though he asks, don't be tempted to talk about products. If you get caught in this trap, your chances of sales success decrease significantly. Graciously explain that product discussion is premature until you understand their needs better and get back to asking questions. Before you leave, share a few key benefits and suggest the logical next step.

This is what the top sellers do. They don't rush the sale and, as a result, they get the order. And quicker. Follow their example and you'll soon be enjoying the same success!

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>.