

Denver Business Journal - January 19, 2004

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DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, January 16, 2004

Avoid using technospeak babble; it can cost you sales

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Technology is evolving so fast that salespeople face an overinforming/underinforming Catch-22. On one hand, products have become so technologically complicated that the amount of explanation needed to make customers thoroughly understand them may make their eyes glaze over long before the educational process is completed.

But if the salesperson errs in the other direction -- trying to sell a product or service that the customer doesn't understand at all -- the sale won't be made at all.

How do you sell a product when you don't know the prospect's level of understanding or decision-making criteria? Ask numerous questions that will help determine what they want and can handle, offer information that meets their needs and encourage them to ask questions.

Lacking direction to the contrary, keep the presentation concise and simple, offer benefits over features and reinforce your willingness to help solve problems or increase education after the sale.

Here are tips to help sales forces avoid technospeak traps:

- Be cautious about assessing levels of technical knowledge based on gender, age, title or level of authority. It's far more productive to first assess the prospect's method of decision-making. Is he/she interested in getting just the facts, understanding how it works, learning the underlying benefits, wanting to be made comfortable with the product/service or finding out how this product/service can make him or her a hero?

While the level of technical presentation is not tied tightly to any decision-making mode, the "just the facts" group likely will want more technical backup than someone who wants to know benefits so that he/she can become a hero to co-workers and managers.

- Understand how the prospect processes information. Is he/she a logical, analytical thinker or a sensitive, empathic feeler? While this can tie to the decision-making criteria above, don't assume that one type of processor -- the thinker, for example -- automatically will want just the technical facts. There may be other forces factoring into the decision-making process.

It's possible to encounter an engineer who wants the facts but is a feeler who will interpret those facts based on how they make him/her feel rather than on cold, objective analysis.

- Listen and interpret carefully. A wise salesperson will intelligently interpret the information gained from an in-depth customer interview. Many selling clues lie in asking the right questions and carefully interpreting the answers.

If selling to an engineer prospect, the natural assumption is that a highly technical presentation is mandated. By asking the right questions, however, the sales representative may discover the engineer is on the hot seat and needs a victory to reassert his/her good standing. This is where the wise salesperson will shift discussion to include how the product/service can raise the engineer's stock.

- Clarify and define terms, whether used by the salesperson or prospect. To define, the salesperson might say, "This is a fully integrated system, meaning it can work with any software you have." To clarify, a salesperson can say, "Since these terms tend to have different meanings in different industries, I want to make sure we're talking the same language. I define this term as ..."

The salesperson also should ask for clarification or definition of any unclear term used by the prospect.

- Learn the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of different cultures.

Communicating reasons to buy a technical product can be a daunting enough challenge. Understanding how different world cultures are wired can spell sales success or doom before the salesperson even starts.

For example, a Japanese customer may greatly appreciate that a presentation has been translated into his/her native language. This is truly a case of how you say it being every bit as important as what you say.

- Offer competitive intelligence. No matter what their personal decision-making criteria, the prospect almost always can be influenced with some strong, competitive intelligence.
- Show the prospect how your product/service will give his/her company a performance edge, solve a vexing problem in the industry or eliminate a weakness in the prospect's company.

Gathering competitive intelligence serves three purposes to just about any type of prospect: It demonstrates that you're really thinking about and are invested in finding solutions; it gives them ammunition to justify a purchase; and it provides substantive additional firepower to their marketing efforts, enhancing your role as a trusted adviser.

Replace (or complement, depending on the prospect) torrents of technospeak with common-sense-based speaking, and you'll go a long way toward transforming a lukewarm prospect into a vocal supporter.

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