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To boost presentations, follow helpful checklist

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

You give a powerful presentation, feel good about it, and even the buyer says it's a direct hit.

Then, expecting to move forward and finalize the sale, you are dumbfounded when you hear the words, "Can you get back to us in a couple weeks?" You wonder why an excellent presentation doesn't convert to an easy close.

Despite you adhering to all the basic principles -- such as practice, good eye contact, limited PowerPoint use and a memorable opening and close -- the desired sale remains elusive.

Here are some considerations to prevent post-presentation stalls.

- Recognize that requests for a presentation can be a screening tool.

A proposal or presentation isn't the best vehicle to create interest. Presentations are to prove how your product solves a need. Stalls are certain to occur if a presentation occurs before discussing budgets and decision processes. Aligning the sales process with the customer's buying cycle also prevents stalls.

Three common stages most buyers migrate through on their way to a buying decision are: (1) acknowledging their needs, (2) assessing options and (3) alleviating concerns.

The first phase, acknowledging needs, is analogous to not feeling well and going to the doctor to find the reason. Buyers must first determine their problems and if they are urgent enough to fix. The primary goal of salespeople in this phase is to help clarify needs and the impact of the prospect's current situation.

The second phase, assessment of options, occurs when the buyer has decided to do something and then starts evaluating possible solutions. Indications that a buyer is assessing options include the presence of a committee, a request for a proposal or the buyer is talking to other vendors.

In this phase, the most important task is helping the buyer determine the criteria they will use to make a decision that's favorable to the seller.

The third phase is similar to buyer's remorse. There's usually an unannounced choice, but

reservations remain about the decision. Initial clues are unreturned phone calls, the emergence of past concerns and new concerns. The underlying cause is a fear of making the wrong decision.

Alleviating this fear requires finesse, handholding, support and reassurance. Studies show applying pressure for a decision in this phase results in further delays.

- Giving too much information is high on the list of mistakes.

Avoid confusing the buyer with too much information by addressing only identified needs with relevant benefits. It's tempting to wow the customer with multiple benefits, but it will lead only to a delayed decision. Enthusiasm is a double-edged sword. Excitement about our offerings makes it easy to talk too much.

One sales training and consulting firm testing skill sets in more than 50,000 sales professionals reported 60 percent of them needed more two-way dialogue in their presentation.

The price for overtalking is a bored and inattentive audience. Once an audience is lost, it's difficult to get it back. The rule is "involve and resolve." An engaged prospect is more likely to buy. Check in with your audience, ask if your message is making sense and if it's providing the information wanted.

If there are any vague answers, clarify with follow-up questions about what else they need to know. Dialogue differentiates you from your competitors, builds credibility and conveys the unspoken message, "I really want to find the right solution for you."

- Presentations that overemphasize low price will lead to stalls and lost sales.

Before the customer wants a low price, they first need to believe your solution will work for them. Talking up low price, especially if your buyer is unfamiliar with your service or product, conveys low value.

- Learn the four basic buying styles to increase decisions.

Not every buyer wants to schmooze or engage in small talk. On the other hand, some buyers won't buy if you don't schmooze.

The four basic buying styles focus on results, their experience and interaction with you, security and proven products, or the need to be right out of fear of being wrong. Buyers buy from people they trust -- and it's easier to trust people who communicate like they do.

- Bring your presentation to life with analogies, third-party stories and testimonials.

Avoid industry jargon or lingo, which increases the risk of misunderstanding.

If possible, involve the buyer by letting them touch your product, run the demo or get them to help with something.

In group presentations try to meet everyone before the presentation. If you can't, then include a round of introductions. Have your contact introduce you and bring the group up to date.

Never present anything in writing that you can do in person. Tonality is essential. Persuade with conviction by varying loudness and softness, volume, tempo and rhythm of speech. Pauses are especially effective.

Read the buyer by observing their physical posture and reactions. Be aware of glazed-over eyes, puzzled eyebrows, and questioning or disapproving frowns. Check in often and ask for feedback.

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