
May 2007

Passion for your Product can Kill the Sale

By Jack Allison

It can't be true! How can being passionate about your product or service prevent a sale?

In reviewing sales effectiveness for a number of companies selling technology products and solutions, I've observed a common behavioural mistake....let's call it "Pushing Product".

The irony is that usually happens very early in the sales cycle. We all know the value of securing that initial meeting with a top executive in the prospect organization (and how hard it can be many times to gain that access!). So once we finally get that opportunity, what do we do? ...

Once we've introduced ourselves, we can't wait to explain all the wonderful functions and features of our technology product or service ...and so we immediately launch into a detailed description of what our products do, how great they are, and how valuable they would be for the prospect's organization.

We finish by yanking out our best glossy marketing materials (which, by the way, many times focus more on a technical regurgitation of features and functions than on business benefits)... and stick them under the prospect's nose.

By this time the meeting is close to over, so we do our best sales summation and ask for the opportunity to proceed with further contact with the prospect; and we're surprised when the response is "thank you for coming today; we'll be in touch"

What happened?...Since we did all the talking, not only didn't we determine what the real business needs of the prospect were (so we would know where our products might add value), but we also squandered an opportunity to establish ourselves as someone genuinely interested in helping that executive to be successful...and likely won't get a second chance at that level.

Were we wrong to be excited about our product offerings and passionate about their potential to really help this organization? Were we wrong to really believe that our products and services have real value for customers?

Of course not ...but the passion for our products combined with the excitement of the moment (further fuelled with adrenalin at that initial meeting with the key executive) caused us to commit a classic sales behavioural error....we "pushed product" instead of using the time to understand and confirm the real business issues and concerns that led the executive to consent to the meeting to begin with!

And guess what? The more complex our technology offerings, the more we tend to get "wrapped around the axle" talking about them...and not focusing on the customer.

So what's the answer? After a very brief opening statement about your desire to add value to the customer's business... start asking questions about the issues that are challenging your prospect's business...and keep asking more questions for a deeper understanding of those issues and their business impact.

Listening and confirming your understanding of your prospect's key business challenges should be your focus in this initial meeting.

Conclude the meeting by briefly recapping the key issues you have uncovered, and indicating that your company (with its products and services) has been very successful in helping other organizations to address those specific issues (resist the urge again to dive into detailed descriptions of your products or services).

Let the executive know that you would welcome an opportunity to work with him or her and ask...."How would you like us to move forward?"

So what's Sales Tip # 1 for sales organizations selling technology products or solutions?

As counter-intuitive as it might seem, the key is to....

Stop selling....and start Solving !

Jack brings a twenty-five year track record of building highly successful sales forces for information technology companies in Canada, U.S and internationally. Most recently, as the Senior Vice-President, Sales at the Fincentric Corporation, he led the growth and development of the direct and indirect (channel) sales organization on a worldwide basis.

Jack Allison can be reached at jackallison@conselleo.com