



Have the right conversation, every time.



It's interesting to observe the different ways companies address their sales strategy.

A common approach is to try and sell standardised products and services to the biggest set of buyers they can find. Sound familiar? Would a more definitive concept offer better rewards? Could you instead develop ways of helping specific customers, and therefore sectors, achieve successful outcomes?

To manage this, you first need to understand the detail i.e. customers' business objectives, operating practices, challenges and competitive environment. Once you understand these factors, you can start to create offerings that deliver value within a customer's business context. If that understanding isn't in place, all you can ever do is fire out products and hope for an order.

The theory is solid but in the current economic situation companies are grappling with their go-to-market strategies, and business is changing apace. How can a PSP find and adopt

effective ways of selling, allied with the existing shift towards telephone and on-line contact? Do we need to learn to be more direct and time-conscious? To get to the point succinctly and relatively swiftly? Being able to pop in for a chat over coffee unannounced may not always be an option, but we can't afford not to stay in contact, so how do we manage our selling time effectively?

**UNDERSTAND THE
DETAIL SUCH AS THE
CUSTOMERS' BUSINESS
OBJECTIVES, OPERATING
PRACTICES, CHALLENGES
AND COMPETITIVE
ENVIRONMENT**



Our time-honoured sales techniques of gaining attention, asking questions, listening to the answers, spotting buying signals and closing the deal are still valid, but when clients are short of time and turning to on-line suppliers, how can you turn theory into winning practice?

There is no one definitive method. But time spent planning is rarely wasted. Before a call define exactly what you want to get out of the conversation. What stage is the relationship at? What do you need to do today? Are you expecting to close a deal or are you still fact-finding? If the latter, what exactly do you need to know?

Once you have a plan in place – before you pick up the phone, consider: What do you think the customer is looking to get out of it? Are they expecting a detail-led conversation and will they have the facts to hand? Make sure you meet their expectation, and if there is any doubt send a short list of points across that you would like to discuss in advance, so they can prepare detailed answers for you.



Bear in mind the common questioning techniques you are likely to use in any sales conversation:

OPEN

The classics: what, when, who, why, where and how. People find it more difficult to give a one-word answer when a question is phrased this way so use them to encourage people to expand and explain.

CLOSED

Use these when you need a definitive answer. That is, yes, no, or detail like a date or a price. Sentences often start; is, do, can, have, when? If your sales pitch consists of entirely closed questions however, it could be a short conversation!

PROBING

Often start with phrases such as; can I ask, could you, would you, how would, when you, do you. Use when a client has mentioned something then moved on to further points. Let them finish their line of thinking, and then take them back to the statement you want to dig into.

CONFIRMING

A rhetorical tool when you need to check your understanding. For example; if I understand correctly... Can also be very useful when you are not sure what to say next and need to buy some time. Repeating back what you've heard gives you some thinking space.

VIEW PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AS A CONTINUAL PROCESS.



You probably have a range of favourite questions you always ask. Test them to ensure they are still relevant today, and keep adding new variations in. View performance improvement as a continual process.

It is easy to get carried away with asking lots of open questions to gather details. But don't let this lead you down irrelevant and time-wasting avenues, where clients head off on multiple tangents, none of which are relevant to the task in hand. When time is of the essence, and on-line it often is, keep to the point as best you can. The more philosophical question and answer sessions may be better put to one side for a future time when business pressures have lessened.



At times you may want to ask more personal questions, perhaps about business direction and/or personal ambitions. In advance, reflect on what you want to ask and whether you really need the information at this time. Can you think of any context that might help you understand how the question will be perceived? Find the appropriate time to ask. If it isn't this call don't worry, the right time will present itself, so be patient.

Attention to the detail of every call will enhance your results. Changing habits and approaches can achieve different and better results. Try it!



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