CLARITY STACK

How to Influence and Lead Sales Conversations

Ebook

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Whilst it is often thought that the best salespeople are 'natural' at the role, there's actually plenty of evidence to suggest that there's a science behind the art of selling.

Putting the age-old 'born to sell' anecdote to one side, this ebook will get to the heart of the methods your sales team can try out today. The guidance below will help you to more frequently take conversations in a direction that is favourable to the sale, with greater influence over the direction of your sales pitches.

In order for you to carry this out, we will examine the behaviours of both buyers and sellers so that we can better understand how to tap into a prospect's buying motivations more effectively. How do you do that? Well, this content will show your sales team how evidence can assist their gut instincts, in order to help yield better results.

Science Sells

Whilst most of us already know the type of salesperson who seems to have all that natural charm and charisma that fits the stereotype, these attributes alone no longer stand up to the test of B2B sales.

In 'The Science of Selling', David Hoffeld cites that most skilled sellers aren't usually the typical extroverts that we long-assumed.

What does this mean for us, though? It means that many of the missing attributes that can make for a successful salesperson can be learned through study and implementation.

So, how can we engineer better sales outcomes with science, or tested methods?

Get the Finer Details Down

Any serious sales team should be making use of the cues available to them about a prospect these days. Simply put, there's a host of information about most of your prospects via their website, their company pages on social accounts and often in news articles which discuss their recent activity and ambitions for the future.

Could all of this information come up in the initial call? Maybe not. However, having the extra information in your armoury can prove to be especially valuable at some point in the conversation. Let's be honest, knowing at least enough about a business is a better way to build trust than being stumped for a response.

So, before getting in touch, what research should you be doing? Firstly, you need to understand who the decision maker is and get a sense for who you're going to be negotiating with. There's a host of questions you can ask at this stage, and the answers will often cross over from prospect to prospect. Here's a few:

What are their likely pain points?

What are the needs of the prospect that you can meet?

What would their benefits look like from working with you?

What is the relevant product for their needs that you're going to pitch to them?

What's the Play?

Ensuring that you can be influential in your sales conversations next relies on developing a strategy for approaching your prospect.

At this point, you should consider the probable buying persona of your decision maker.

Will they analyse your pitch, or can you sell to them by evoking a positive feeling? What would motivate them to see this product as valuable to their organisation?

You can outline these and reference them for all new introductory calls.

When cold calling or sending out cold emails, that initial engagement is pivotal to working out what type of buying persona the decision maker typically falls into. The evidence may be subtle, but you can learn plenty from their level of enthusiasm, as well as the frequency and type of questions that they ask. Make a note of these and apply them in your next contact.

Add responses and questions you've never heard before to your CRM, so other members of your team are equipped and constantly learning. Asking the more uncommon questions can also work in your favour with prospects who remember you for asking relevant, thought-provoking questions

For more insight on Buying Personas, we have created A Guide to: Buying Personas which is available within the Sales Academy.

How Valuable is This?

You could ask yourself a more simple question to justify the need for doing your homework beforehand. When was the last time you bought a product or service from someone who floundered at the first question of how it was relevant to your business?

Putting it bluntly, you won't be understanding a prospect's motivations particularly well if you've not done enough research before getting in touch. Neither will a lack of research spare you when you've found the opportunity to steal the attention of a busy decision maker for two minutes, who starts asking you tough questions and putting the pressure on.

Be prepared!

Going Further

For information gathering, you can also go beyond the simple online searches. You get ahead of the competition with a few more tools that should certainly be considered by sales and business development teams. We've covered this for you already in a separate Ebook, titled 'Using sales intelligence to increase your sales'. In short, that will explore all of the tools and techniques you can use for more effective prospect profiling. Anyway, back to what you can do right now.

Great Questioning Leads to Enhanced Understanding

Questions are critical to a sales negotiation to glean information, but there are additional benefits beyond simple data gathering. The result of asking basic questions can lead to a process know as instinctive elaboration, as described by Hoffeld in the Science of Selling.

In short, well-presented questions will encourage the respondent to turn their focus to the subject you've asked. By asking these early, simple questions, that focus should keep the conversation largely on the subject at hand. It is often advised that questioning should be
layered in terms of complexity - going in at the deep end and asking painfully difficult questions will only confuse your prospect.

Questions are critical to a sales negotiation

Ask early, simple and focused questions

Questioning to Reveal Prospect Needs

It is important here to not labour over the features and benefits of a product or service before you've actually told the prospect about the value it will bring back to them.

The best way is to define the type of questions you'll explore beforehand. This will help you to offer a more tailored response to why they personally would need what you're selling.

This questioning process can more easily be defined if you're responding to inbound queries, as you can often gauge a thing or two from the nature of their enquiry, or from how you captured their initial interest.

This is a bit more complicated for the outbound salesperson, as it relies more on guiding a prospect in the right direction. Do they match the needs of any of your historical clients? Does some more broad questioning reveal any information about their buying position?

Test this early questioning process to see if it bears fruit. At the very least, you should have gained some knowledge on your potential buyer that could help you to keep the relationship going. This always provides you with the chance of closing in the future, or a referral if you're considered trustworthy and competent enough.

Which Questions Should be Asked?

Using both situational and problem based questions will help to influence your conversations, especially if your questions imply that solutions are available. The earlier point about doing your research can become particularly useful at this point, as you will likely have
made some logical connections based on the knowledge you have.

If you can't tease much out of a prospect, perhaps you can outline some common problems that similar businesses experience, to see what rings true for your prospect. Investigation is key to understanding whether this conversation will ultimately result in business soon, or later down the line.

If the rapport has been established and the prospect is entertaining the conversation, the focus will need to switch to being solution-oriented.

What does your prospect intend on doing about the problems and challenges that she just mentioned?

Does she know about the solutions your company offers? If all has been pitched effectively thus far, what you say next should make a fair bit of sense to your prospect, and they should at least consider where the value you provide could impact their business.

Understanding the Needs of the Buyer

It's all too common to be blinded by your own product and sell a bunch of features to a customer without really listening to their needs. Falling into this trap happens all of the time, but can easily be averted.

If you've already asked the right type of leading questions, you should have a considerable grip on what situation the buyer finds themselves in, as well as any problems they are currently encountering.

At this stage, you will have already determined how great that need is for your product and service, and should be able to communicate the value back to your prospect if it's the right fit, and if the time is right.

Active listening throughout your conversations should have supported you in understanding the reason a prospect may need your service. Maybe their pain points have become too impactful on their day to day business and they need a solution. At this point, pitching about your low price is not going to be as effective as suggesting how quick and efficient your company's implementation process is.

What's in it for the Customer?

Of course your product is going to solve your prospect's problems. Of course your service is second to none. Of course you have encountered your prospect's unique situation before. The prospect may see value in what you do, but do not be under any illusions that any business will be done without transparency and trust. They have heard these things before.

It's understandable that a salesperson wants to present their product and service in the best light, but a breath of fresh air for most prospects is in communicating how it will drive value, and a salesperson not being elaborate with the truth.

For any gaps in your service, a simple discussion about how your solution does the 90% can be enough to take a decision.

The competitors of yours that have contacted them may have already over-sold unachievable benefits, might be priced 10x higher, or might have not heard the needs of the prospect at all.

If you can be authentic and demonstrate how you will meet a prospect's minimum requirements, you are at least now having a conversation with the opportunity for an outcome.

Building Trust

The buyer finds themselves in a situation where the rewards must outweigh their perceived issues or situation at hand. The situation can differ based on the decision maker and the barriers will be evident.

Perhaps a new decision maker needs the right solution to convince the board they are making the impact they were recently hired for.

Perhaps the small business owner has been stung before by an inadequate service and simply cannot afford for another slip up.

Ensuring you have success stories and that your results speak for themselves are always helpful to mitigate this. A proven track record will always precede the outcome of a conversation if your prospect knows who you are - if they are already looking, they've probably done their homework.

Value

At this point in the conversation, can you truly demonstrate the value of your service?

If you can, it is now often a case of showing how the financial outlay is outweighed by the benefit. The key here is to avoid listing the features as discussed before, and suggesting benefits within the context of your prospect's situation. Perhaps your prospect is recouping considerable time, or maybe they will be able to create an additional revenue stream through the introduction of your solution.

Either way, your prospect should be made to feel like you have truly addressed their need, that your product is a good fit, and that they should consider working with you as a genuine option to get further value from what they do. If they can't see the same exciting potential from your competitors, then that's even better.

Knowing Your Outcome

Once you are confident that there is a two way benefit in the conversations you're having, you will need to lead the conversation towards an outcome that makes sense for your client, and is predictable enough for you to action, or follow up on.

Telling Stories

Whilst not all buyer personas might value this, a narrative can often help to better demonstrate how your company makes an impact on your customers.

Often, a solid narrative will briefly explore the situation and problems of a former or existing client, outline the steps taken to reach a resolution, and then illustrate the benefits gained once the solution was implemented.

The best stories allow an association between the prospect and the existing client, be it by industry, by problem, or by their buying motivation. It is up to you to assess whether including these anecdotes will build rapport, and whether you actually have a suitable story to tell.

Being a Voice of Authority

Communicating your pitch with authority is critical to a successful outcome. This is not about being commanding in your approach, but listening carefully to the answers your prospect has given when you've gone through the investigation process.

It is then about understanding those needs, as well as those barriers and communicating a solution which has genuine value for the prospect at this moment in time.

Research on the prospect helps with this process, as does knowledge of the complications to sale. Knowing what the likely objections are and having the ability to acknowledge them and offer a reasonable counter-point is crucial for building confidence and trust with your prospect. It's extremely important to not dismiss any concerns a prospect has at this stage.

By showing that consideration and understanding for your prospect's situation and appealing to their buying motivations, you should be well positioned to consult on what the best outcome might look like. This where it is key to really know your own business inside out, and be ready to answer an array of questions. You might experience a curveball or two at this stage.

Creating Options

Options are great when a prospect is considering working with you. In most instances, you'd anticipate that one choice is more favourable to them than another.

When it comes to laying options out, it is important not to overwhelm your prospects with too many routes to take. After effectively showing them how you can solve their problem, the problem of too many choices could be seen as falling at one of the final hurdles.

By design, your company shouldn't have too many options which could blind a customer. Instead, your sales team should guide prospects towards the solutions that make the most business sense for them. Another commonly adopted tactic is to drive additional value in your options, to show one choice that significantly outweighs the other in terms of benefits and value. This will often help to encourage a prospect that they are getting a good deal.

Conclusion

This ebook has shown that a stage by stage approach to working with the needs of a prospect can yield strong results. Developing a process for each prospect you want to work with, along with a strategy to combat the likely situations and barriers you may have to overcome, represent a large portion of the work before you've even struck up a conversation.

The great thing is, this process can be refined over time. As you continue to do your homework on prospects and strike up initial conversations with them, you will learn about more of the situations you should become more responsive and adaptive to.

"Was this phrase a brush off? What did they mean when they said this? Do I really know what the problem was?"

If you already know your product and the benefits it can bring to your prospects, then listen to them, and learn from them. The quicker you can build their trust and rapport through showing that you understand their situation, the more likely they will be to trust you, allowing you to lead the conversation to becoming a solution-oriented one.

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