

The 4 Secrets to Killer Sales Calls

By David Fields

“This radio was purchased in 1926. It doesn’t work.” So declared the sign in the best window display I have ever encountered. Next to the antique radio was a well worn pair of brown wingtip shoes, with its own, carefully lettered, small announcement: “This pair of shoes was bought at Brophy’s in 1926. Still being worn.”

More passers-by were attracted into the shoe store by that small, simple display and converted into long-time customers than by any other combination of merchandise arranged in the window. Why? Because the owner of Brophy’s used the four secrets of creating a killer sales story.

Whatever your business, large or small, product or service, you only make money when you effectively create prospects and convert prospects to customers. Arming your sales force to succeed with a selling story that has an immediate impact is, therefore, a critical element of creating explosive revenue growth for your company.

What’s the next Yes?

The first, and most important, secret to creating killer sales presentations, materials, speeches and approaches is knowing what, exactly, you’re selling. Amazingly, most salesmen miss this entirely because they forget that a sale is always a series of small “Yeses,” the last of which is the decision to fork over hard-earned dollars. For instance, in the shoe store example, what was the window display selling? Not shoes! The next Yeses in the sales series were creating prospects (Yes, I’ll stop here) and getting them inside the store (Yes, I’ll go in). The actual sale of shoes happened well down the line.

What’s your next Yes? Most sales calls cover a number of Yeses, from “Yes, I trust you enough to do business with you” to “Yes, I agree what you are saying is a benefit for me” and many others, each of which should be identified and carefully accounted for to have extraordinary sales results.

Know Your Customer’s Need

If there is a golden rule of effective selling, it’s that the only need which matters is your customer’s need. Most often, our customers’ needs are neither obvious nor well articulated by them. In fact, what business people often forget is that their customers are not actually interested in their product or service—they are interested in the benefit which it provides. The famous example is the customer in the tool aisle searching for a drill bit. He doesn’t really need a ¼” drill bit, what he needs is a ¼” hole. Of course, that doesn’t totally describe the need either. The company which wins the sale at a premium realizes that the customer needs a ¼” hole in plywood in the next half hour with the minimum amount of cost and mess and, ideally, with a product that matches the rest of his drill set.

To create a killer sales ability, you first have to understand the customer’s situation and point of view. The need you can address—or, more precisely, the benefit you can provide, is a direct outgrowth of the situation the customer finds himself in and his point of view on how his challenges can be overcome. Only rarely does a customer articulate the entire situation, which means you need to do some detective work in advance for each of your key customer segments. Nothing works as well as developing a detailed, “day in the life” portrait of your prospective customers. When you see all the background, the nuances and the external factors which are contributing to the stated need, offering a compelling benefit becomes obvious and easy.

In our shoe store example, Brophy’s understood that men’s needs were not just for shoes—they could buy those in any number of places—but for an interesting, pleasant place to buy high-quality, long-lasting, timeless apparel. The window display communicated all those key benefits in addition to the basic message that the store carried shoes.

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Keep it Simple

Everyone says you need to keep it simple. When they're saying that, the emphasis is on you. They, themselves, don't need to keep it simple because whatever they are saying is so darn interesting. We all have a tendency to fall into this trap either because we have worked hard on our business and are fascinated by it, or because we are not secure in the benefit we are offering so we keep relating features *ad nauseum* in hopes that one will resonate and close the deal. Big mistake.

What's happening inside our customers' minds while we are continuing to rattle on about our great offering? They're wondering whether the broccoli cheese soup at the deli is good today. A killer sales story is squarely focused on benefits. Instead, what I see in most sales presentations is too much time spent establishing credibility and too much time explaining features. Yes, credibility is important since and early Yes is "I trust you;" however, after a brief demonstration of credibility most prospects will give you the benefit of the doubt. While you may think a twenty minute exposition on the customer's situation shows that you've studied the customer in depth, the customer probably is concluding that you're boring and not focused on his needs. As for features, unless the prospect is asking for proof that you can provide the benefit he seeks, there is no reason to delve into your fancy, whiz-bang, differentiating attributes.

Brophy's display window was the epitome of simple. One pair of shoes, one radio, and two small signs in a large retail display case. A more contemporary rule than KISS is Don't Ask, Don't Tell. In other words, once you've talked about the benefit, if the customer doesn't ask, then don't tell. Frankly, he doesn't really care that much or else he would have inquired.

Create an Experience

In sales, nothing you say matters. It's true. People

believe what they help create and no amount of our talking and explaining takes the place of letting them create the realizations themselves. In other words, to achieve explosive growth in our sales success we have to give our prospects the opportunity to create the experience for themselves which will then lead to the "aha!" moment which ultimately creates the sale.

Over twenty years advising companies in this area, I have identified five different methods of creating effective sales experiences. The methods vary depending very much on what you are selling, your ability to capture the core message tangibly, and the expense/feasibility of providing a trial of your offering. The good news is that no matter whether your sale is concrete, like a consumer product or software program, or abstract, like a process, a service, or a change in conditions, there is a method for effectively creating an "aha!" experience. (The five methods are fully detailed in a free whitepaper available at www.ascendantconsulting.com.)

While it may not seem obvious at first, the super-effective shoe display was actually a sampling method. The store-front window let the passer-by enjoy a small shopping experience, from which he concluded at an intellectual or emotional level that shopping in this store is interesting, engaging, pleasant, and classy. Exactly the experience needed to create the thought, "aha! I want to step inside this store."

The four secrets outlined here have been successfully utilized by sole proprietorships and Fortune 500 companies where I have had the opportunity to engage in business-building initiatives. Your path to extraordinary sales success may not involve an 80 year-old pair of shoes and a broken radio, but I guarantee you that if you adopt the lessons taught by that small-town retailer you, too, will achieve record revenue growth.