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BY RICK DAVIS

Making presentations may be a verbal skill, but it is not unlike writing a bestselling novel. To engage the audience, you need a detailed plot, an exciting ending, and an organized outline that breaks down the delivery of informa-

building your sales story by covering the first three keys of effective presentations: 1) Prepare presentations in advance; 2) Choose the right sales tool for the right audience; and 3) Use time and timing effectively. If you have made these preparations and crafted your out-

the customer about factors unrelated to your product, such as crucial regulatory issues they will face. Another way to establish credibility is to volunteer limitations of your company or products. There is no perfect company, nor does your customer expect perfection. When you preemptively volunteer limitations of your product, the customer actually gains respect for you and your company. Yet another way to establish credibility is to sincerely compliment your competitor. Salespeople who believe they are the only solution to customers' challenges are naive.*

The bottom line is that you establish credibility during presentations by demonstrating your general knowledge of the LBM industry and your value as an objective resource for information.

2. Talk in chapters, not in novels. If your customers and prospects were willing, you probably could talk for hours about your product, your company, and yourself. But that would be as boring as reading a college textbook and

would do little to create a sale. Therefore, you must carefully select the issues that you will focus on. I recommend the concept of talking in "chapters." Try using shorter, more concise sound bites.

If you took my advice last month to brainstorm and list all the benefits of your product, company, and yourself, you are in a position to create a presentation template. This is a formula that allows you to cover massive amounts of information in a short period of time and also to organize your thoughts in an effective manner.

3. Create emotional interest. The whole purpose of the concept of chapters is to focus on the specific issues of interest to the customer. One person may be more interested in the design and aesthetics of your product while another may need to know the energy-efficient features. The critical issue is to

Command Performance



TO MAKE POWERFUL SALES PRESENTATIONS, YOU NEED A CAREFULLY PREPARED AND CONCISE SCRIPT.

line, you are now ready to develop other skills that will help you put together winning presentations.

Appealing to the Audience

1. Establish credibility. Salespeople destroy opportunities to generate powerful images because they behave stereotypically. Consider that a prospect or customer continually is confronted by salespeople who make boastful claims, which are certainly important to move the sales process forward, but often do little to improve a salesperson's image. In fact, just the opposite may occur. Too many bold claims, made too often, can erode a salesperson's credibility over time.

To combat this problem, you need to educate your customers in a general way. Rather than spout off the wonderful features of your product, enlighten

tion into manageable chapters.

A written outline can help you avoid rambling iterations that do little to gain a prospect's interest. You can choose to sound like a monotone schoolteacher reciting dull facts or like a Sales Leader delivering a dynamic narrative.

In last month's column, we began

* EDITOR'S NOTE: MORE INFORMATION ON WAYS TO ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY AND OTHER RELATED SALES STRATEGIES CAN BE FOUND IN RICK DAVIS' BOOK "STRATEGIC SALES IN THE BUILDING INDUSTRY," AVAILABLE AT WWW.BUILDERBOOKS.COM.

Sell Sheet

remember that people make decisions based more on wants than on needs.

If people were purely logical beings, buying solely based on their needs, then there would be no jewelry or “status” automobiles. But people are not purely logical; people are also emotional. Hence, your role as a salesperson is to help clients mesh their sometime conflicting wants and needs.

This is as true for business-to-business as it is for business-to-consumer sales. You may perceive rightly that price is one of the most powerful emotional factors for builders. Profit is the logical driver of purchases and it is related to subtler factors such as installation costs, timely delivery, and the like. Therefore it is essential that you recognize how to focus on the emotional issues of your prospects in order to create powerful presentations. In some cases this requires helping builders discover the emotional

aspect of logical issues (e.g. long-term profit being more important than price).

Organized Thinking

Try the following steps to create manageable chapters of information and build your sales novel.

1. Complete your brainstorming list. When you consider all the exciting qualities of your company and the many products you sell, the list becomes quite lengthy. If you sell five different products, you may discover a dozen important attributes for each. One product, such as hardware, might have various finishes, handlesets, operating features, specifications, etc. Your company might also provide numerous benefits like showroom displays, delivery capabilities, stock inventory, after-sale service, and leverage with suppliers. The list of product and service attributes is

potentially endless. If you fail to manage that list, you will end up with rambling, monotonous presentations.

2. List the benefits of each item. After you have created this list, take a moment to organize the benefits of each attribute by product, and write out a short chapter for every one. You quickly will discover that your story is growing to almost unmanageable length. This is why planning your presentations is essential. If you have a two-hour story to tell in only a few minutes, then you'd better be prepared to focus on the most important issues, presented in a way that elicits a powerful emotional response for your audience.

In this case, I would like to revisit last month's example of a paper towel salesperson. Paper towels are sold based on a multitude of features and to a variety of audiences. Notice in these next examples how

the attributes are the foundation of the powerful presentations:

Step 1: Complete your list of attributes: absorbency, designs, stock management, coupons, packaging, advertising, rebates, brand awareness, etc.

Step 2: Pick one attribute, such as designs. The border decorations for the paper towel come in three colors (red, blue, and brown) and three themes (spices, farm animals, and floral patterns).

Step 3: Write a chapter presentation. For example, “The border designs on the paper towel provide *color-matching capabilities for kitchen décors*, with browns ideally suited for earth tones while the reddish and blue hues match a variety of other popular kitchen color schemes. The *choice of themes also enhances home décor*, with some homeowners enjoying floral themes while

others gravitate toward farm animals. The key is that our paper towels actually enhance kitchen design for our customers who are interested in such level of detail.” This is a presentation ideally suited for a homeowner. A purchasing agent might not be as interested in the aesthetics of the product as much as the financial issues.

A chapter for the purchasing agent would communicate a business-related attribute, such as stock management. The stock management program employs small shelf space, company delivery, and rapid turnover. The chapter presentation would go something like this: “The stock management program is successful because, unlike others in the industry, *we employ our own delivery personnel, which facilitates rapid inventory turnover and creates a dramatic return on the investment* in your shelf space. Price and markup are impor-

tant, but not as important as overall return on investment. In one situation, a client I can refer you to discovered that the return on shelf space was almost double other paper products simply because our stocking program was so efficient and inventory turns were so high.”

Many salespeople struggle with their presentation skills because they lack preparation. Ask yourself if you are comfortable making presentations in front of your peers. If, like most salespeople, the answer is no, then take time to develop your presentations in writing to maximize the quality of your verbal message, breaking your novel into manageable chapters. You’ll discover that chapters are easier to memorize, and they become useful, laser-focused presentations. When you take the time to write your story, your verbal skills will grow and your confidence will soar. ■