



The Way I See It... Honing Telephone Skills

The survey 'Buyers Views of Salespeople 2005 - Changing Perceptions' by TACK International found that 69% of buyers rate the quality of telephone communication from supplier salespeople as merely 'fair to poor'. Hugh Alford of TACK looks at the lessons that can be taken from its findings.

All sales contact with the customer requires thorough planning and research so that call objectives can be set, in terms of information you want to convey or obtain and any decisions you wish to gain. Buyers get bombarded by sales calls, so preparation should ensure the approach is relevant, imaginative, professionally delivered and not an obviously scripted call.

When making an initial introduction it can take dozens of calls to establish who is the right contact and then speak to them. Above all a persistent and positive approach is needed given the slim odds of getting through to the right person! If frustration creeps in this can lead to an abrupt and potentially aggressive manner in an attempt to make contact. Strong psychological strategies are essential for maintaining an excellent mental attitude.

Pointers

Here are some valuable pointers for improving the chances of success on this path to 'getting through' and having a valuable call with the buyer:

- * Build relationships with whomever you come in contact with, be it switchboard, receptionist, PA etc. as you never know what influence these people have.
- * Respond to people's tone, speed of speech and use their name to help build rapport.
- * Keep detailed notes of people's names or events to use in the conversation next time you call.
- * Use the same language as your customer uses within their business.
- * Use every opportunity to find out direct dial numbers, mobile numbers and email addresses.
- * Use email and voicemail constructively to support the phone calls and always call back exactly when you say you will in your message.
- * Use email to share information and knowledge that will be of interest to the buyer, showing your interest in them as a customer e.g. a relevant news article or case study.

Improving telephone selling skills on the call

- * Prepare your call objectives, the information you need to establish and the decisions you wish to gain.
- * Once through to your contact politely introduce yourself and briefly state the reason for your call and ask if it's a convenient time to speak. Most will genuinely give you a time

to call back if not convenient. Having a time to call back means it is no longer a 'cold call' (44% of buyers consider courtesy and good manners as a key traits of the people they like to do business with).

- * At the earliest stage of a call with a buyer you need to grab their attention and maintain it since often the environment of buyers is full of both visual and noise distractions.
- * Move into your investigation phase seeking out their needs, wants, attitudes, opinions, concerns and problems. Remembering that customers need "a good listening to" and dislike being "told sold". Highly developed questioning/investigative skills are required as you have less time to get to the real issues on the phone. Be prepared to take more than one conversation to complete the investigation phase.
- * By gathering this information you are in a position to match your offering through its features, benefits and particularly the personalised benefits.
- * At this stage, if not before, you may meet objections from the buyer. These are best approached by appreciating them before answering them.
- * From then on you will be looking to close down the call on a decision-based objective.
- * Keep developing the account by agreeing the next time for follow up contact. Consider allowing the buyer to drive how, where and when they want the relationship to develop for example, by asking them what they would like the next steps to be

Body language over the telephone

There are three powerful uses of 'body language' through the phone – these are choice of words used, the way they are said and the tone of the voice. Together these help build a picture of how you would like your company to be perceived by your customers.

Remember **PHONE** to make you sound:

Polite

Helpful

Organised

Natural

Efficient ***Your Comments***

Number of comments: 1

 **Carl Duncker , 28-Sep-05**

Excellent article

Very good. Yes, the call objective should be set prior to the call so it is effective and efficient. The best salespeople are often the best listeners. We teach that sales is about questioning and listening not talking - something that gives the role a bad customer perception.

Also, getting straight to the point, offering something of relevance and only focusing on those potential customers that have the most to benefit all help to making an effective call for both customer and provider.

Kind regards