## Getting the Customer to Say No

The title of this article may seem a tad odd. After all, we are taught that the task is always to get the customer to say yes, In fact, we are often taught that there is no such thing as “no”, and that we are never to take “no” for an answer. So what’s this, suddenly Tudog decides to discuss the virtues of getting the customer to say no?

Are there virtues in getting the customer to say no?

Sure the primary objective of a sales call is to get the customer to say yes. We are all for “yes”, and enjoy hearing it ourselves – as often as possible. However, there are times, that for whatever reason, the “yes” we are seeking is simply not going to happen. In these circumstances, the trick then becomes – we would suggest - how fast you can get the customer to say no.

Part of our problem comes from how we often begin the sales process. Tudog has often lectured about the need for a strategic approach to sales, as opposed to a “contact” based sales approach. We agree that contacts are extremely important and that having them can serve to open the door, accelerate a process, and even seal the deal. There are, however, two central problems with a reliance on contacts alone; (1) you will eventually run out of contacts long before your company runs out of potential market, and will find yourself at a stunning competitive disadvantage if you did not also construct new relationships while you were exploiting contacts, and (2) contacts are generally unqualified leads, meaning that they are agreeing to meet with you not because they have a need or interest in what you are selling, but because they have want to extent to you a courtesy.

The other way we often sell, through referrals, also has an element of uncertainty, because they too are often unqualified leads. It is true that in many cases referrals are made after some consideration of their needs and your solutions, but often people refer one person to another also as a courtesy.

So what we have essentially are a lot of sales calls being received not because the company recognizes a need for the product being sold, but because human dynamics on one level or another dictated that the sales meeting should take place.

In these circumstances we believe it is almost as important to get the customer to say no quickly as it is to get him to say yes. Why? Because people generally have a hard time saying no, and therefore tend to string us along with a “maybe” that we assume means “maybe yes”, when in fact it really means “definitely no”. Getting them to say no quickly, if in fact “no” is what they’re going to say, saves time, energy, money, hopefulness, and focus. For every “maybe” that is really a no that we pursue, we could be pursuing a “maybe” that can be converted into a “yes”.

So how do we tell the difference? By engaging in a process that qualifies, and by definition – disqualifies, prospects. Here’s what you do:

1. Determine Quality of Referral Source

Many businesses (Tudog's included) gain access to new prospects through referrals. You need to qualify the referral source and make sure that they genuinely understand the profile of your likely customer. When you get the referral don't be too shy to ask questions like, "why do you think they need my product/service"? Keep in mind their answer when you contact the prospect.

2. Engage in Pre-Meeting Due Diligence

Before you set out to meet a prospective customer it is always advisable to do some pre-meeting due diligence. Tudog includes a number of aspects into its pre-meeting research, including; (1) the company need for our product/service, (2) the price point the company can handle and how compatible it is to our prices, (3) the type of deal structure the company is generally used to agreeing on, and (4) whether the person we are meeting with is the decision maker.

3. Have at Least One Telephone Conversation Prior to Meeting

Prior to meeting with the prospect it is advisable to have a telephone conversation with the prospect during which time you can gain some insight into the needs of the company, how to position your solution, whether you need to bring other people with you, and other helpful bits of information.

4. Set a "Contract" at the Meeting

At the meeting make sure you control the process by making a contract with the prospect from the start. In other words, it is okay to say, "I'd like to learn about your needs and then present to you a solid, cost effective solution. Is it fair to say that if our solution makes sense, your company will buy it"? The answer to this question will immediately reveal to you whether the prospect is there to buy or there only to gather information. (By the way, the gathering of information is a classic problem for sales people, as prospects try to gain insight into pricing and other issues so that they can use the information to negotiate better deals with their current vendors. You need to control this process by revealing information on a "as needed only" basis).

5. Let Them Know You Want to Hear No

Part of the contract you try to set is that they will tell you "no" if that is their answer. You need to tell them that while you prefer to get a "yes", you would like get the "no" as soon as possible (as opposed to endless weeks of "maybe" and "it's under review".

6. Set Your Follow-Up into a Structure

Before you leave the meeting make sure you set up your follow-up structure so the prospect knows what to expect of you. You can like them know that you will call next week, and the following week, but that if they are unable to make a decision after 2 weeks, you will cease disturbing them. This places the follow-up expectations in perspective and lets the prospect know when you are no longer going to actively pursue an answer.

7. Terminate When You Said You Would

You will need some discipline to cut ties when you said you would, but it is imperative that you do so. The prospect needs to feel that the “power” of the relationship is shared and that there is not an endless timeframe within which they can come to their decision. They will, in many cases, be grateful that you set up, and stuck to, a timetable, so long as it was reasonable and practical.

8. Leave the Door Open

Never leave in anger. There is no reason to close the door. It is perfectly legitimate for you to tell the prospect that so long as they are unable to make a buying decision you are unable to be of service. However, when they are prepared to make the decision, you will do everything within your power to assist them in resolving their challenges and meeting their potential.

Getting the customer to say “no” isn’t as crazy as it seems. Approach your sales strategically and take control of your sales processes and you’ll be spending more of your time selling to people who actually want to buy.