

## Preparing for the Sales Call

Is there really anything more important in business than the sale call? Isn't it true that everything the company does up until the moment of the sales call is in order for the call to be successful? The type of product, the production process efficiencies (so the cost is right), the strategizing, the development of tactics, the packaging, the marketing, and the distribution are all put into place so that someone can go out and sell, sell, sell. With all that effort and all that money being spent for the benefit of the all-too-critical sales call, isn't it supremely important that the preparation for the sale call truly reflect all that has been invested and all that is at stake?

The success of the sales call is all about the preparation that goes into it. Isn't it fair to say that with all the work that the product development, management, logistics, finance, and marketing people put into getting to the sales meeting, the sales department has an obligation to put in some work before the meeting as well?

So the real question is, what sort of preparation is required, what information is useful, and where can the information be found?

Presumably the message the company has selected and the positioning it has adopted are the result of the research and market testing performed by the marketing team. When you go into your sales meeting you should have a pretty good handle on what, in general terms, you are selling, to whom, and why they should want or need it. The job of the sales department is to take the information a bit deeper and make it more personalized. This way, when you walk into the sales call, you are not talking about the needs of the market as a whole, but rather you are able to discuss the specific needs of the particular company with which you are seated.

So what do you need to know? Consider the following:

1. You need to know the solution you bring to the customer – you need to understand the specific way your product alleviates a pain or provides an enhancement to the specific operations of the company you are visiting. You can find this out by reading their website, doing a web search on them, and most importantly, seeing if you can speak to any of their customers and/or suppliers to see if you can understand where their pain is. You may also be able to get the information directly from the “horse's mouth” by asking some simple questions when you set up the sales call. All in all, these combined sources will give you some idea of how your product brings benefit to the prospective customer.
2. You need to know about the people you are meeting with – right or wrong sales has a lot to do with the way people connect. People buy because they establish a trust with someone and want to do business with that person. The more you know about the people you are meeting with the more you will be able to make the necessary connection. The way to find out about people is to do an internet search where you may find out about hobbies or civic activities, talk to the person on the phone and try to determine something about his/her personality, read the company website and their bio, and, perhaps most importantly, size them up when you enter their office. Little hints like family photos, vacation photos, mementos and other items will tell you a great deal about a person.
3. You need to know what they know about you – there is no reason to assume that the prospective client is not looking into you in the same way you are looking into them. The

trick is to make certain that you are consistent with the information provided on your company website and that you are true to the brand and the company you are representing. If you come off as too different from what they have come to expect after viewing your website, they will become suspicious and that all important trust factor will be eroded. Also, do an internet search on yourself and see what comes up. Assume that they have and be prepared to be related to in a manner that is consistent with whatever they managed to discover.

4. You need to know who else they are talking to - in some cases the prospective customer will simply tell you who your competitors are in an overt effort to draw you into either a bidding war on the price or to get you to sweeten the offer by adding services or offering better payment terms. If you are not being told which companies are your competitors make the general assumption that all your competitors are. This may mean additional work, but it will make certain you aren't caught unaware at the mention of a specific company's product or offer. Know who your competitors are, what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, and how you compare. Be prepared to answer questions and demonstrate how your product, and why your company, make for the better choice.

It all boils down to the sales call. The preparation for it is an essential element to its success. The idea you can "wing it" is worse than arrogance, it is an insult to the prospective customer and a disappointment to your colleagues who helped get you to the point of the call. Go into the call prepared, and come out with an order.