

Giving a Sales Presentation? Perform a Background Check—On Yourself!

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An accomplished medical researcher told me about a presentation she had recently made. “I gave too much background and had to rush when explaining the clinical implications.” “Who was the audience?” I asked. The answer: “A group of clinicians.” If this doctor was trying to “sell” her conclusions to her audience, she failed.

Just as it’s natural for a researcher to begin a presentation chronologically, it’s natural for a sales person to begin a presentation with some company history and background. Most of us assume the background will lend weight and credibility to our presentation—to make our firm look strong and attractive. After all, if we have a solid history, aren’t we a logical choice?

From the buyer’s perspective, the answer is a loud “No!” Your customers simply don’t care about your firm’s history. They care about you—at least at first—*only* in relation to their problems and their goals. Copywriter Robert Bly says it well:

Your customers are interested primarily in themselves—their goals, problems, needs, hopes, fears, dreams, and aspirations. Your product or service is of secondary importance. The degree of concern is determined by the potential for the product or service to address one of the client’s wants or needs or by its ability to solve one of her problems.

Buyers want the finale first. They want to know: Can you solve their problem? Can you help them control inventory or quality? Can you impact customer satisfaction? Can you tame their technology tiger?

When you make a sales presentation, start by clarifying the problems and goals of your buyer. Whether you do this research prior to a presentation or during the sales presentation, it’s an investment that will pay off well. Address your remarks directly to the customer’s concerns. Focus on what you can do or deliver to make your customer’s problems go away. Give evidence of how you’ve delivered similar results to other customers.

Bring your company’s history, technological capabilities and structure into your sales presentation only as support or validation for the claims you make about what you can deliver. As business guru, Randy Gage, puts it, “lead with benefits; validate with features.”

Next time you face a customer, remember that it’s your job to think like the listener and to structure your presentation accordingly. Perform a background check—on yourself.

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