



Southern Building Material Association's Sales Management Newsletter

November 2011

"Membership Pays."

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and therefore can't address
them, shame on you***

10 Things Never to Tell Sales Prospects

By Jeff Haden

Samples can be helpful. Demos can be effective. But what is the primary tool used by salespeople?

Words.

Whether spoken or written, words make sales happen... or not.

Too many salespeople (and marketers and advertisers) use the same words — words used so often they've become meaningless — to describe their products and services. Pretend I'm a potential customer or client. Here's how I react if you use the following:

1. **"Customer focused."** Talk about redundant; should you be anything *but* customer focused? If your goal is to imply that other providers are not customer focused, tell me how: faster response time, greater availability, customized processes or systems... tell me in concrete terms how you will meet *my* specific needs. (If you don't know my needs and therefore can't address them, shame on you.)
2. **"Best in class."** There are two problems with that phrase: Who defined your "class" and who determined you were the "best" in it? (My guess is, you did.) Still, maybe you are that awesome. Prove it. Describe your accomplishments, awards, results, etc. As a customer I don't need best in class, I need best for me — so tell me, in objective terms, how you provide the best value for my needs.
3. **"Low-hanging fruit."** When you say, "We'll start with the low-hanging fruit," I hear, "We'll start with the really easy stuff you are too stupid to recognize or do yourself." No business wants to hear they have low-hanging fruit. Just describe, in cost-benefit terms, how you prioritized your list of projects or activities.
4. **"Exceed expectations."** Admirable goal, one every business should aspire to, but exceeding expectations is an internal goal. Tell me you will exceed expectations and exceeded expectations becomes an expectation. (I know, that's kinda Zen.) Just tell me what you will do every time; if you consistently pull it off I'll be delighted. Always let the customer judge whether you go above and beyond.
5. **"Unique."** The ever-increasing pace of commoditization means few products or services have no like or equal for long. If I'm considering hiring your firm or buying your products, "unique" means nothing to me. Tell me, in concrete terms, how you are *better*.
6. **"Value added."** This term is often used to imply I'll get something for no or very little incremental cost. That means what I will receive isn't value added — it's part of the overall deal. So tell me the deal, explain all the options and add-ons, and help me figure out how I can take full advantage of what you provide.
7. **"Expert."** Margaret Thatcher once said, "Power is like being a lady; if you have



Long-term business relationships are great.

- to say you are, you aren't." *Show* your expertise instead. "Web 2.0 expert" often reads as "We can slap videos and theoretically interactive applications on your website. "Built websites for ..." and "Created applications that..." lets potential customers evaluate your level of expertise and its suitability for their needs.
8. **"Exceptional ROI."** We all seek a return on investments and we all love a great ROI. But without access to my numbers you can't accurately calculate my ROI. Therefore your estimates are either theoretical or based on another customer's results, and either way I know those estimates are absolutely best-case. "Provides an exceptional ROI" reads as "...and you're a terrible businessperson if you don't do this." Show the costs, don't hide anything, and trust me to calculate my own ROI. If I'm not smart enough to do so I probably don't have purchase authority anyway.
 9. **"Partner."** Long-term business relationships are great, but we will never be partners because while your hand reaches into my pocket, mine will never reach into yours. Still, maybe one day I will see you as a quasi-partner... but that's something I'll decide on my own based on your performance, not on your marketing.
 10. **"Turn key."** I love a turn key solution as much as the next guy, but few solutions truly are. No matter how comprehensive the offering I always wind up participating more than I was led to expect, so when I hear "turn key" I'm naturally skeptical... that is, unless you thoroughly break down what you will provide and what my participation will be, both during implementation and after. Turn key is in the eye of the beholder and the customer is always the beholder.

Creating a Powerful Sales Plan

by Dave Kahle

Field salespeople have a unique aspect to their jobs – they have the ability to decide what to do every moment of every day. The need to make this decision – where to go, who to see, who to call, what to do – distinguishes the sales profession from most others.

I've often thought that the quality of this decision, more than any other single thing, dictates the quality of the sales person's results. Consistently make effective decisions and your results will improve. Make thoughtless, habitual or reactive decisions, and your results will be sub-par.

One of the ways to ensure that you make good decisions about your selling time is to create a comprehensive sales plan.

What's a sales plan? A written, thoughtful set of decisions about the most effective things you can do. A sales plan should be the result of some good thinking, wherein you analyze and prioritize a number of different aspects of your job.

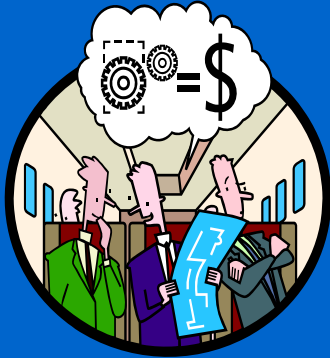
A good sales plan addresses different time durations and different aspects of your job.

Annual planning retreat

Every salesperson should discipline himself/herself to an annual planning retreat. Set a day or two aside, every year, to engage in some serious planning. Turn off the phone, shut down the email, and immerse yourself into deep thought about the coming year. Begin by specifying a series of annual sales goals. What, specifically, do you want to accomplish this year in your job? I recommend no more than five specific sales goals. Typically, one of these goals describes the total volume of sales dollars you want to create; another may describe the number of new customers you want to acquire; yet another may relate to the number of high potential customers with whom you want to increase your business. Regardless of what your goals are, an annual, written, specific



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set of goals is the beginning of a sales plan.

Next, give some thought, and express that thought on paper, as to your basic strategy to accomplish those goals. If you are going to acquire 20 new customers, for example, exactly what are you going to do in order to accomplish that annual goal?

Classify all your accounts by their potential. Rank them in order, identify the highest potential, and then plan to spend more time with the highest potential.

Re-organize your filing system; throw out the obsolete hard copies and delete the unnecessary electronic files.

To do this well, you will need to devote a full day or two. This annual exercise is the first part of a good sales plan.

Monthly plan

Next, you should develop a more detailed plan every month. Produce a one or two page document which contains your specific commitments to the most effective actions. Once again, you are required to analyze and prioritize your efforts in regards to a number of issues.

First, your monthly objectives: What do you want to accomplish relative to the annual goals that you set? If you said you wanted to sell \$2,000,000 worth of your goods this year, how much do you have to sell this month? Each of your annual goals should have a monthly component.

Next, you should address your prospects and customers. In order of priority, in which prospects and customers should you invest your time? That priority often takes the form of a methodical and objective ranking into categories – typically A, B, and C – based on potential. The sales plan then describes your plan for coverage of the A's and B's.

You should address the CTM opportunities, regardless of where they occur. CTM stands for *Closest to the Money*. Analyze and prioritize your efforts related to those opportunities within your territory that are closest to the money. What are you going to do to bring each of them to fruition? Specify each, the dollar amount of the opportunity, and what your actions should be.

Your company may have certain key product or product lines that it wants to emphasize. If so, you'll need to analyze and prioritize your efforts in regards to those product lines. What will you do this month to increase sales of those product lines? What specific actions will you take, in which specific accounts?

Finally, what will you do this month to improve yourself? What classes or seminars will you attend? What books will you read? To which CDs will you listen?

Note that all of this addresses not every action you will take, but rather the most effective actions. You can note these things on a page or two.

Don't think that you can keep all this in your head, and skip the discipline of writing it down. Writing each specific action and strategy down, whether it's on a yellow pad or a computer document, forces precise thinking. The written word also commits you to a degree much deeper than if you keep the idea locked in your head.

After you have completed this monthly sales plan, it's time to schedule your time. Lay out a plan for each day for the next 30 days. Where will you plan to be, and who will you plan to see? Reflect first your priorities from your monthly plan. Then fill in the non-



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priority calls.

You and I both know that your days will rarely go according to plan. However, without a plan, you will have totally given up the ability to control and manage your time. By having a plan you have something to fall back on, something to refer to, some benchmark by which to measure the constant and urgent demands on your time.

So, there is an annual component to your sales plan, as well as a monthly discipline. But you are not finished yet.

Weekly plans

You need to reorganize and recommit to your monthly time and territory plan each week. Adjust your plan based on what actually happened the previous week. For example, if you didn't get to see an A account that you had planned on seeing, can you see them this week instead? Make your adjustments each week. Each week, at the end of the week, spend some time planning and preparing for the upcoming week.

Daily plans

Finally, you need to plan each sales call. What do you want to accomplish in each call? What do you need to prepare in order to accomplish it? Again, you'll be more focused and more committed if you write down a specific outcome that you would like to achieve in each sales call. Keep in mind that sales is a process, consisting of a series of steps that the buyer and seller take to come to a good decision. Your planned outcomes should be narrow and specific. Something like: "Acquire the information I need in order to structure a proposal," instead of "Sell this account."

The creation of a sales plan, as you can see, is not a simple, one time event. Rather it is a discipline that involves a commitment of time and thoughtfulness at specific intervals in the year.

It is also not just an administrative requirement, but a powerful tool that enables a professional sales person to consistently make good decisions about the most important question he/she faces: Where to go and what to do?

Sales Quotes for the Month

"Failure will never overtake me if my determination to succeed is strong enough." By Og Mandino

*"It's not failure but low aim that is a crime."
- Unknown*

*"If you don't make dust, you eat dust."
- Motto of Jack A. MacAllister*

*"Success comes to the person who does today what you were thinking about doing tomorrow."
- Unknown*

*"I am easily satisfied with the very best."
- Winston Churchill*