



Five Quick Tips for Creating Conversations Salespeople Will Use

If you're like most marketers we work with, you're probably struggling with the best ways to help your salespeople have more meaningful conversations with customers and prospects. Perhaps you believe your salespeople sell too tactically, offering piecemeal solutions and missing the opportunity to serve in a more trusted advisor role. Or perhaps you have great salespeople, but their messages are inconsistent across the field and not reflective of corporate strategy and vision.

Effectively articulating any company's true business value is a challenge for even the best salespeople. So, what percentage of your sales organization can engage customers in discussions that carry them from high-level challenges down to individual solution areas without leaving the customer lost in translation?

When connecting the dots from marketing vision to sales execution, you can use these five quick tips for creating scripted conversations to help salespeople more effectively communicate your company's business value to customers and prospects:

1. AVOID USING YOUR OWN COMPANY'S "CORPORATE SPEAK."

Many companies have developed messaging at the corporate level, which likely includes the invention of your own unique term and associated acronym. Unfortunately, that can lead to salespeople spending their valuable presentation time trying to define and explain the messaging itself and not the associated business value to your customer.

Instead, try enabling salespeople to tell a story that explores business challenges and your approach to solving them. When it's appropriate in the discussion, sketch in the acronym and link it between the pains and solutions. Next, script a line that says, "Here at XYZ company, we call that <your special term and acronym>." Remember, customers want to know how you solve problems (your unique approach to value). Analysts want to know what you call it (your brand category and acronym).

2. USE THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE.

Don't think for a moment you can create this introductory dialogue without interviewing and gathering data from some very seasoned folks in your sales and executive organizations. They are the best at sharing a good dose of reality in what an executive tête-à-tête can or cannot be. But there is one caveat to remember when questioning these valuable resources – even your most senior executives can sometimes fall back on the same comfortable pitch. Stretch them to help you build an elevated discussion – one that sets your company apart. Make sure they can articulate what you are expecting your salespeople to present. In this role, you'll be as much of a strategist and facilitator as an interviewer.

Above all, keep this important project on track by owning the result, making decisions that keep it moving forward and ensuring the project does not become victim of death by committee. Remember, this scripted piece will evolve alongside your messaging. Thus, a six-month shelf life is appropriate for this type of sales tool.

3. MAKE IT MEANINGFUL AND MEMORABLE FOR CUSTOMERS.

Two suggestions here. First, keep points brief and on target. For example, "We work toward solving three key business challenges" helps customers associate you with specific pain areas right up front. Remember, your customer is likely to have to carry your story forward to his/her colleagues to gain buy-in and move the sales process forward. So, keep your point simple enough that your customer can then repeat it in his/her own environment and further your sales cause.

Second, use examples. This introductory presentation is a great place to leverage case study (success story) data in a more personal way. Even if you don't/can't use specific company names, cite situations where your company was able to address business pains in a unique and measurable way.

4. MAKE IT MEMORABLE FOR SALESPEOPLE.

Technology sales can be very complicated. We have all watched whiteboard presentations with boxes, clouds and lines ad infinitum. To create the ultimate introductory executive-level talk, you must first determine what is appropriate for your sales team to present – and it probably won't have any technology in it at all. That fact alone can be unsettling to salespeople who are used to drawing (or talking about) boxes and clouds.

When developing the whiteboard content and corresponding visuals, remember some basic speechwriting rules. Keep sentences short and leverage techniques, such as the art of alliteration and consonance where it makes sense. Avoid lengthy terms, phrases and acronyms that need to be defined to be understood. Be sure to supplement the whiteboard tool with instructions for use to help salespeople know when and how to engage in such a dialogue. That also helps them mentally prepare for the right time to ease into the script.

Chances are, if you're going to invest the time and money in creating an executive-level whiteboard conversation for your sales organization, you're probably going to expect them to learn it verbatim. But before engaging your training organization to test each and every salesperson, remember to test yourself first. If you can't memorize or even read it, how can you expect the sales team to be successful? Also test the executive team that supported its development. Finally, try out the tool with a small group of salespeople and make last-minute modifications before rolling out to your general sales force.

5. BUILD A STORY THAT FOLLOWS A PATH AND PAVES THE WAY FOR WHATEVER IS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN NEXT.

Create your introductory whiteboard conversation as the first in a series that helps salespeople move through the sales cycle in a logical, results-focused fashion. Each exchange should have a clearly defined start and finish. And, make sure salespeople understand the purpose of each discussion and what activities should follow.

By building a path for sales to follow, you're helping to ensure that marketing strategy and programs align with your company's sales methodology. Infusing success stories, thought leadership and ROI tools into the scripts further integrates existing marketing tools into the process.

CONCLUSION

As technology companies focus their salespeople to sell "higher in the organization," whiteboard conversations can serve a critical role in ensuring early executive-level discussions are targeted and meaningful. But to be successful, these sales aids must be developed to consider the needs of both the presenter and his/her audience. And, like all marketing and enablement tools, they must be launched with instructions for use, monitored for acceptance, measured for results and modified as market needs dictate.

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