



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IS EVERYTHING

by Leigh Wallinger

It is well known that people buy from people they like. For those who have been on sales training courses you will remember one of the first things you are taught is that "People buy people first". The more widely liked you are, the more you are likely to sell. Do or say something that doesn't sit comfortably with your prospective customer and you are less likely to make the sale.

All things being equal, people will do business with, and refer business to, those people they know, like and trust.

This is often forgotten by sales people – sometimes we need to be reminded about the basics. In a world full of value propositions, differentiators and special offers it is worth reflecting on your relationship with the prospective buyer. If he or she doesn't like you then you are less likely to make the sale.

How do you get people to like you?

The biggest step is to build a relationship which involves 2-way communications. In social networking circles this would be termed a connection. To establish this relationship on a personal level requires you to identify some common ground, some common interests, likes or dislikes. Thomas Power, CEO of Ecademy, uses the phrase "connectedness is attractiveness". The more connections you have, the more business opportunities you will find and the more income you will generate.

Putting this into a sales & marketing context, the more connections you have that are active the more experience you have at starting and nurturing relationships. This is the critical skill you need to build relationships with your prospective customers. When people begin to feel connected to you, they also begin to trust you more.

Prospective customers won't always respond positively to a constant barrage of sales approaches. Learn to approach them with a view to building long term relationships, where you are seen to be someone who is helpful and knowledgeable. This sets you apart from the other sales people they encounter. Once the relationship is established, the connection is made and trust exists, business will follow.

Business secured on the basis of a relationship is likely to be "better business". The likelihood of fraud or bad debt is much less than with a purchaser with whom you had no relationship and trust. Bad experiences, where we have bought goods/services that have not met our expectations, are common – especially so in the technology sector. Purchasers tend to revert to transacting with those sales people who they know and trust. This is some form of risk mitigation strategy because they know that by dealing with someone they know and trust, should something go wrong then the situation will be resolved with much less hassle.

From the seller's perspective, this helps to protect your accounts from your competition. Provided you have a good 2-way relationship with your customer there will be trust established in the connection. This trust will need to be reinforced regularly and when something does go wrong and you receive a complaint, by dealing with it promptly you will reinforce the strength of the relationship.



How do you build trusting relationships?

The following applies to both your customers and your prospective customers, although your customers should be slightly more responsive because there is already a "transactional relationship in place.

Here are 10 tips to building trusting relationship:

- Be extremely courteous.
- Show interest in them.
- Ask questions
- Listen very carefully
- Deliver exactly what you said you will.
- Keep follow ups regular and informative for the other person.
- Send them articles, newsletters and other items that you think will be of interest to them.
- Use a mixture of follow-up methods – phone, email, letter
- Help them by giving them ideas and suggestions.
- Don't ask for immediate repayment

This last point won't sit comfortably with those sales people who have been trained to Close, Close, Close. Building the relationship is an investment phase, you get your rewards later, sometimes much later. Remember that nobody ever listened themselves out of a sale. If you listen patiently to what is on your prospective customer's mind after asking questions to uncover their business needs, a connection is built. The more you listen, the better you will understand how to structure your offer or proposal. You do have to ask for the order because there is always a certain amount of indecision / hesitation at the point of buying.

There are other spin-offs in having good relationships with both your customers and your prospective customers. If people are connected with in a trusting relationship, you are more likely to obtain referrals. Yes, you still have to ask for them but referrals should help you to grow your business more profitably because the sales costs will be lower.

Trusting relationships with customers will also yield follow on business opportunities. If your customer is a large Corporate, then there is the opportunity to gain referrals into other parts of the organisation and grow your revenues still further.

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