



6 WAYS TO AVOID PITCHING FOR BUSINESS

by Leigh Wallinger

Does this happen very often to you?

When you get in front of your target prospect for that first meeting, it is vitally important that you do not end up pitching for the business. Pitching is what you instinctively do after the prospect sits you down and says: "OK, what are you selling?"

If you respond to this with a pitch, you will find that the sale will rapidly disappear. It is quite likely you won't even see it drifting away, as you were too intent on giving your prospect your full company presentation.

At the end your pitch, the prospect will probably give some vague statements along the lines of having to reflect on all the information provided to see how it fits with their strategy; to talk with his colleagues on the way forward; to wait until the new financial year before some unallocated budget can be identified for this project.

Actually, the prospect is probably thinking "How do I avoid wasting any more time with you" but won't tell you. You leave the discussion feeling relieved the first meeting is over and you've hooked another great prospect. The prospect leaves the meeting feeling relieved as well – he's got rid of you without having to commit to anything.

Why this is not the way to go.

When you are meeting with a prospect and faced with the question "What are you selling?" there is a huge temptation to talk and talk. As you have absolutely no idea what your prospect is interested in, the only thing you can talk about is your company, its products and services. You cover everything, hoping something sparks your prospect's interest.

In the process, you will broadcast that you are just a salesperson peddling a portfolio of products and services. You are making your prospect do the hard work – assessing how your company may or may not benefit his business. This is not the best way to develop the sale as the prospect is busy enough as it is; he doesn't have time to do the selling for you.

He hears a presentation about you, your company, how long you've been in business, where your office is, how many staff you employ. He hears absolutely nothing about how your company understands the problems / difficulties he is encountering and that you have a cost-effective solution that can address them.

So out of frustration, the prospect looks for ways to close down the discussion. Alarm bells ought to ring in your head when you hear statements like:

"Send us a proposal so we can review how it fits our business"

"There's no budget, leave me your card and I'll get back to you"

"How much is it?"

"We don't have any spare resources to tackle this for the foreseeable future"

"You're not on our Preferred Supplier List"

No matter how you respond to these points, it is quite likely that your discussions are at an end. The prospect, who has remained in control throughout, has just decided to terminate the discussion. Your follow ups will probably go unanswered and be ignored.



So what went wrong?

The main reason was that the emphasis of the whole presentation was on your company not on your prospect's company. This is not a surprise – you didn't know enough about the prospect's business to do any different. Your prospect isn't really that interested in your company, or in the technical details of your products. All he wants to hear is what your product / service can do for him. It could be to save time, or save money, or grow sales or grow profits.

Here are 6 steps you can follow that will help you avoid giving a sales pitch:

Prepare 10 key questions before the meeting

To do this, you will have to spend some time researching the company you are going to meet. [In fact, the research should be undertaken even before you make the first approach to get the meeting.] There are numerous sources of background information on companies, all readily accessible via the Internet. Then, develop 10 open-ended questions that will enable you to draw out information from the prospect. Use these questions to help you identify the pain points that your product / service is able to address.

Make yourself ask questions

There is little you can do but to practice this. If you are not used to asking questions and gathering information from prospects, this will initially feel very uncomfortable. Do persevere and asking questions will soon become natural. Remember it takes at least 30 days for a new habit to form and in this period, your mind will find ways to resist making the change. You must learn to ask open questions to identify your prospect's pain points.

Aim to talk only for 1/3 rd of the time

This is quite easy once you master the skill of asking good questions. You are listening for some form of "trigger word" that indicates the existence of a pain point being encountered by your prospect. Depending on your product / service, you may have to uncover several pain points before you identify one that your company can address.

Know how your product / service adds value to your prospect's business

Having a thorough understanding of how your product / service helps clients is critical to determining which pain points you will focus on. With this knowledge, you can start to build the (negative) impacts of each of the pain points highlighted by your prospect that your company can address. The bigger you can make the inconvenience caused by these pain points, the greater opportunity you have to create urgency within the prospect to address them.

Exploit only the pain points that you can address

This doesn't require much explanation. Only focus on pain points that you can address, ignore the rest. Experts in the field of networking for sales will suggest you shouldn't simply ignore them but offer to help your prospect. You do this by introducing the prospect to people who can address the pain points which your product / service cannot impact. This is especially valuable if you are a member of a networking group, such as BNI, where each Member identifies business opportunities for other Members



Be armed with a collection of customer success stories

If you can demonstrate to your prospect that their pain point is not unique and that you've solved it before for other customers, your credibility will be sky high. Use these success stories to develop your prospect's confidence in your capabilities.

Don't get tricked by the prospect into giving a pitch. Do your research ahead of the meeting so that you are armed with 10 searching questions that get you prospect thinking. Use previous success stories to add credibility to your solution and focus on those pain points your company can address.

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