



Are Your Sales Reps “Presentation Ready?”

Most sales executives are proponents of needs-based consultative selling and believe that effective sales calls revolve around customer-centric dialogue rather than traditional sales pitches.

If you spend any time in the field with your sales team, you'll quickly discover that although an effective two-way conversation with your customer is critical to success, every important sales call ultimately includes at least one mission-critical presentation.

The 80/20 Rule of Selling Time

The most successful sales calls usually apply the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of a meeting is spent in a two-way dialogue with the customer and the remaining 20 percent is a presentation. These presentations are not necessarily formal, but consist of key sales moments that tend to be poorly executed or avoided altogether. They include the following:

- Quick presentations about the company's background and credentials.
- Initial meeting that describes the company's unique point of view on industry trends and issues. It favorably shapes the agenda for the rest of the meeting.
- Walkthroughs of important sales aids.
- Summarization of the customer's needs and the recommended steps in the buying process.
- Sharing of case studies and examples that demonstrate how you have successfully addressed similar customer problems in the past.
- Live demonstrations of your product or service in front of buyers.

Most sales reps also need to be prepared to deliver formal presentations in a live and online setting.

Even though only 20 percent of selling time is spent presenting, 80 percent of the value in most sales calls comes from effective presentations by a sales team. In a way, presentations are the moments of truth in every sales call that determines the success or failure of a customer meeting.

Assessing Your Teams Presentation Skills

You can evaluate them by observing their competence in three key areas:

- **Attention capture:** Do they get executive buyers to sit up and take notice in the first two minutes of every critical interaction in the selling cycle?

- **Executive presence:** Do they build credibility and trust, especially when confronted by tough questions from executive buyers, with effective eye contact, body language and vocal tone?
- **Preparation:** Can they plan a compelling execution of a wide variety of presentations that they must make to motivate their executive buyers to support their proposals?

Unfortunately, most sales reps fail at least one of these areas, if not all three. At pivotal turning points in the sales cycle, executive buyers start to disengage and lose interest and faith in the message. This results in predictable roadblocks to the advancement of the buying process.

How to Make Your Sales Team Presentation Ready

Turning sales reps into successful presenters can be challenging. Delivering a critical presentation to executive buyers can be incredibly stressful. Simply telling or showing your sales reps how to do it won't help to overcome their fear, eliminate bad selling habits or improve sales performance. The solution is to approach the challenge the same way as an effective sports coach.

Think about your favorite sports team. Whatever sport it is, winning depends on whether its team members can demonstrate and use strategic skills on the playing field. It's the same with making effective sales presentations.

The key to success on game day is structured live practice and feedback on the field. When it comes to making your sales reps presentation ready, it's critical to build this into your training and sales management. Like successful sports coaches, your sales trainers and managers need to provide their teams with multiple opportunities to:

- **Practice** in simulated settings the toughest presentations they must make during their sales calls.
- **Accelerate** skill acquisition when possible by viewing their own behaviors using video feedback.
- **Receive** constructive feedback about their performance and try it again until success behaviors become second nature.

For most sales reps the “practice-to-play” ratio is less than one-to-one. But when it comes to making your sales reps presentation ready, the lesson from the field is clear: if it doesn't happen in practice it won't happen on the field.

David Mears is the chief sales officer at Mandel Communications, Inc.