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Two Ways to Sell More in a Recession



"This is the best time ever for good sales people. There is more opportunity now than there has been for the last five years and we plan to take advantage of the current conditions. We intend to put all the expertise we can gather into the marketplace."

That statement was not made in a boom time or during a market that was giddily growing with every passing day. It is a statement that was made now. Now, when the market is tight and a number of people and organisations are feeling the squeeze. It was a declaration made by a client of mine in the IT/computer market. As you would know a market that is experiencing its share of challenges and market pressures.

We researched previous tight market conditions and arrived at a sales strategy that we could use successfully to prosper in a down market.

Two ways to get more business

A friend and I were discussing the new Grollo building at Docklands in Melbourne. It is billed as the world's tallest building (when finished). It got me thinking about selling and growing your business.

Some sales people see the best way of having the tallest building in town, as tearing down any building taller than their own. They do this in a sale by attacking their competitor's products. You know the style. They make disparaging statements about the quality, reliability, range or usefulness of anyone else's product. They call it "planting seeds of doubt". Sometimes effective as a tactic but always damaging in the long run.

The second way

The second way to a bigger, taller building is to build it that way from the start. The first rule here is to never tear anyone else's down. A simple and proven method.

You and I do business with many people and organisations. Why would we change? Because we get to keep the benefits of what we already have and add some other benefits that we want and don't have right now. As a sales person, how do you find out this vital information and take business from your customers current supplier?

Ask your prospects this simple question: (relate it to what you sell). For this example

let's use a printing business: "What does your current printer do well, in the way they do business with you?"

The prospect will give you a list of what they ALREADY have as benefits. They may answer, they got to know me, they deliver, the quality of the work is good, etc. Of course, they will add, we get a good price!

You now have a list of what this prospect will not give up. Now we have one more question. "What else could your current supplier do differently or better?" That is the short version of the question. You can flesh it out a little. Keep it simple.

Two questions that will guarantee you get extra business. No, this is definitely not a trick...!

The prospect will usually start to tell you about other areas that they would like and are not getting. For example: they could be quicker at returning phone calls, they could deliver closer to the time they say they will or I would like more advice about design and layout.

So, what do you have?

A list of all the reasons that they could be open to move to another supplier. It won't yet be you. You still have a sales job to do. But what you do have is a clear set of criteria to use when selling.

What about the old price issue?

Naturally, any sensible prospect won't be able to resist throwing "Lower prices" onto their list. We will come back to that.

Now you have your list you use a standard checking question and gain agreement.

"When looking at printing, your current supplier got to know you, they deliver, the quality of the work is good. You also want quicker returning of phone calls, delivery closer to the time agreed and more advice about design and layout. In relation to what you pay, you want to be sure that you are getting real value for money.

If you could find a printer that did all of those things, that would be the company you would want to do business with, correct?"

Three points to make

The following three points sum up this successful questioning technique.

1. The entire list of the prospects supplier requirements has been put in one. This means that you now have a sales format to work with.

2. The issue of lower prices has been rephrased, so that it now represents a reasonable proposition to both. You delivering a good product that is fairly priced and the prospect knowing that they have received value for what they paid. Try using this when you are in a price discussion.

3. You have helped the prospect clarify what is important to them (in this case it's print supply. In your case it will be your product). The statement, "If you could find a - your product or service - that did all those things, that is the company you would want to do business with?" is a powerful one, because it moves all potential suppliers to a new starting point. A point where you have a much greater opportunity!

There is more opportunity now for good sales people because when the market tightens up, we find out who can actually sell and who were the 'professional visitors.' Sales people who concentrate on building a taller building by being better and giving prospects and customers what they want, will always prosper - no matter what the prevailing market conditions.

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