

## “I Propose...”

Many companies and their decision-makers require written proposals, and if you are like many sales people, you probably shudder at the thought of this request. However, writing a good proposal doesn't have to be painful providing you keep a few points in mind.

First, recognize that closing the sale in a business proposal is a process, not an event. It doesn't occur just because you have asked for a commitment or because you have presented all the features and benefits of your product or service. When a customer or prospect agrees to do business with you after reviewing your proposal, it means that you have addressed their key issues and demonstrated exactly how your solution will benefit their company. This requires a bit of strategic planning.

Unfortunately, too many sales people spend too much time talking about their company, product or service at the beginning of the proposal. The drawback with this approach is that decision-makers are extremely busy which means they don't want to waste their time reading something that has little or no relevance to their situation. Salespeople will argue that this information is critical and that they need to present it in order to show how their solution is appropriate to the customer's situation. While this is true, it is essential to direct your initial focus on the customer and demonstrate that you have a good understanding of your prospect's issues and concerns.

Great proposals often start with an executive summary which highlights the prospect's current situation or problem and how this issue is affecting the company. This means you need to ask your prospect key questions during your conversations. In the hundreds of sales training workshops I have conducted over the years, I have discovered that the vast majority of sales people fail to ask their prospects sufficient insightful, thought-provoking questions. As a result, they fail to understand the negative impact of a particular problem on the company's business. However, stating the impact of the problem in your proposal can reinforce to the decision-maker, the importance of implementing a solution.

Closing the sale in a proposal means positioning your solution and demonstrating exactly how your prospect will benefit by using your product or service. Far too many sales people forget this critical element. They discuss many of the features and benefits of their solution but they fail to outline the impact of their solution on the prospect's business. The challenge is that the majority of sales people do not discuss this

with their prospect. Therefore, they cannot address it in their proposal.

Reduce the prospect's risk. Many people would rather tolerate working with a vendor who is not performing well rather than make a change because of their fear of the unknown or the pain that is often associated with making a significant change. I once retained the services of a particular individual even though I was not completely satisfied with his work simply because I dreaded the hassle of finding a new vendor. If this is a potential concern of your prospects, then offer some type of reassurance or guarantee to reduce or eliminate this fear.

Closing the sale in a proposal also requires some form of action or commitment. Ending your proposal with a feeble statement such as, “If you have any questions please let us know” is not effective. It is essential that you clearly outline the next step(s) you expect from your prospect along with a time frame.

Lastly, keep your proposal as brief as possible. Unless your solution is extremely complex, you need to keep it short, clear and concise because executives simply don't have time to read a fifty page document. Besides, short proposals are usually much easier to read and understand. I recall the very first proposal I was required to present. Because I didn't know any better, I only included information that I felt was relevant to my prospect and was able to outline a thirty thousand dollar project in just three pages. After we reached an agreement I asked what influenced their decision and was told, “Your proposal was easy to understand.”

The bottom line? If you have asked your prospect enough of the right questions and positioned your solution in a manner that demonstrates exactly how your solution is the best one for your prospect, and removed the risk, you increase your ability to close the sale.

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