

47. Tell Stories to Your Customer

“If you’ve heard this story before, don’t stop me, because I’d like to hear it again.”

Groucho Marx (1890-1977) Comedian and actor

Facts tell, while stories sell.

Have your salespeople tell stories. I have found that most successful salespeople sell by telling stories and not by making presentations. And, it does not seem like they are selling.

Top salespeople can build trust and credibility while overcoming scepticism by talking about how another customer solved a problem by using a product or service. A good story can address an objection or concern before the customer ever brings it up. Done right, the story well-told makes the storyteller appear sincere and trustworthy.

Sales presentations are the quickest way to lose a sale since there may be nothing more obvious or obnoxious than a canned pitch, better known as “death by PowerPoint”. Shut down the laptop and build the relationship with your customer by sharing your stories.

Connect with a customer’s emotions by talking about past experiences with other customers. Stories can be a great way to break the ice with a new customer and ease the natural tension in a sales call. For the existing client, the well-told tale can enrich the business relationship. Generally, customers can identify with the story and can picture themselves as a part of the story. This emotional connection helps them remember the story while they may never remember the facts or figures, let alone the features and benefits of your product. Stories should have a simple theme or value; if the tale is too complicated the message could get lost.

The mechanics are simple. A good story’s opening is clear and engaging. The sequence of events must be easy to follow. Don’t be too clever or you might lose your audience. The story must have a clear ending and must have had a purpose. If done right, the story lives on in the memory of your customer. Story telling can achieve things that marketing brochures can't.

Be sure to tell true stories and not tall tales. An outlandish fib or an outright lie will be immediately visible and self-defeating. Keep a record of all your stories. This preserves the stories for use by others in your firm and it will protect the facts within the story. A good use of the archived stories could be to help your new employees learn about your firm’s value proposition. Or, when properly edited, these stories could go on your website for viewing by visitors.

One more thought: Stories don’t all need happy endings. Sad stories can help us learn and teach others.