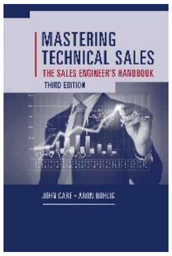

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Handling The Zero Discovery Demo

"Stop Me If You See Something You Like"

We've all been in that situation when you walk into the conference room, or start-up your webcast, and you have no idea what the sales call is about or what the customer really needs. It's known as the "*spray and pray*", the "*dog and pony show*" or "*the three hour tour*".

We also know that although it is usually a complete waste of your time, these calls do happen in real life and the professional SE needs to be prepared to deal with them. So, two days from now you are visiting a customer and the only information you have is the name and address of the company and the guidance of "*they just want a general overview of our products and what we do.*" What happens next?

Before You Go

1. Check Your Attitude! You are probably ready to choke your salesperson, complain about a non-communicative customer and moan about life in general. So go ahead and get it out of your system, update your boss about the event, and then pick up your attitude as if this was a critical multi-million dollar opportunity. Be positive.

2. Conduct The Research. Ignorance is no excuse for poor preparation. Check out the customer's website, run a Google search, visit a financial site if they are publicly traded. This data may be in your Sales Force Automation system, or the rep may provide it (at least ask the rep to research if they own any of your solutions at other sites or subsidiaries) – but if you do not have it, you should. At a minimum, you should know what their major products are, where their major locations are, basic finances (profit, revenue, and margin), who they compete with and who they are most similar to within your current customer base. Between Google and LinkedIn, you should be able to research the names of the customer contacts.

3. Contact The Customer. OK, maybe the rep said not to contact the customer – but you need to make a decision about preparation. Ask for a technical contact to call so that you can validate connectivity, environment, and wireless coverage. Make something up if you need to – but try to call the customer, techie-to-techie, and while you have them on the phone, drop in a few relevant discovery questions. "*Hey, as I have you on the phone, can I just ask you…*" Do not make your salesperson look like a bumbling idiot, as you are a sales team, but do play up the technical part of your title.

4. Balance Education v Selling. Your goal is ensure the customer understands how they could use your solution in their environment and the benefits they would gain (and the pain they may avoid. The goal is not to educate them on every nuance of how to use your product. If your demo is “click here, drag this” then it is a navigational functional demo and you are really teaching them how to use your solution as opposed to what it does. Clicks = Complexity

5. Don’t Forget *Do Nothing Inc*. 50% of deals are lost because the customer does nothing. Make sure you have a list of compelling reasons for them to act, because you will need them during the call. You do not want to make that stuff up in the middle of the meeting.

6. Prepare Handouts and a Memorable Leave-Behind. Build a simple summary handout of your presentation/demo. Focus on a couple of key slides or screens, a customer success story and a memorable take-away. This might be a Mnemonic, a Set of Power Numbers or a simple diagram such as a 3x3 grid. In effect, you are giving them a 60-second summary of your meeting based on “if they can’t repeat it, they don’t get it. And if they don’t get it, they won’t buy it.”

Once The Meeting Starts

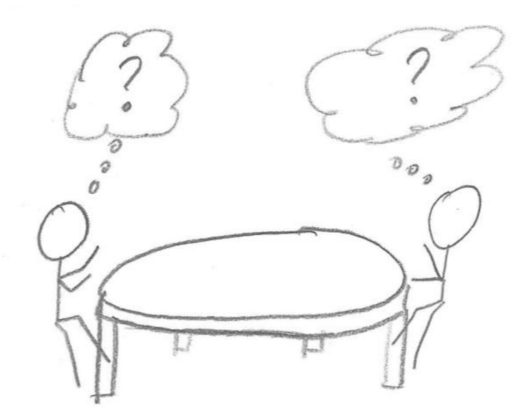
Do not start presenting or giving a demo. You are now in the position of having to perform some discovery on the fly. This is going to require some flexibility on your part, so consider it as a challenge. Here are some techniques I have found useful to ‘provoke’ the customer into disclosing useful information.

1. Trade Your Story For Theirs. The rep probably has a strong desire to start with a corporate overview. Although I am not a big fan of “broadcasting” who we are and what we do, you can offer to exchange your corporate story for their version of what brought them into the room today.

2. The Pain and Gain Sheet. Think of this as a PowerPoint slide with a number of questions on it. These are important questions which you know your solution can answer. Examples vary depending upon what you are selling, but they are along the lines of *“how can we reduce our backup window?”* or *“do you know what your exception rate is on invoices and how much that costs you?”* Here is an example of a pain sheet I once used for determining presales metrics to run a business.

3. The “A Customer Like You” Story. Start with 2-3 stories about customers just like them. If you are selling to a small-medium community bank, then make it another small financial customer, another small-medium customer, and then another customer in the same city/location as them. You are seeking either a “that sounds just like us” or a “we don’t have that problem” style response.

4. The Staff Meeting Conversation. When working with a manager and a group of her direct reports, try the "last staff meeting" question. I draw a picture of a table and a couple of stick figures and ask "*when you talked about <what you do> at your last staff meeting – what were the items that came up for action?*" This works particularly well if you are selling "IT Plumbing" solutions or equipment varying from servers to heat pumps to medical devices.



5. The Demo/GPS Roadmap. When called in to perform a generic (out-of-the-box) demo, give the customer some control over what you show. I've written before about a Demo/GPS Roadmap – which graphically shows the customer, step-by-step, what they are going to see. Hand this out to customer and ask for feedback in terms of what would be important to them and what isn't. Choose the one or two items they say are important and ask "*how do you do that now?*" with as many follow-up questions as you can before they start to get impatient. Try to have them draw something for you to explain their current state.

6. Just Ask! Play the technical/doctor card. "*Listen, I can talk for hours about this subject and all the great things that my solution can do, but I'd like to narrow it down so I can focus on those things that are important to you. Can I ask you a couple of questions before I start?*" If you get some resistance, use the doctor analogy about understanding all the symptoms so you can get a complete picture.

Summary

Just because you have been committed to make the zero-discovery sales presentation does not mean it really has to be zero-discovery. Do your research. Once you start the meeting, position your questions as being of benefit to the customer so you do not waste their time. Obviously this is not sales or customer behavior you want to encourage, yet if the technical part of the call fails it is often the technical part of the team that gets the blame, regardless of the circumstances. So be prepared.

"In Sales, just as in Medicine, Prescription before Diagnosis is Malpractice."

Jim Cathcart, SFA Pioneer

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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