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Pain And The Sales Engineer

Your Biggest Competitor Is "Do Nothing Inc."

Every sales methodology out there talks about discovering the "customer pain". They may actually use the pain word, or disguise it as a key business issue/driver – but we all know it as pain. Yet as Sales Engineers, whenever we present or demo our solution, we naturally gravitate towards the comfortable ground of "*look how good life is going to be in the future*". That is the opposite of pain – that is gain. We do not spend much time on pain such as: "*and this is why life is so bad right now*". I am going to make a case that avoiding pain is more important that seeking gain – and we need to present our solutions that way.

Two Very Important Numbers

50% PERCENTAGE OF DEALS THAT RESULT IN "NO DECISION.

I've heard numbers quoted varying from 33% up to 56% in the past year. I asked 27 VP's of Sales or Operations across a wide spectrum of companies this question: "*Counting only those deals that actually make it past the initial stage of the pipeline funnel (i.e gets some basic qualification), what percentage DO NOT result in revenue for you or your competition?*" The average response was 47%. Allowing for sales optimism and that you may not always know what happens to a deal – 50% is a good engineering approximation. (note – this is a business pain that companies like salesforce.com utilize to sell their wares!)

80% PERCENTAGE OF DEALS DRIVEN BY PAIN VERSUS GAIN.

I asked this question: "*Of the deals you actually won – how many were motivated by the customer having a serious problem (pain) to solve, as opposed to the customer moving towards a future gain?*" The average response was four out of five. This seemed a pre-programmed answer so I asked for further research and the answer came back the same. So pain drives 80% of deals – and therefore gain only drives 20% of your potential sales.

So What Should The Pre-Sales Engineer Do?

1. Do The Math! If you focus solely on selling benefits (the gains) then you are only going to hit the target 10% of the time. That is 50% times (1-0.8) = 10%.

2. Focus more on the pain. That means not only promoting the benefits of your solution, but also contrasting them with the current state of pain. "*You said that this was an issue in your environment right now – so here is how we can reduce the time it takes to <……> by 50%, which is what your target is.*"

3. Be Vicious. I'm a big believer in the concept of diagnosing and solving a business pain. Part of your job is to amplify the current pain a customer is feeling. The more you increase the risk of doing nothing, the better your chances. This involves questions such as "*who else does this impact?*" or "*what happens if that outage had occurred during trading hours?*" A personal experience of this occurred when I took my car to be serviced a few years ago. The mechanic told me that my tires were worn. I asked if I should replace them. He replied "*Well, legally they're OK.. (pause) .. do your children ride in this car much?*" I replaced the tires!

4. But .. Don't Step Over The Line. Your goal is ensure the customer understands the issues around their current situation and how you can help .. it's not really to scare them into acting. Leave that to the salesrep as you have your technical credibility to maintain and it may seem "too sales-ey".

5. Map Your Presentation/Demo Back To The Business Drivers. During the Discovery process, you have uncovered the business drivers and determined why the customer is actually speaking with you. Make sure that your pitch and playback to the customer reflect that. I use a Demo Situation Sheet (covered in my Demo Workshop) to draw out both the pain and the gain and link what you are showing to what has been said. Just giving your standard presentation isn't going to allow you to cut through the "do nothing" haze.

6. Help The Customer Onto The Bridge. Every journey begins with a single step – and that single step is often the hardest. Explain to the customer what the first step is to get from the current state (pain) to future state (no pain and possible gain). If they can visualize taking that first step across the bridge it's actually a massive step forward in the opportunity.

7. Question Your Numbers. Whenever you state some statistic or result, ask yourself the magic questions of "so what?" and "who cares?" If your hardware results in 20% better performance or your software reduces bugs by 32% or your overall solution increases talent retention by 8% - so what? Those are only relevant numbers IF the customer has stated they have a problem in that area. You need to relate the outcomes of your solution back to the customers pain.

8. Forget the Sunshine, Puppy Dogs and Unicorns. That's what I call the rosy future that you paint of how the solution will produce results for the customer. They are all nice outcomes, but usually what the customer wants is a future where they aren't bleeding money through unnecessary costs, they aren't getting irate phone calls, tweets and emails from their customers and they look good in front of their peers and their boss.

9. This Happens Outside Of Sales Too. There are full scientific studies of risk aversion and behavioral science. Wikipedia has a good summary and Dan Ariely's book "Predictably Irrational" provides some great stories. You'll understand how and why risk aversion and gain v loss drives so many emotional decisions.

Summary

Continue to promote the good, future-oriented benefits of your solution, BUT .. add in some of the current real-time pain the customer is facing to help them take the first steps. If you focus on gain, you will miss 80% of your audience. Perhaps if you focus on pain earlier in the sale cycle, there will be less wins by "No Decision Inc."

"The aim of the wise is not to secure pleasure, but to avoid pain."

Aristotle , Greek Philosopher