

Brief

6 Reasons Your Sales Reps Lose Deals They Should Be Winning

Sales organizations often examine how deals are won – a more productive activity is to uncover how deals are lost. This Brainshark Brief explores 6 factors most likely to turn a potential sales win into a failed opportunity.

The job of a salesperson is changing fast in the race to adapt to an evolving digital marketplace. Industry conversation about effective sales often turns to new and different types of consultative selling, in which reps act as subject matter experts who bring immediate value to a buyer.

Being able to play this role is essential. Research has shown that sales reps' failure rate will continue climbing if they can't keep up with better-educated buyers and an increasing number of options in the market.

That said, there are a myriad of reasons why sales reps lose deals, from poor preparation to catching a buyer on a bad day. But there are major, common factors at play, too.

- Inability to communicate or create value
- Focus on products rather than buyer pain points
- Minimal understanding of company differentiators
- Failing to secure a "champion" to help navigate the buyer's process and politics
- Insufficient motivation and development as a sales rep
- Organizational aversion to new sales processes

1. Inability to create value

Conveying value to the buyer up front is critical, yet it's often overlooked or insufficiently emphasized by the seller. To create true value, the sales rep needs to understand some basics about the buyer's current state, including how he or she is operating and the issues that exist within that process. Once the rep has that view, they can suggest its negative consequences.

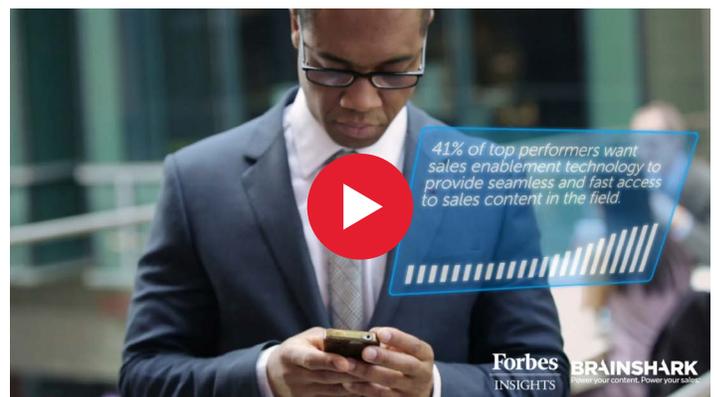
Here's the wrong conversation: "I understand changes impacting your industry, and how this might affect your company. Let's talk about solutions we have to offer." This eliminates the rep's chance to uncover specifics about the customer's situation, the impact of current shortcomings and, most important, the ROI upside of a future desired state.

The ability to put dollars against the customer's negative consequences is key: a customer who knows exactly how much the current state is costing him in time or money will be better motivated to seek out a solution. By determining the buyer's actual monetary risk if they do nothing, the sales rep has successfully introduced real value into the conversation – and made it clear that change should be top of mind.

2. Too much focus on products

In many cases, sales calls fall flat because reps become overly reliant on products instead of buyer pain points and needs. That's the wrong focus: Product information is one of the most easily available resources for buyers. As a result, calls become a case of "tell me something I don't already know."

SiriusDecisions notes that 67% of buyers conduct research digitally, regardless of their stage of the buying process – clearly, they're aware of products and features. The hurdles arise when salespeople are unable to connect the dots between buyers' pains and specific ways they can help address those problems through capabilities and services the competition does not offer.



Watch: The 5 Crucial Elements for Valuable Sales Conversations

3. Too little grasp of differentiators

Speaking of the competition, it's shockingly common for sales reps to have little understanding of what makes its company's offerings stand out in the market. This can just about end a sales opportunity mid-conversation.

The wrong approach? Speaking in platitudes when confronted with the differentiator question: "We have the best people." "We offer a complete solution." "Our customer service is excellent." What value do any of these statements provide for a general manager who's looking at cost overruns from a supply chain problem?

When a sales rep can address a pain point with a specific company differentiator, the conversation is on the right track: "We have a proprietary inventory fulfillment system so you're never out of stock, but aren't carrying excess inventory." With this answer, a rep isn't cornered into talking about commoditized goods, but can begin to highlight how his or her company's service is different than the competition's. Winding up in a bake-off between features – or a popularity contest between sales reps – is never a sustainable methodology.

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4. Failure to cultivate champions

Numerous deals are lost because the sales rep doesn't understand the buyer's culture. Having a brand champion to help navigate the buyer's world, and initiate the right introductions, can make a considerable difference in establishing meaningful sales conversations, faster.

Keep in mind that it's important to nurture relationships with advocates – the connection has to be mutually beneficial. Companies should be prepared to help champions or advocates tackle problems they're currently grappling with; then, they'll be more likely to contribute.

5. Lack of development as a sales rep

Elevating the selling process is paramount – growing any sales force's list of 'A' players is what drives revenue growth.

But many salespeople don't take their skills to the next level for a simple reason: it's hard work. Selling techniques that demand innate curiosity and great exploration skills aren't intuitive – they take practice. And the finer points of consultant and insight selling require a higher level of command.

A sales rep can easily rely on the same pitch for all buyers, but it's far more engaging to craft a different conversation each time, with multiple threads and topics most relevant for that buyer, plus open-ended questions designed to truly understand the buyer's world instead of constantly looking for an opening to make a pitch.

6. Organizational aversion to change

For many companies, a larger type of systemic thinking is at fault. Operating more effectively – and ultimately closing more deals at lower cost – may require wholesale changes within a sales organization.

One area of consistent trouble is with the selection of sales managers. Companies often choose to promote people who've climbed up the ranks as superstar sales reps – and then expect them to have the skills to train, coach and manage a team. Those aren't necessarily their strengths, however, and many are unable to effectively articulate and define success to their team. By default, they base team performance solely on sales, ignoring the kind of longer-term relationship-building that often leads to lucrative gains in the future.

Another organizational issue is poor alignment between marketing and sales (and beyond.) This type of large-scale disconnect leaves salespeople scrambling for the right information to share with buyers and the marketing team not understanding what sales needs.

In today's sales environment, reps need marketing teams to deliver materials that engage buyers – not just end users – across the entire scope of the sales process. When this kind of sales enablement is running smoothly, marketers use insight into buyer personas and decision criteria to provide materials that move buyers to the next stage of the process. And do it all in a systematic fashion.

Summary

Yes, sales reps need to up their game and enhance their conversations. That's an expected part of their career development. But the bigger consideration is that reps don't operate in a vacuum. A company that doesn't examine how its entire organization behaves – and supports its sales force – will always be wondering why it's left on the sidelines while savvy competitors make changes, make sales, and pass them by.

Find out how Brainshark is helping sales teams engage buyers and boost productivity.

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