

MANAGEMENT ENGLISH

6 SELLING & PITCHING

Contents

1 Sales Pitching	Page 3
2 Handling Objections and Hesitations	Page 10
3 Sales Closing	Page 17

Sales Pitching

Pitch Preparation Questions

- 1. What is the objective of your pitch? What specifically are you looking to achieve? What do you want from the customer?*
- 2. What does the customer really care about? What problems, needs and wants do they have? What research will you do?*
- 3. What success stories could you share that are relevant to the customer?*
- 4. How will you structure the presentation? How will you create interest at the beginning – what will your hook(s) be?*
- 5. How do you want to speak and come across to the customer?*
- 6. How can you use the power of 3? The majority of people can't remember more than three things at a time. Good sales presentations follow a 3x3 rule. A sales pitch must have no more than three key ideas and each slide should contain no more than three specific pieces of information.*
- 7. What is the 'why' behind the pitch? How can you highlight this before the 'how'?*
- 8. Do you need a short version and a long version of your pitch?*
- 9. Are you ready to deliver your pitch effectively without slides?*
- 10. How will you adapt the pitch for different customers?*
- 11. Will you include any data? Will you include any humour? Will you use flattery?*
- 12. What powerful words and phrases will you include?*
- 13. How will you specifically highlight the value you bring?*
- 14. What will you do if the customer does not look interested?*
- 15. What are you hoping the customer will say after you complete your pitch?*
- 16. What questions and challenges can you anticipate? How will you respond?*
- 17. If they appear interested what are the next steps?*

Pitching Strategies

At the business development stage the pitching will cover a mix of selling your company as a supplier and then your company's products and services. Depending on the customer the balance between them will vary, if pitching to a sourcing manager they will be more interested in whether your company can meet their supplier rules and regulations whereas the buyer will be more focussed on the product or service.

Fixing a Conflict of Perceptions

Start with a big unquestionable truth, then an opposing fact and then provide a solution. By starting with a positive truth followed by a negative the customer feels the difference and wants to get back to the positive.

- 1 Present an unquestionable truth that is good.
- 2 Then, present an opposing truth that is bad.
- 3 Lastly, present a truth to return to the opening truth.

Example

Truth A: "Customer demand is constantly evolving, and retailers need suppliers that can offer the right mix of continuity products, quality and new products."

Truth B: "There are many companies making cookies as part of their product offerings."

Solution: "At Bennetts we are totally focussed on cookies because that is all we make. This means we are constantly developing production processes, ingredient sourcing and creating new cookies."

Truth A: "Chocolate cookies are a simple pleasure that can help everyone enjoy their coffee time."

Truth B: "Chocolate cookies are full of unnecessary calories and are not good for people who are sitting down most of the day."

Solution: "Charlie's Cookies taste wonderful plus are both low fat and low calorie, they are now available at most good supermarkets at everyday prices."

Use Emotional Appeal

Customers and consumers have emotions that they connect with and are important in buying decisions, connecting with them can prompt action.

1 “Consumers are really aware of food safety nowadays, know what they should be able to expect and seek trustworthy providers.”

2 “Food suppliers have a lot to do in order to satisfy all the requirements of the coming Food Production Safety Regulations of the European Union that will impact on production, logistics and packaging.”

3 “Our Quality and Compliance Team has already been on EU training courses covering the new regulations, changes have been made to a number of processes and control in the factories and our logistics team are adapting lorries to meet new requirements. At Bennets we are ahead of others and confident we will have no issues satisfying the regulations.”

1 “Life is tough for most people nowadays and the outlook does not look good sadly.”

2 “Customers deserve to feel good and have a treat that cheers them up.”

3 “Charlie’s Cookies are an inexpensive way of creating a highlight in the day.”

Demonstrate the Product

Sometimes experiencing the supplier and product is the most powerful way of convincing customers it is worth buying.

1 “Rather than me trying to explain how well our factories are set up and operate, can I send you a short video presentation now and invite you to visit at your convenience?”

2 “Explaining the work of our Quality Team is both complex and important, I might not be as effective as our Quality Director, would it be possible to set up a call and if helpful a meeting?”

3 “Let’s visit our innovation lab to see the range of ingredients and trialling they are conducting to satisfy new consumer demand and satisfy regulations. The team can show you and explain how they work and the range of new cookies.” (During a factory visit)

1 “Rather than me trying to explain the benefits of Charlie’s Cookies to you, can I offer you a packet?”

2 “Explaining our app’s functionality might not be as effective as experiencing it, would you like to test it on my phone now?”

3 “Can I send you a free membership code now so you can test the app for yourself in our meeting?” (During an online meeting)

Show Perspective Based on Customer Research

Comprehensive knowledge of the product or service is required but often salespeople do not know the customer they are pitching to well at all plus also forget to show they have taken the time to get to know them.

1 “When I am doing the family shop at my local branch of your store I often see lots of stock of value and also premium priced chocolate cookies, I would love the opportunity to supply you with Charlie’s Cookies to offer a mid-priced great chocolate cookie.”

2 “I was really impressed by your new website and the way it highlights key ‘hero’ products in each category and offers regular customers discounts, I believe Charlie’s Cookies could perform really well as one of these.”

3 “I was really impressed by the instore display of sandwiches, drinks and snacks for shoppers looking for lunch shopping, how do you think Charlie’s Cookies could become part of this?”

Most businesses are actively trying to let people know about them, as a general rule customers can expect a salesperson to be aware of anything that is available on the internet, corporate website, will expect you to test the user experience of their B2C website, visit their physical outlets and industry publications.

Delay the Pitching

Many salespeople make a common mistake of pitching too early which often does not work for the customers. This is often the case when the either or both the pitcher and customer are not communicating in their native language and cross-culturally. Many customers prefer some market talk or soft questioning to get comfortable and then will indicate when the best time is to pitch.

1 “What do you think the coming year will bring us? How do you see consumer behaviour changing? What do you think are the priorities of consumers? How do you think your business will respond?” (Then pitch when appropriate and reflect the answers from the customer in the pitch)

2 “What are you looking for from your suppliers going forward? How do you see the market changing? What challenges and opportunities do you see and how will they impact on your suppliers?” (Then pitch when appropriate and reflect the answers from the customer in the pitch)

Customers hear pitches all the time, if you do not listen to their answers to questions and clearly show you have then the pitch is doomed to fail. In addition be ready to answer the questions you ask.

Communicate Shared Values

When researching and preparing a pitch the values of the customer should be identified, many businesses are very proud of their values, and they impact on supplier and product selection. Specifically, and sincerely demonstrating that values are shared can be very effective and can start to show compatibility as a supplier.

1 “I heard your CEO talking about ethical sourcing on your company YouTube channel, she seems to really believe in the new regulations on minimum wages and factory conditions proposed by Ethical Trading Initiative. We have been members of ETI for 20 years, have signed up to the new regulations and have implemented most already in our supply chain.”

2 “I saw on your website how the founders believed in bringing a moment of joy to as many people as possible everyday, it was very inspiring. At Bennets our founders believe that everyone should be able to spoil themselves with a treat everyday, hence the creation of Charlie’s Cookies.”

Sharing Knowledge to Inspire

Giving away knowledge can be a powerful tactic and create interest; it can connect with a customer’s genuine interest (sometimes self-interest) or fear of missing out.

1 “I attended a briefing meeting with our production team last week, it is really impressive to see how they are using new AI data driven systems to improve efficiency and control production processes to enable them to create new low-cost products that our competitors are not able to.”

2 “I am really impressed at how the new lower calorie sweeteners have enabled us to reduce the calorie count by 75% of the new low calorie cookie range. In blind tasting more than half of the people tasting the new range actually preferred them to the standard range.”

The Pique Technique

Standard approaches are often off putting and tiring for customers, The Pique Technique is an alternative approach. In the Pique Technique the pitcher asks an unanticipated question, makes a strange request or asks a question that leaves the customer keen to know more.

1 “Would you be able to visit our factory on 5th June at 3.30pm?” (as it is so specific it could create interest as they will wonder why a specific time was given rather than an open invitation)

2 “Please let me know if you would be interested in a delivery on 15th May, it could be worth your while.”

Memories

Instead of focusing on the business, product or service talk about the memories they create.

- 1 “What is the best factory visit you have completed with a new supplier that you have then started working with?”
- 2 “What is the best reaction you have received to a new product/service you bought?”

Help the Customer Paint a Picture

Helping the customer visualize a positive outcome from working with a new supplier or buying a new product/service.

- 1 “How does the business react when you bring in a new supplier that adds something to the business and meets all expectations?”
- 2 “How does it feel when you see a customer in your local shop buying a new product that you brought into the business?”
- 3 “When you hear a customer favourably talking about a service you supplied, how do you feel?”

Flatter the Customer

Customers tend to like being flattered as long as it is genuine and sincere.

- 1 “I understand you found and onboarded many of your business’ highest performing suppliers, how can I learn from you how to become one of your suppliers?”
- 2 “I hear you bought and managed the instore launch of many of the best-selling products, how can we make Charlie’s Cookies the next one?”

Show an Investment of Time

Customers appreciate time invested with no immediate or guaranteed return.

- 1 “I have researched your business and your expectations of suppliers. I read the codes of contact, supplier agreements and networked to get some anecdotal feedback. If you have a few minutes I have some detailed questions I would like to ask.”
- 2 “I visited several of your shops, small, medium and large shops to understand the store layout and product presentation. I saw several interesting displays, promotions and placements. I would appreciate your ideas on how Charlie’s Cookies could be part of this.”

The Solution Pitch

The use of a solution pitch often shows the difference between a good salesperson and a great one. Good salespeople know everything about their product whereas great salespeople understand every way it can have a positive impact on its customers.

When selling through features, the salesperson is telling. Customers are interested in the specific benefit, solution or value they will get from a purchase, great people make this the key focus of their sales pitch.

Telling or selling

Telling: “Charlie’s Cookie Milk comes in many flavours and contains several natural ingredients that are blended to create a wonderful drink. Please let me explain more about each flavour.”

Selling: “We help our customers have a wonderful start to the day, or anytime, with a drink that gives them a treat, feels like a treat and can be integrated into a healthy diet.”

Telling: “At Bennetts we have been making food products, including dairy, biscuits and pastries for 65 years, supplying them to major retailers and independent stores with whom we have grown the business with continually.”

Selling: “Bennetts has a track record for 65 years of not only being a supplier but a partner of our customers, working within their production, development and account management expectations to help them provide continual profitable growth for them.”

The impact of a selling approach rather than a telling approach is significant as the customer understands the salesperson understands their problem, need or want.

Handling Objections and Hesitations

Objections and hesitations to starting work or buying are normal and must be expected, actually handling objections and hesitations effectively as early as possible normally helps develop the business. There are many reasons for objections and hesitations, most fall into one or more of the following, a lack of trust, need, priority now and/or budget available.

Handling objections effectively means interacting with the customer in a way that either helps them change their mind or get rid of their concerns. When sales staff receive objections or hesitations they should never simply tell the customer they are wrong, instead they should help the customer come to a different conclusion. If customers cannot be persuaded then it is probably not a good business relationship to start. Common approaches to handling objections and hesitations are;

1 Adopt the right attitude! Great salespeople never take anything personally, they prioritize the relationship and getting the sale over their emotions and ego. They are very aware of the customer's and their own body language and all forms of nonverbal communication. They are able to identify and understand what the real objection is, looking below the surface rather

How do you prepare your mindset for sales meetings?

How do you want the customer to see you in the meeting?

2 Having Situational Awareness, knowing the stage in the process on supplier onboarding or sale plus the customer's problems, needs and wants.

What are the different stages you have to go through if you want to start work with a new customer?

What are the different stages when selling a customer a product/service for the first time?

What are the different stages when selling an ongoing customer a product/service?

What problems do your potential and existing customers face?

What do your potential and existing customers need?

What do your potential and existing customers want?

3 Researching and collating extensive background information, this supports situational awareness. Thorough research of business and customer is both effective and expected by the customer.

What risks and challenges does the customer face? What are the key issues in the market the customer is working in?

In previous discussions what hesitations and objections were there and how were they handled?

Is the customer actually a decision maker, if not who is?

What does the customer need from you to proceed?

What will the customer say when recommending you in their business?

4 Encouraging hesitations and objections, many salespeople will be very direct and encourage hesitations and objections, even asking questions such as “Why would you not work with us?” or “What could stop you buying our product/service?”. Nobody wants a customer with many reasons for not proceeding but accepting that most are probably reasonable and need resolving is simply part of the process. Softening questions is often a good way of getting a more honest detailed answer, some reservations take time to answer so are better raised early and some can not be overcome so better known early to avoid unproductive time being spent pursuing business. At this point open questions that can not be answered with a yes or no are necessary.

“Bob, I would appreciate your help, could you please explain why we might not be seen as a suitable supplier?”

“I understand you must be very careful when bringing in a new supplier, what information can I provide to help show we are a good fit for your business?”

What objections or hesitations can you anticipate, then plan and prepare for?

Which objections can be turned into a reason to work with or buy from you?

What questions can you prepare to help the customer share more about their hesitations and objections?

What pre-emptive action can you take in the pitch to answer hesitations and objections before they are raised?

5 Active listening is more effective than normal listening. Good salespeople listen to understand, not just to respond, when customers share their hesitations or objections. Experienced salespeople avoid interrupting customers and give them space to voice their hesitations and objections freely, realizing the only way to proceed is to get the issues out in the open and then hopefully resolve them. When customers do share issues salespeople should repeat back what they heard and ensure they are understood accurately before they are tackled. This also makes the customer feel that their feelings are being taken seriously and will create trust. Great salespeople listen to what is said, what is not said (plus why) and what is behind what is said.

When pitching and handling objections how can you firstly make sure you catch everything the customer says?

How can you make sure you are conscious of what is not said?

6 Try the LAER Bonding Process® created by Carew International. This involves listening, acknowledging, exploring, and only then responding. It appears obvious but often salespeople miss a stage, acknowledging is a really important step that some miss. In addition to understanding the personality of the customer, cross-cultural understanding is very important, decision making in business is done at different speeds in different cultures.

“Gill, I am sorry I was not aware of that issue from before, is there anything I can do to demonstrate our factories can satisfy those criteria now?” (Acknowledging)

“Mrs Smith, I do not think I had considered that potential risk in my presentation, please can I explain how we manage it?”

“Mark, that is a good question and I am sorry I should have answered it more clearly, please can we discuss the options open to us to proceed?”

How could you acknowledge potential objections effectively and move the customer to explore ways of progressing?

Which stage of the process ie listening, acknowledging, exploring and responding do you need to improve?

Which customers have you bonded well with and why?

Which customers have you not bonded so well with and why?

7 Sometimes salespeople have to disagree but do this agreeably. There are a number of ways of doing this, in reality there will always be hesitations, objections and differences of opinions. No salesperson wants a buyer to buy a product or start working with them as a new supplier without being confident they have made the right informed decision.

Acknowledging and showing understanding

“I see what you’re saying about the existing range of cookies you buy Bob. I think Charlie’s Cookies really can bring something unique and additional sales.”

“That is a good point, many producers are not focused enough on quality, I think that if we can arrange a meeting between your quality team and ours you will see both our commitment to and achievements on quality standards.”

“Carla, thank you for raising your concerns on sales support, what I would like to suggest is that you provide us with the specific expectations or actual SLAs you have, then we can provide a detailed explanation and commitment to achieving them.”

Apologizing and disagreeing

“I am sorry. I disagree with your assertion our factories have a poor delivery record, if convenient I can bring all the data from the past 3 years.”

“My apologies Monica. I must respectfully disagree, our cookies are made with higher grade ingredients than those of the competitors you mentioned.”

“Sorry, I don’t think that it is a good idea to delay the launch until May, I have our customers’ sales figures from the last few years and April is a great month for our products.”

“I understand and respect your opinion, though I tend to think that Charlie’s is a well respected brand and can be applied to the cookie milk.”

Expressing neutrality or uncertainty

“I am not sure I agree with you on that Bill.”

“Frank, I could be wrong but my understanding is that our team answered all the emails within 12 hours and followed up 3 days later.”

“Lorraine, I don’t think you and I have the same opinion on this issue.”

“At Bennetts we have a very different opinion on how to launch the product.”

Moving on after disagreeing

“Instead, I think we could review some other dates for the launch of the cookie milk.”

“An alternative solution might be to discuss a discount based on the volume of cookies bought.”

“What do you think about raising a smaller order and us keeping some stock on hold for you instead?”

“However, in the interest of our ongoing relationship, I would like to ask for a week to present a new offer to resolve this issue.”

8 Learning how to say no, customers often say ‘no’ and so must salespeople, how it is said though is very important. Often the best way to say ‘no’ is without actually using the word ‘no’.

Concise, clear and justified

When a salesperson has to say no it must be concise, clear and justified, the customer should be left in no doubt. In a long term relationship there will always be times that the salesperson has to say ‘no’ and it is important to do this effectively.

“I had explained we could only offer a price of 4 euros for orders received in March, it is now mid April, the stock available sold and new orders are now at 4.40 euros as explained before due to the increase in material and labour costs.”

Empathetic, positive and specific

Salespeople can begin with empathy, being positive, explain specifically why they cannot and finish with a positive.

“Lynne, thank you for asking us about contributing to this marketing campaign, it sounds interesting, sadly my marketing spend for the rest of the year is already committed and I know additional requests are being rejected, I hope it works really well for you.

Provide reasons and prevent further requests

It is important that when a salesperson says no it stops the conversation, otherwise the relationship suffers and becomes difficult.

“Sorry Tanya, sorry I cannot provide a delivery from stock as all the free stock has been sold, the best I can do is a delivery in 6 weeks.”

Saying No Without Saying No

Sometimes directly saying no is not the best approach as it can cause offence, be misunderstood and damage trust. Particular care should be taken in cross-cultural relationships on this, the salesperson should adopt an approach that is suitable to that of the customer to be careful.

Customer - "Can you bring forward the delivery by 2 weeks?"

Salesperson – "Sorry I cannot, the order is already on its way now as planned and there is nothing I can do to accelerate shipping and customs clearance times."

Customer - "Could we launch cookie milk before your other customers?"

Salesperson – "Sorry we have committed to a specific date with our key partners that they have committed to and this date will be supported with social media and tv advertising."

Extending Answers

In some situations, for example after a long negotiation, if a salesperson simply says no it is both inappropriate and damages trust, the customer will often need a detailed answer they can understand and share in their business. In addition with some cultures a one word answer is a sign of rudeness, damaging the relationship and preventing future opportunities being offered. Great salespeople will know when to provide detailed clear explanations (often followed up in writing).

Providing an alternative

Providing an alternative may not satisfy what the customer needs but it demonstrates a desire to help rather than simply saying 'no'.

"Michelle, thank you for your enquiry for free stock of raisin cookies, sadly we have sold out, I can offer new deliveries in 4 weeks and/or I can offer immediate delivery from stock of blueberry cookies."

"Sorry I cannot offer a discount on Charlie's Cookies, my Head Office have been very clear on this, I can though offer to provide a social media advertising budget to support your launch of cookies or a discount on an opening order of the cookie milk."

Deliberately keeping the door open

Salespeople often have to say 'no' but they still want the customer to come back to ask again another time and feel comfortable doing so. The salesperson has to ensure the customer knows that on the request there will be no change of mind but the next time they want to ask for something they will.

“Graham, on this occasion we cannot offer more discount, we are committed to a standard margin structure with key accounts, that is very favourable in my opinion, if an opportunity comes to help you in any other way I will be in contact.”

Not all requests are made the same way

Customers have different personalities, strengths and weaknesses, plus can reflect different cultural characteristics. Customers ask for help in different ways and the salesperson should consider the characteristics of the customer and relationship with each of them. In some cultures, asking for help is not common, is difficult and when required in a second language very challenging whereas in others it is normal, encouraged and does not have to be done with any finesse.

Having to Say 'No' after Saying 'Yes'

This is never easy and can be one of the most difficult things a salesperson has to do. Sometimes due to competing demands on requests, logistical issues, genuine misunderstandings or inaccurate information, a salesperson says 'yes' in good faith but then has to say 'no'. As a general rule apologizing with sincerity is the best approach, taking full accountability (leaving not doubt on this even though it may not be the salesperson's fault directly) and trying to offer an alternative if one exists or some form of 'sweetener' to demonstrate commitment the relationship.

“I am very sorry to let you down Julie, I know I said we had available stock of caramel cookies when I visited last Thursday but that morning another customer ordered it all and my stock info was not updated when I met you. I appreciate this causes you a problem, I apologise for this and if it helps can offer you the same volume of vanilla chocolate cookies with a one off 15% discount as a goodwill gesture.”

Sales Closing

What Sales Closing Is

Closing sales is for most people the most difficult part of the sales process, actually many salespeople pitch and then deal with objections but simply miss the closing process hoping it will simply happen. Many salespeople find it difficult to close so just allow a meeting to close thinking they will follow up by email with messages such as 'please let me know if you would like any more information.' For some people closing involves the risk of rejection and is justified by convincing to themselves 'I have done all I can, its over to them now, they need time to think'.

When planning a meeting with a customer many salespeople plan time for the pitch and then time for questions but simply do not allow time for closing. There is a process / formula for the sales process but in reality, because humans and business relationships are complex, selling is as much an art as a science.

A common trait amongst salespeople who do not close effectively is a fear of the word 'no', in B2B sales the reality is the answer to expect is 'no'. Selling is difficult and involves receiving 'no' and at that point not giving up, in addition getting a 'yes' requires specific work. In most business sectors customers expect to say 'no, not now' several times before 'yes', experienced salespeople often actually worry if they get a 'yes' quickly. In reality the sales process normally lasts longer than assumed and depends on more focus on dealing with objections and closing.

Great salespeople plan their close at the same time as their pitch, they plan their questions and approach, accepting it will require resilience and resourcefulness. Remembering customers in B2B do this as their job and the expectations on them is critical, effective sales closers have the ability to look at everything from the customer's point of view and adapt to secure a sale.

Before closing though, hesitations and objections must be answered and satisfied fully, demand openly established and only then closing started. The process should neither be rushed nor delayed. Time spent planning, preparing and practicing is required for successful sales performances.

Sales Closing Techniques

The Alternative Close

All customers are unique, they prefer to have a choice rather than being given an ultimatum, so in the alternative close an alternative is provided rather than simply offering just one product or service.

“Would you like to order the chocolate or the blueberry cookies?”

“Will you require delivery in April or May?”

“Will you require production in Europe delivered in 8 weeks or Vietnam delivered in 12?”

What alternatives could you plan and provide?

The Ascending Close

The ascending close is commonly used when selling insurance, banking services and professional services. This process involves asking a number of questions that require a ‘yes’, starting generally and then getting more specific. The target in the ascending close is to create 6 ‘yes’ answers, from that point the belief is that it is harder for the customer to say no.

“Are you open to working with new suppliers? Do our accreditations and audits supplied meet your expectations? Have you seen the new advertising campaign we launched? Could you see our products being part of your product range? Do you have shoppers who could be interested in Charlie’s Cookies? Would you be interested in us running some targeted marketing to support the launch of Charlie’s Cookies?”

The Assumptive Close

In this close the salesperson assumes they will get the sale from the start and adopt language that reflects this. The trick in this close is for the salesperson to frequently check in on the customer, assessing the level of interest, spotting hesitations and objections, constantly assessing whether they are in agreement. This close can be used when the salesperson believes that their positivity and confidence will make the customer assume their answer should be yes. This approach should only be used with regular customers where there is a strong sense of trust and connection.

“The new raisin cookies really are wonderful, they will be a top 10 product within a month and create additional sales for you. I see shoppers picking up their regular chocolate Charlie’s Cookies and then also take the raisin. We have some stock on reserve for you, when do you think is the best time to launch them instore?”

The Ask

In many sectors the most common mistake salespeople make is *not* asking for the sale or asking too late, missing the moment when getting a ‘yes’ was possible.

Salespeople often delay as they have a fear of rejection so delay until they believe a yes is certain. So instead, the salesperson adds more and more sales pitching, hoping the customer will do the closing without an ask.

Most salespeople worry about asking too late and are focused on what they believe is the perfect time, whereas great salespeople plan an initial ‘no’ and start asking earlier.

Experienced salespeople build in time for an initial no to the ask from most customers, this is also why closing should be allocated 25-35% of the time in the meeting. Building in time for rejection, preparing your responses and planning on how to keep the meeting moving forward. The following example shows the first ask, expecting a no but being ready to reply.

“Mark, it looks like we satisfy the criteria for becoming one of your suppliers. It is clear you see how Charlie’s Cookies can fit into your product offer and create additional sales. Are you ready to order?”

“Not yet.”

“What do I need to do to proceed to being approved as a supplier and delivering Charlie’s Cookies?”

The salesperson here demonstrates commitment and confidence, actively seeking to proceed and being open to direction. The salesperson needs to get any remaining objections out in the open such that they can be answered. Once any remaining hesitations or objections are satisfactorily answered then a new ask can be made.

How do you feel about asking a customer for something?

In your next sales meeting how can you create an opportunity for an early ask? How will you answer the rejection?

How can you prepare yourself for several rejections?

Does your business count the rejections or the sales?

The Backwards Close

This backwards close reverses the conventional approach to sales by starting with asking the customer for a referral rather than trying to make a sale. With this approach salespeople are able to quickly put the customer at ease as they do not feel they are being sold to, this can also make them more open to listening to what the salesperson has to say.

Salespeople will find this most effective when they know the customer is not interested in buying their product/service. This approach should not be used when there is not a good established relationship and trust.

“Michelle, thank you for today’s meeting, the business you have built with Charlie’s Cookies is much appreciated. I mentioned before we have created a premium range that you explained would not be suitable for you, please can I ask if you can refer me to anyone in other businesses within your group that could be interested?”

“Bob, I would like to ask your help on a referral please. We are launching Charlie’s Cookie Milk later this year, I know this is type of product is not bought by you, could I ask for a referral to the buyer who I need to talk to about this?”

The Columbo Close or Later Steve Jobs Trick

Columbo was a TV detective who was famous for letting a suspect think his questions were finished, then he would say ‘Just one more thing’ and ask a killer question. Steve Jobs adapted this in his product launches in which he would say ‘one more thing’ then introduce a great feature or brilliant new product.

Salespeople can use this when they feel that the customer is losing interest, by keeping something back like a killer feature, offer or success story, the salesperson can get the meeting back to moving forwards. Some salespeople will finish their pitch, then just as the energy drops and the customer might be thinking about finishing the meeting, they will then deliver the most powerful part of their pitch.

“and that is Charlie’s Cookie Milk, thank you for your time.....Oh, just one more thing, I guess you assumed this product is high in both calories and fat. Its is not, due to its unique formula it has half the calories and fat of milk!”

“and that is Charlie’s Cookie Milk, thank you for your time.....Oh, just one more thing, I nearly forgot to tell you that I have a significant advertising budget to support the launch of Charlie’s Cookie Milk through social media, tv and publications with the first 3 customers that commit.”

The Hard Close

This approach to closing requires the salesperson to be really conscious they are being sold to. Requests are made for tangible commitments from the customer, this might be a signed contract or order, arranging audits of factories, arranging meetings of support departments, commitments to a launch date or an announcement of business cooperation.

With some customers this approach might be effective and at some key times, sometimes a clear answer is in both parties' interest to avoid wasting time and make things happen. This is often required when a salesperson has limited stock available or has to work with a limited number of customers. Salespeople must be very careful with this approach as when working in some countries this approach could be seen as rude or inappropriate. This approach is probably much safer in person rather than virtually. In addition, using this approach in the early stages of a sales process can be destructive to relationships and/or making sales.

“We have pre-booked production capacity to grow 10% with existing customers plus bring in 1 new volume customer this year, George, sorry to push you but I need to know whether that new customer will be you and get the process moving to secure that place. Frankly if you are not committing, I need to know and proceed with another customer. When can I have your decision?”

“Last week you expressed a lot of interest in being 1 of the 3 retailers who will launch Charlie's Cookie Milk, we plan to launch instore supported with the marketing on 1st July. This means I need an order from you this week or I will not be able to make you one of the 3 retailers.”

Why Not? Close

Some sales processes are complex, whereas this one is not, some salespeople simply ask ‘why don't you try working with us’ or ‘why not place an order?’ at the end of a presentation

“Thank you for letting me tell you about Bennetts, I believe we can contribute to your ongoing success, why don't you try working with us?”

“Thank you for letting me introduce Charlie's Cookie Milk, we believe it can be as successful in your business as the cookies, why not place an order?”

“Thank you for attending the demo of our app, we have many satisfied users and we are really excited about working with you on launching this in your business, why not place an order for a trial number of users?”

The Doorknob Close

This close is used when the customer has refused to buy and is also called the lost-sale close. When the salesperson is about to leave, has there had on the doorknob to open the door and leave, they then ask what the real reason was for the customer not buying. That creates a chance to establish some honesty, understand the reason then sit back down and either handle some objections or try again to close.

Many customer either lie about why they are not buying or give misleading/inconsistent answers. This approach if used well at in appropriate situations can discover the real reason for the customer not purchasing or actually create a sale.

“Ann, before I go, please can I ask for some help? I am new to your account / new in the job / really surprised at your decision and would appreciate some guidance. What is the real reason you have not ordered?”

Most people in life find it hard to refuse a request for help, particularly put in some context eg being new to a job. In many cultures the customer will at this point provide a more honest answer as long as the request is made politely.

The answer to the doorknob question might relate to availability of budget, other commitments or misunderstandings. By getting a new answer the salesperson creates a new chance to get the process back on track by creating new understanding, solutions or a chance to create a new proposal.

This close is great in situations where there is some personal connection with the customer, the salesperson has nothing to lose if they handle this politely and might create a sale.

“Ann, before I go, please can I ask for some help? I am really surprised at your decision and would appreciate some guidance. What is the real reason you have not ordered?”

“Like everyone we are a bit concerned about trade this year, we are trying to be careful with the cash flow which means keeping our stock levels a bit lower.”

“Thank you, Ann, I understand, currently everyone is concerned. What I am hearing though is new products are performing and shoppers are looking for innovative products. This is why I believe Cookie Milk could be good for both of us if at least trialed as soon as possible. Ann, if as a one time offer I can get my CEO to approve extending your credit terms by 60 days and reduce the minimum order quantity by 50%, would you be interested in ordering?”

The Now or Never Close

This close is used to get the customer to commit in a specific amount of time, this can help with a final push to create action but does risk the supplier losing credibility if they do not stick by the deadlines they set. A sufficient level of demand is necessary before trying this, if the customer has said the salesperson's product is of no interest then there is no point in adopting this.

When there is demand, the customer can worry about missing out on something, they accept they want it, will buy at some point and this close encourages them to do it now. If the salesperson is able to offer discounts or better terms this can also be applied.

Incentivizing

"If you can raise the order today, I can authorize a 10% discount."

"Signing up today will give you exclusivity in your region for 3 months."

Pushing

"We only have 1 container left for March delivery, the next stock will be available for May and the price will be 5% higher."

"The price of 9 euros is only valid for another week and then the price will be increased to 10 or 10.5 euros."

The Puppy Dog Close

This close comes from the belief that customers who go into a shop, see puppies and then hold one are more likely to buy. The chances of making a sale are increased by letting the customer try it out. Some business sectors offers test drives (cars), free trials (apps) or keep a product for a month. This close allows customers to experience and believe in the benefits, potentially realizing they cannot live without it. If the product can't be tested without preventing resale, or has limited of benefits and/or has a short lifetime then this close is not effective.

"If you would like to get more opinions of the Cookie Milk I have 25 cartons in my car, I would be happy to leave them with you to get more feedback on it."

"If you have any concerns about working with our teams I can arrange a visit to the factory for you or arrange to bring in our team to meet your key people."

"The app is best understood through experience of it, I have emailed you a code that will allow 5 users to set up free membership for 2 months to test it out."

The Secondary Close

In this close the salesperson creates a focus on a small less significant point in the sales presentation, if the customer answers on this it means acceptance of the entire offer.

“Will you want to launch the cookie milk with 2 flavours or 3?”

“Would you require the first delivery in October or November?”

“Will you want the first order made in the factory with audits completed by SGS or the factory audited by Intertek?”

The flavour, date or factory selection are minor issues here, the main issue is whether an order will be raised or the new supplier accepted. Normally, if the customer provides a clear answer the customer will proceed on the main issue.

The Sharp Angle Close

Many customers are professional buyers or procurement professionals, they have salespeople pitching to them all the time, plus as the customer they normally have the upper hand. Experienced customers ask for discounts, terms, marketing and other extras. Great salespeople sometimes use the sharp angle close in response.

In this close the sales person, who gets approval in advance from their company, gives them what they want, but at a price.

"Marie, ok, you are pushing me today, I can agree a discount of 10% for an order of 10,000 - but only if you send me the order today by 5pm."

“Brenda, that’s a tough ask, but I want to secure an order and get the milk into the business. Ok, I can offer 30 extra days credit terms but only if the order is 15,000 units not the 10,000 offered.”

This approach is useful when the salesperson offers something they are willing to give but only in return for an order received the same day. This close is best used with experienced customers who have authority to make such agreements instantly. It is not a good close in situations that are more complex and involve other stakeholders, for example this close may be useful for securing a sale with an existing customer but would not be suitable if trying to secure agreement to become a new supplier.

The Summary Close

In this close the salesperson makes a summary of all the benefits (not features) of their product or their company as a supplier, highlighting the problems solved, solution and value provided. This should be a summary of the top 3-5 benefits, said clearly such that there is no doubt in the customer's mind.

Customers find summaries helpful, they provide clarity, it does not matter what the salesperson says, what matters is what the customer hears and remembers. This is effective when there has been a long presentation and/or discussion, whereas it is less effective when the initial pitch was brief and none of the benefits appeared to have created any interest.

“Thank you for time today, in summary, Bennetts has satisfied all the supplier requirements in your code of conduct, has completed all the required audits, can work with your credit terms, has already submitted products that have caught buyers' interest, and we are ready to support with targeted marketing. Can we start the new supplier contact?”

“Thank you for allowing me to present Charlie's Cookie Milk today, at Bennetts we have shown we can satisfy your supplier expectations over the years, our account management team have helped your teams with any issues effectively, the product looks like it can help you build your product offer, achieve good margin sales and we can hold stock to enable you to potentialize the sales launch. Can we proceed to discussing an opening order?”

The Takeaway Close

In most sales processes we assume salespeople will add things to secure the sale, but in the takeaway close things are removed. If the salesperson has explained the benefits of some features and the customer does not appear interested then the salesperson takes them off the table by removing them from the offer. The sales person then offers a reduction in cost to compensate and see if this makes the customer more interested and likely to buy.

This close can only be used with products, services or new supplier sales processes when the offer can be changed and a cost saving shared. This close is not effective when the objection to buying is not price based.

Not all customers are either straight forward or show their feelings, sometimes a customer will be interested in a benefit and does there best not to show it. Sometimes when proposing removing a feature the customer did not initially seem interested in the customer is forced to say they actually want the feature.

“Anna, if you do not need to use our best factory with all its audits and awards, I can offer production at one of our older factories that satisfies your minimum supplier expectations along with a 8% discount on the prices, is that interesting?”

“I get the impression you think the premium features of the license will not be used by your staff, I can provide licenses without these features and reduce the price by 15%, would that be of interest?”

The Question Close

In this close the salesperson asks in depth questions to the customer to get them to explain why the benefits, terms or price is not interesting to them. With complex products or services this is effective as it allows the salesperson to explain specifics, highlight value and answer any hesitations. In addition, when a salesperson is trying to become a supplier for the first time there are often complex issues that require explanation, evidence and understanding that cannot be hurried.

Sometimes in a sales process the customer appears stuck, neither rejecting nor proceeding, at this point simply repeating what has been said before is unlikely to work for the salesperson, so asking a mix of open questions and specific closed questions can be very effective.

“Diana, I get the feeling you believe that our cookie milk could be a successful as part of your range, is there an issue with the packaging or delivery date?”

“David, what can I do to help you reach a decision on whether you buy?”

“What specific information, audits and evidence of regulatory compliance would help you be satisfied about the production facilities of Bennetts?”

“I understand your need for sales support, what service KPIs would you like to specify?”

Use Timelines and Dates to Close

In many situations there are timelines that determine so much of what is possible and required.

“Earlier you said you need to have the order delivered by end June. Working backwards from that day and considering how long we need for both production and creating the advertising to support the launch, it means we need the confirmed order by latest 3rd March. Is this going to happen?”

General Sales Closing Questions

There are a range of questions here that can be used and adapted, there is no perfect question, the choice of question depends on the personality of the customer, the relationship between customer and salesperson plus the situation. When planning a meeting experienced salespeople leave plenty of time for closing and never hurry it.

"Bob, on a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that we will launch cookie milk in your business?"

"Graham, are you ready to move forward? If so, I will send over the completed new supplier forms tomorrow."

"If I can get you the additional 5% discount, would you confirm the order by the end of next week?"

"What are the remaining obstacles that we need to overcome to secure the order?"

"Ok, I think we are getting some clarity on the 2 options we have to proceed, are you feeling more positive about a January launch of 3 flavours of the milk or a March launch with 4 flavours?"

"Michelle, what would be a good next step to answer your remaining concerns?"

"Jenny, when do you want to make a decision on our new supplier application and start looking at the launch instore of the cookies?"

"When do you think we should meet to agree delivery dates and instore launch details?"

"What could stop us proceeding to order?"

"Listening to your feedback and observations, it sounds like Bennetts could be a good addition to your supply base, have I understood this correctly?"

"Jenny, can you see any obstacles that could prevent Bennetts becoming a supplier of yours?"

"Alan, unless you have any more questions, I think we in agreement on all the details and can move forwards?"

"You explained you would want to launch instore by the end of May. If you order by the end of this week, I can guarantee we have enough time to deliver, provide instore marketing and social media advertising. Does that work?"

"Given what I have explained about Bennetts today, do you see any reason why our application to be a supplier will be refused?"

"Would you prefer to book production space or raise actual orders?"

"Which flavours of cookie milk would you like to launch first?"

"Can we be sent the order today so you can secure the remaining free stock of cookie milk?"

"What's the best time to finalise the order details?"

"When would you like to begin?"

"Our other customers are achieving great sales with the new vanilla chocolate cookies, when would you like to see the same?"

General Sales Closing Phrases

When the salesperson is reasonably confident that they will secure the sale or sign up to be a new supplier phrases can be used to move the customer to commit, they do not require an answer.

"It appears that this launch of cookie milk will work for you, but I understand you need to discuss it internally. Lets agree a meeting in a week to resolve any outstanding issues."

"I understand that you are not able to confirm the order today. To avoid any risk of misunderstanding, please remember Bob, the offer I made on 10,000 units at \$1.25 is only available for orders received by next Wednesday."

"Unless you have further questions on the details of the order, I think we can discuss how to launch the product instore."

"Let's discuss potential launch dates."

"If you can raise the order today, we can commit to some advertising on social media."

"I appreciate there is a cost with this product but it brings significant value and security, can you afford the risk of not buying it?"

Sales Closing Checklist

Preparation

- 1 The close does not happen at the end. From the moment a salesperson is thinking about meeting and pitching to a customer they are doing this with a view of the close. Everything is planned, prepared and practiced such that they can perform in the close.**
- 2 Great salespeople have many techniques for closing that they regularly use with customers and practice, viewing the dynamics of the conversation from both the customer's perspective and their own.**
- 3 Sales hesitations and objections are anticipated and responses prepared, by being ready it avoids the risk of getting stuck or not picking the best response.**
- 4 Great salespeople do not take the close personally and rarely accept no, they prepare assuming they will receive a 'no' and then plan how they will get to a 'yes'.**
- 5 They leave time for closing, are not in a hurry, are resilient and are resourceful in getting to a 'yes'.**

Necessary Requirements to Close

- 1 The sales pitch was inspiring and understood, focused on the problem being solved, solution created and benefit to the customer.**
- 2 The salesperson is feeling positive and enthusiastic about the sale, plus is demonstrating this. When asking questions confident salespeople are comfortable with silence, they give the customer space and manages their body language and tone to show confidence.**
- 3 Hesitations and obstructions have been welcomed and answered satisfactorily through questioning and explanations presented from the customers point of view. It is understood by both parties that the customer wants or needs, can afford the price and had budget plus it's the right time for the customer to benefit from buying.**
- 4 The customer must understand, not only how the supplier, product or service specifically benefits them but why they should commit when they have alternatives.**
- 5 The customer must believe the salesperson and their products, services and business is credible, honest and trustworthy.**

Selling Tips

1 Focus on your behavior first and try to assess how your actions could affect others. In advance of meetings and connections think through what will happen, simulate differing outcomes and identify the language that will be required. Every interaction is different but every interaction can be prepared for and practiced to some extent.

2 Every person you deal with is an individual, understand and be aware that their experiences, characteristics, culture and business sector affect their personality. Research from the internet and connections can help in building a successful approach to any interaction. Keenan said “The best thing salespeople can do to get better is second-level research. Second-level research is researching the industry of their prospects, including the issues, challenges, players, regulations, its evolution, origin, end users etc. We’re not expert enough in the industries we sell to, so it makes it hard to be seen as credible. Less focus in, more focus out.”

3 There are 2 key factors in business, trust and performance, both take time, pressures obviously exist but when selling be careful not to solely apply your timelines. Bob Burg said “All things being equal, people will do business with, and refer business to, those people they know, like and trust.”

4 Adjust your sales pitch, dealing with objections and closing techniques to reflect the culture, views on risk and opportunity of your buyer. Be careful to monitor your body language, local culture, values, sensitivities and adjust your language to ensure titles / familiarity is appropriate.

5 Hold your personal values close and live by them whilst also understanding and respecting those of others. Be careful not to judge others by your values, values are often affected by culture, history, religion and events that can vary significantly when working internationally.

6 Take your time to get to know people as they might change as they become more relaxed and trust the relationship – watch and listen but do not judge.

7 Ask for clarification, do not simply ask ‘do you understand?’ instead ‘I am not sure I have explained myself well enough, please can you confirm what you see as the situation / proposal / deal’.

8 Follow trends on how people from different countries do business but do not rely on them – sometimes people have worked in different countries that have affected their way of doing business or are influenced by the way their business sector often does business (eg Law and IT)

9 Learn about the market and customers of your buyer, what are the product, regulatory and economic trends plus what are their other potential sellers delivering and offering.

10 Understand how the sales process works in your buyer's country and what outcomes are realistically possible, business works at different speeds in different countries.