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Overcoming the Toughest Objections

*To dream the impossible dream,
To sell the unsellable prospect,
To answer unanswerable objections,
To close the unclosable deal.*

The Man of La Mancha is one of my favorite plays. I think Don Quixote is a good role model for sales people. He ignores everyone who tells him he is crazy, he goes out alone to do battle against great odds, and he never gives up hope. While we may not have to joust with spinning windmills or scuffle with bands of ruffians, the “dragons” we have to slay come in the form of customer objections. Some customers who want to brush us off quickly throw out “unbeatable” objections designed to send us scurrying away, with our proverbial tails between our legs. Here are three of these “unbeatable objections” you’re sure to encounter and how to overcome them.

Business owners know that one of the easiest ways to get rid of a sales person is to show them that they have no need for advertising. This is why, *“I get all of my business from word of mouth and referrals!”* The advantage of this “brush off” is that it puts the sales person in an impossible competitive position... since word of mouth advertising is free, we know we can’t compete on price. Prospects also like using this one because it gives them a chance to puff out their chest and brag about their success. Since it is their word against yours, you can’t challenge this objection without calling the prospect a liar, not the best way to start a rewarding relationship. While a business that offers good prices and good service will get some business from referrals, it is seldom enough to keep a business growing, so in reality they need to advertise. My approach to handling the word of mouth objection is to indulge the customer’s fantasy. Rather than challenge this objection, I show interest in it. I begin by praising the customer, *“Wow, that’s great not many businesses find themselves in that position.”* I then begin probing the prospect about their business, but I disguise my questions by asking, *“Obviously you are doing something right! What are you doing differently from your competitors?”* I’ve found that customers who offer this objection like to talk about their business so you can collect a lot of valuable information about what they do. I then turn the direction of the conversation to what advertising could do for them. *“Mr./Ms. Customer, you’ve told me a lot about what you’re doing here, do you think if more people knew about (Repeat back customers information) that they would want to do business with you?”* I reinforce the value of advertising by telling them, *“Businesses like yours get a bigger bang for their investment in my paper, for every customer the*

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typical business gains by advertising, you'll get two or more because of your word of mouth." I also talk to them about recovering "lost referrals," explaining how print reminds readers about a half-remembered referral from a friend and solidifies it by providing them with a phone number and an address. When I was a sales rep, I had some cards printed which read, "Word of Mouth Advertising, Jim Busch Local Representative." This usually got a laugh from a customer, but allowed me to open the subject of how advertising does not compete with word of mouth but actually enhances it.

Another objection that is tough to overcome is the, *"I've got more business than I can handle, I have to turn customers away."* Much like the word of mouth objection, this is one part unbeatable objection and another part braggadocio. In most cases this statement is as truthful as a politician's promise a week before the election. Very few businesses are actually functioning at their full capacity. I have actually seen customers who were interrupted in the middle of telling me how they had too much business, only to go into sales mode on the phone trying to win a new job. The initial response to this objection is similar to the technique described above, praise the customer to get them talking about their business. In this case, you should direct your probing to discover areas where they have room for growth. In the case of a restaurant, they may do great at lunch, but dinner time is slow in the middle of the week. Service businesses may be slow during some seasons of the year. Once you find these openings you can start talking about filling these gaps in their schedule. (See "How much does an empty table cost?" in the Link and Learn archives at paperchain.org)

In some cases the customer may actually be telling the truth, they may be fully booked. This is especially the case in businesses that require skilled labor. This can include registered plumbers to your local dentist. It is difficult and expensive to expand these businesses due to a shortage of qualified workers and the large investment required for tools. Operating a business at full capacity does have a downside, it means that the owner's income is capped and there is no room to grow the business. A business may be able to raise their prices, but often the market or their competition can make this impractical. Once again, good probing skills are the key to overcoming this problem. Your questions should concern the relative profitability of the goods and services offered by the business. For example, a contractor may do roofing and windows. In your probing you learn that replacing a roof is a big job that is very profitable, while a competitive environment keeps the price of window installation low and the profit margin razor thin. You can use this information to make a case for focusing the contractor's advertising on roofing. By increasing the number of roofing jobs, the business owner can increase his profits without spending

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more on operating costs. By gaining an in depth understanding of the customer's business, you can develop a program that will help them accomplish their goals.

Some customers like to use their "budget" like a broom to sweep away unwanted sales people. *"Oh I'm so sorry, I'd love to advertise with you but we've already spent our budget for the year."* This is a "nice" way to tell you NO! The customer doesn't have to argue the merits of what you're offering or tell you they don't like what you're selling. They know you will go away if they have no money to give you. They set up *"the budget"* like it is a federal statute that must not be violated. It is cast in stone and their hands are tied. Larger businesses and those with good accountants may actually have a written budget which allots a certain amount for marketing and advertising. In my experience, very few small businesses actually have any sort of a formal budget. They sell their products to their customers and pay their bills, taking what they have left over as their paycheck. Most small business owners manage their affairs intuitively, they will spend money if they feel it will improve their bottom line. They operate their business more by gut feelings than spreadsheets.

I address this objection by uncovering their true budgeting process.

"Mr. /Ms. Customer, I appreciate you being upfront with me about your budget. I guess my timing is bad. So I can contact you earlier next year, may I ask, when do you set your annual budget?" this question will help you determine how formal their budget process is and when your next window of opportunity will open. A good follow up question is, *"What led you to choose (Insert their Choice of Media Here) to market your business?"* Their answer will tell what they want to accomplish with their advertising. If they say, they like the daily newspaper because of the number of people they reach; you know coverage is their "hot button." You can then proceed to tell them how you can help them achieve their marketing goals without forcing them to expand their budget. This approach requires the sales person to be well prepared with market information and their paper's audit data. *"Mr. /Ms. Customer I absolutely agree with you, the more people you reach in your target market, the more effective your advertising will be. If there was a way to double the number of homes you reach here in town without increasing your overall investment do you think you would attract more customers?"* Of course the customer will answer in the affirmative. *"Well I can help you resize your ad in the Daily Competitor from a half page to a quarter page, you'll still be prominent in the paper and this will free up some of your budget to invest in reaching the people in the area who you're currently missing. This strategy would maintain your prominence*

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in the daily paper and puts your message in the homes that don't subscribe to the daily without increasing your budget. Wouldn't you agree that this is much better than putting all your eggs in one basket?" This is an approach that has been used by radio reps for years to take money out of newspapers and can be very effective. This technique is equally effective with people who have a formal budget and with those who "fly by the seat of their pants." It works by changing the prospect's view of their budget as a commitment to one media to an overall investment in the future of their business.

Handling objections is what separates the true sales professional from the order takers. Handling tough objections requires a good understanding of business, advertising and psychology. Being prepared to handle these "unbeatable" objections will help you accomplish the goals that many others believe to be "impossible dreams."

These three objections represent a tiny fraction of the "tough" objections advertising sales people face every day. If you would like to see other objections addressed in future Link & Learn columns, please forward them to PaperChain Link & Learn c/o janderson@wisad.com. We will collect them and include them in future articles..

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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