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The Recipe for Sales Success

With apologies to Betty Crocker & Martha Stewart

The next time you sit down to eat a piece of toast at breakfast or a sandwich for lunch stop and think about the bread on your plate. The finished product looks or taste nothing like the ingredients used to make it. Baking bread requires a great deal of knowledge and expertise. The flour, salt, yeast etc. must be mixed in the proper proportion and in the correct sequence. The dough must be handled carefully and allowed time to rise before it is put in the oven. If you want to make bread you need to carefully follow the recipe, this is also true if you want to make a sale. The most common mistake I see when spending time with sales reps is that they try to rush the sales process, pitching a solution before they have clearly defined the customer's problem and proven the value of their products. When making bread or trying to sell advertising, failing to follow the recipe will certainly end in failure.

The dictionary defines "recipe" as *a set of directions for making or preparing something, a formula for or means to a desired end (re: a recipe for success)*. A recipe can be altered, for example raisins or an egg may be added to suit the individual taste of the baker, but certain parts of the process can never be changed. The physical properties of the flour and yeast demand to be treated in a specific way if they are going to cooperate and become bread. When selling advertising we must deal with the psychological properties of the prospect if we want them to cooperate and say yes to the program we recommend. In baking and in sales, a consistent process will consistently produce a positive outcome. Deviate from the process in either and you leave the outcome up to chance.

The recipe for "Sales Success"

Like an old family favorite this recipe is sure to please. It works because it engages the customer in the sales process and shows them how your publication can help solve their business problems. Like any good recipe it is important that you follow the steps in the order they are given and of course don't forget to add the yeast (known as enthusiasm in the sales world).

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Ad Sales Recipe

- 1 cup pre-call preparation
- 1 tablespoon opening statement
- 3 cups of good quality questions
- 1 cup of solutions
- 1 tablespoon of closing statement
- Objections handling (Optional as needed to satisfy customer concerns)

Instructions

Step 1—pre-call preparation

To prepare for the call gather all materials needed to make recipe (sales materials, copies of publications, research, insertion orders etc.) Vigorously shake up sales person's brain to generate ideas for opening statement, sales questions and talking points. Rep should also give some thought to potential objections and testimonials/third party stories which can be used on the call. Pre-call planning is critical because of the difficulty of getting in front of the customer and the importance of maximizing every opportunity to do so.

Step 2—Opening Statement

A good opening statement is made by mixing equal parts of customer benefits, positive attitude and good body language. The sales person should approach the prospect with a lively step and a smile on their face. Their demeanor should be friendly and businesslike indicating that they are there for a purpose. After this is accomplished, the rep should quickly use an initial benefit statement (IBS) to stir up the customer. This statement should offer the customer a reason to listen to the sales person. Many reps like to add a dash of testimonial in at this point—"I've worked with several other people in your business and they've been very successful using my paper to build their business."

Step 3—Uncovering customer needs

Once customer is stirred up and ready to talk, rep should pepper them liberally with good questions. Continuing adding questions until you have uncovered enough customer needs to justify purchasing a program. Please note: This is the single most important part of the recipe. This recipe will fail if a) the rep does



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not ask well thought out questions to uncover the customer's business needs, b) the rep does not listen carefully to the customer's answers and fails to ask good follow-up questions, or c) the rep is anxious to talk about their products and rushes through this process. Spending too little time on uncovering needs will create lumps (objections) later, which may be impossible to eliminate. Properly preparing the customer for a sale with good probing should take much more time than any other part of the recipe. Showing interest in their needs also tenderizes the customer and makes them more likely to purchase a program from you.

Step 4—Solving the customer's problems

Once enough customer problems are uncovered the rep may begin to add their recommendations to the mix. It is important to layer the recommended solutions with the customer's problems. A solution will fall flat if not thoroughly mixed with a customer need. For example, mix "I think you should purchase a front cover ad" with the problem "because you said you want more people to be aware of your weekly specials." Reminding the customer of the needs they expressed sweetens the solution for the customer and makes the customer hungry to purchase it. Making a recommendation without a clear tie to a need recognized by the customer will leave a sour taste in their mouth spoiling the recipe.

Step 5—Closing the sale

If each of the previous steps has been followed in sequence, closing is "a piece of cake." If your probing has helped the customer to clearly identify significant business problems and/or opportunities and your recommendation proved your ability to improve their situation, then closing is the next natural step.

A simple recap followed by a request for an order is all that is needed.

"Mr./Ms. Customer you said you need to bring in more customers early in the week and you want to drive your delivery business, the coupon program we discussed would accomplish both of your goals, all I need is your authorization and we can get started next week." This step should be done confidently and smoothly. Once the sale is "in the oven," leave it alone. Once you make your closing statement, be silent; give the customer time to consider your statement. Resist the temptation to interrupt the customer and let them be the first one to speak. If they say yes, thank them and proceed with the order. If they say no, recap the benefits again and ask them why they are hesitating: "Mr. /Ms. Customer you said that we need to fix this, this and this, which is exactly what

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this program would do, could you tell me what is holding you back?" This enables you to address their concerns and close again.

Step?—Objections

Objections can come up anywhere in the process. The best way to deal with objections is to prevent them. This recipe is designed to reduce the number of objections you receive. A good, customer benefit oriented opening statement prevents the “not interested” objection early in the call. Focusing on asking questions and letting the customer talk engages the client and eliminates the objections that occur when a rep makes a recommendation without understanding the customer’s situation. If objections do crop up they are much easier to address, because you can position them as solutions to the customer’s problems.

Conclusion—“Season to your personal taste”

Sales people are an independent lot; they like to do things their way. Following the “sales success” recipe does not mean you can not inject your personality into the sale. The recipe is simply a process that makes the customer aware of the value of your offering. The rep must use their understanding of human nature to work with the client and keep them engaged. They must have a good knowledge of business and of advertising to formulate insightful probing questions. The rep must use their creativity to come up with effective solutions for their problems. Sales research has found that the steps described in this “recipe” is the most effective way to help a customer see the value in the program the rep is offering. Reps who focus on the sales process are consistently more successful than reps who just “wing it.”

Learn this recipe and make it part of your SOP (Standard Operating Procedure). Resist the temptation to rush ahead before the customer is ready and you’ll hear fewer “No’s”. Concentrate on using the “sales success recipe” for a few weeks and you’ll see it’s the “best thing since sliced bread.”

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

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