



## Mastering Technical Sales

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## Step Away From The BlackBerry

### Listen To Me! : Handling Corporate Attention Deficit Disorder

Ever been in the middle of giving one of your best demos, look up to check the audience, and you spy one or more people checking their email? Is Blackberry ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) running rampant during your internal meetings?

I used to believe that there was an inverse relationship between Blackberry/laptop usage and the quality of the presentation. During 2009 I became convinced that the correlation was much weaker. So when the VP in your meeting picks up their mobile device to check or send an email, what should you do?

We'll examine this behavior in two situations, externally - during sales calls, and then internally within your own organization. Now my fundamental premise is that the behavior of checking email during meetings is bad - as it means that people are not paying attention to you and your message. You can make a case that fact-checking, data-gathering and task assignments can be made in parallel with the core meeting ("*hey, Steve, can you see when our latest release will be available in French?*"). Yet it takes incredible discipline NOT to check your inbox for other messages. Over the next 18-24 months acceptable business behavior will change to fully include electronic multi-tasking, but until that happens .. here are some ways to counter attendee electronic ADD.

### Sales Calls and External Meetings

1. **Lead By Example.** At the start of your presentation, make a point of turning your phone off (or putting it on vibrate). Of course, it should already be off, so you are faking it, but you may shame some people into silencing their devices
2. **Promote Interactivity.** Constantly involve the audience by asking questions and soliciting feedback. The more engaged the audience, the more likely they are not to drift and stray.

3. **Use Movement.** Take every possible opportunity to move around the room. This serves a dual purpose in that firstly the human eye is drawn to movement, so it is a natural attention getter. Secondly it is psychologically harder for someone to check their email while you are walking behind them and can see their screen.
4. **The Pull-Back.** Should you notice a few people engaging in the Blackberry prayer position (heads down, hands in lap) then it is time for a Very Important Point. Pause; wait 2-3 seconds; say something like "*now this is one of three critical points I'd really like you to remember*"; show/state the proof; reinforce it and then move on.
5. **Build a Game Plan.** As part of your routine pre-call preparation with the salesrep you need to decide how to handle the situation where your executive sponsor has mentally checked out of your meeting. Do you, as a team, bring him back by using silence, asking if he is waiting for an important message/is this still a good time and who should do that? Hint: usually the rep. Alternatively, do you let it pass and hope for the best? There are no hard and fast rules - which is why you need to game-plan before every call. My advice is that very few deals are closed if the buyer is not paying attention.
6. **Compress The Time.** Promise that you'll get through the sales call with 5 or 10 minutes to spare, and then arrange the agenda so that you have a series of shorter topics (aim for a highpoint every 8-10 minutes) rather than one long session. This may mean breaking apart a one hour demo into three 15-20 minute sections, with a recap and a 'what this means to you' after each section and a "one great slide/grabber" before each section.

## Internal Meetings

7. **Lead By Example (again).** If it is your meeting or if you are the boss - don't check email. Insist that your team closes their laptop lids and puts their BB's away. When there are staff members from other teams in the room, use something like "it's a rule we have within pre-sales to respect.." It works wonders!
8. **Lead by Example III.** Don't do it! When sitting in someone else's meeting resist the temptation to check your email. Make a point so that others see your behavior.

9. **Creative Scheduling.** Build in time for email and phone calls. I run most training sessions as a series of 45-50 minute modules with 10-15 minute breaks. Just like school. Offer the more frequent breaks in return for a commitment to attention.
10. **The Call-Out.** Your boss is reading his email when you are speaking - what should you do? Firstly make sure your boss knows that you know what he is doing without directly embarrassing him. Secondly proceed in a professional manner. Finally bring the matter up at your next one-on-one meeting by stating "*when you read check your email when I'm speaking it makes me feel ... and sends other people the message that what I have to say is not important*".
11. **Go with the flow.** If someone in the audience is a repeat offender - put them to work. "*Steve - while you are online, can you Google ....*". You may as well derive some benefit from their poor behavior!

## Summary

Acceptable business behavior and etiquette are constantly evolving - and the use of internet-connected devices is expanding within the bounds of a standard sales call. You do have a basic business right to professionalism and courtesy from your customer - just look yourself in the mirror and ask what your behavior is when in an internal meeting or on a webcast. Unless you are in control of the meeting and can set the rules most tactics you use will be diversionary and flanking rather than head-on confrontation.

Thanks for reading this without checking your email.

"The greatest gift you can give another is the purity of your attention."

*Richard Moss, author & spiritualist.*

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Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at [www.masteringtechnicalsales.com](http://www.masteringtechnicalsales.com).

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