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Stop The Madness!

Eliminating Corporate Fluff

We've all been in a situation when that "special" presentation deck is used to start off a sales call and the entire audience rolls their eyes. You have exceeded your corporate fluff and marketing hyperbole quota with just a single slide of a corporate overview.

This **Talking Point** document is intended to make you reconsider and re-evaluate the content of your standard corporate presentations and to re-examine the apparent need for fluff and hyperbole. Would you rather blow away your revenue quota or your polysyllabic buzzword quota?

Corporate fluff comes in two main forms - the corporate overview and marketing management speak. It is important to realize that you may be guilty of participating in either of these communication crimes as the fault does not solely lie with "HQ".

The Corporate Overview Fluff

Using a corporate overview is a tried and trusted aspect of sales, but may not be the most appropriate use of your time or your customers. How do you intend to differentiate yourself from the other vendors who have already preceded you or will follow you in pitching their company and solution?

1. **The Corporate Overview.** This travesty of communication has its place in the sales process, yet you have to question why almost every sales presentation starts with a company overview. On the basis of first impressions, do you really want to lead with your company time after time? Strip away the Gartner quadrants, customer lists with logos, basic financials and the industry awards - what do you have left?

If your customer sessions start with "Hullo, I'm Joe, your account executive. Our company was founded in 1995 by our three founders and we went public in 1999 and are now listed on the NASDAQ with the ticker symbol BOZO. We have 600 employees in 19 different countries serving over 60,000 users. And here is a picture of our new corporate headquarters. Now for the next three hours here is my pre-sales engineer who will take you through every module of our product." Think again.

2. **Do This Instead.** You are selling your solution, so lead off with a small piece of it - in plain matter of fact language. Try starting with:
 - ✓ A customer success story or video
 - ✓ A short 3-5 minute scenario based demo
 - ✓ A brief role play (if suited to your solution)
 - ✓ That one compelling slide/report/screen which "sells" your solution

Keep it simple and to the point, and always tie it back to the customer's needs (which, of course, you already know because of pain and discovery sessions).

3. **Correct Use of the Corporate Overview.** Although sales engineers rarely give the corporate overview, you can help by focusing the account executives attention on the "so what" aspect of their pitch. Why is it important to the customer that you have 200 people in support, have twice the industry average R&D spend and are considered the industry standard? Examine any claim about being #1, or easy-to-use and innovative and ask 'who says so?'. If it is your own opinion - then that is corporate marketing fluff.

Corporate Marketing and Management-Speak Fluff

Every company develops its own culture and language, complete with acronyms, catchphrases and even corporate filler words. Closely inspect your communications - original or borrowed - for any of the following;

1. **Making up words.** Joining two or more normal words together to put across a concept is usually a bad idea. Some recent examples from the software business include "flexicurity" and "flex-ponsive", leading us to believe that flexible is the new 2008 marketing filler word.
2. **Architecture.** When tempted to use a buzzword such as scalable, open or architecture, remember that the industry is littered with the wreckage of open

scalable architectures which have crashed, burned and floundered because they were eventually outsold by a better sales force with an arguably less capable product but a stronger market message. Exhibit A would be Oracle vs Sybase, Microsoft vs Netscape or Siebel vs any other three CRM companies.

3. **Nouns masquerading as verbs.** Beware of nouns masquerading as verbs by appending a "re" to them - such as *repurpose*, *retask* and *reposition*. Honorable mention goes to *professionalizing*, *architected* and *decisioning*. Your sales and marketing communications should not read as if they have written by a management consulting company.
4. **Do this instead.** Say what you mean and ban clichés, acronyms and trite phrases (at this moment in time). Descriptions such as open, intuitive and, dare I say it, flexible (or her brother adaptive) are now just filler. After all, who would admit their solution is closed, complex, difficult to use and extremely rigid? Take that stuff out of your slides and out of your sales lexicon. Open up your PowerPoint decks and demo scripts right now, and remove the offending words. You are not writing a college thesis so make the language easy to understand. Use the built-in readability statistics in Microsoft Word to help you with clarity.

Summary

You may be two hundred percent confident, and equally bad at math, that your solution is uniquely qualified to solve the customer's business pains and problems. However, if you wrap that message up in fluff and hyperbole you are just going to confuse, or bore, your audience. Differentiate yourself by being clear, relevant and authentic. Be proud of your product and your product - do not hide behind meaningless words!

"Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood"

Jr. Teague

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.

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