



Mastering Technical Sales

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Customer Success Stories

Tell Them A Story!

One of the best ways to get your message across to an audience is to tell them a story. Speaking about other customers, their successes and your experiences makes you appear confident, knowledgeable and authentic. Most sales organizations have official references - complete with a glossy brochure accompanied by a PowerPoint slide with logo - and all blessed by legal.

What about all those unofficial customer stories which are lying, uncollected and mostly unused, around in your head and those of your colleagues? Why not collect them and share them to boost your sales performance by removing some risk from your customer's buying process?

How To Get Started

Ask your more experienced and tenured colleagues to share some of their customer stories with you. Don't just limit yourself to sales and sales engineers, reach out to people in your services or installation teams and ask about their customer experiences too. These people are a walking encyclopedia of customer stories which is undoubtedly one of the reasons they have been so successful for so long.

Many companies have now institutionalized these "unofficial references" within the sales organization, and require the sales force to each contribute several stories a year in order to be able to draw from a library. At your next regional meeting ask everyone to write down a story as their homework.

Unless you are new to your company, you probably have a few stories you can use from your own customer base as well, if only you took the time to think about them. Perhaps next time you visit a customer you can ask them to give you some quantifiable benefits or ROI they have received from your solution. If you don't ask you don't get.

What Kind of Stories Do I Need?

I classify them as 'conversational stories' in that you should be able to establish the relevant details in 15-45 seconds. Michael Bosworth, in his Solution Selling methodology lays out a framework for a customer story that may help you.

Step	Content
Situation	Customers name, industry and job title
Critical issue	The pain of the person or company
Reasons	The business reasons for the company's issue biased towards your eventual solution
Vision	In the words of your customer, the capabilities he said he needed to solve the problem; " <i>he told me he needed a way to..</i> "
We provided	If properly described in the vision, just say " <i>we gave him those capabilities</i> ". NO PRODUCT NAMES!!
Result	Some specific measurements

"The Operations Director of a large fleet rental company was unable to accurately track the mileage and maintenance records of the cars in the fleet and provide that data to his clients as they had no central recording and maintenance system. This was causing excessive maintenance costs and lost business as their competitors could supply the data. The director said he needed a way to provide online access and reports to his fleet customers. We provided him with a web-based online system which cut down his maintenance costs by \$11m and allowed him to retain 100% of his corporate customers."

That takes 30 seconds to say and can cut days out of your sales cycle as you establish "credible" and "low-risk" as two adjectives the prospect now links to you and your company.

CALL TO ACTION: Write down your informal references, ask your colleagues to do the same - and share them for success.

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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