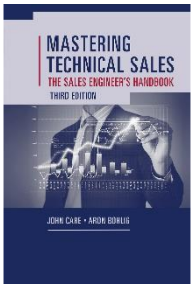

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Handout Happiness

Getting A Foot In The Door With A Hand-Out

A hand-out is one of the most misused tools in the sales arsenal of an SE. Often skimmed through when the audience is bored or left behind on the conference table after you finish– the hand-out can be a powerful weapon when used by an expert. That is because it keeps selling for you after you leave.

I'll suggest some best practices for creating and using the hand-out and answer that age-old question "*do I hand out my hand out before or after the presentation*?"

The Eternal Question – Before or After?

The general rule is that in a sales situation you should provide your handouts AFTER your presentation or demonstration. When you provide them beforehand, especially if they are a close copy of your presentation, why should people attend? You are encouraging the audience to thumb through the hand-out, then do their email and tweet "*Sitting in #boring vendor presentation in London. Vacation in Paris next week. Must start packing*". So yes you can make the case that you personally should be entertaining and value-add enough to stop that behavior, but why chance it? A sales presentation is about constantly re-establishing interest and curiosity. A stack of paper on the desk is a distraction.

BUT there are cases when you should hand something out before you start. Here are some examples:

a. Agenda. An agenda for a long or complicated meeting.
b. Key Slides. The key slides or demo screens when conducting a webcast.
c. Diagrams. A Diagram or Blueprint of a complex environment or architecture.
d. A Worksheet. Yes – I have seen SE's help an audience convert a technical issue directly into money saved.
e. Mathematics. Anything that involves math, even if you think the audience can do it in their heads.
f. Definitions. A list of standard definitions or acronyms.
g. Education. Because you really want people to keep notes.

Best Practices

1. The Experience. Think of the hand-out as part of the entire sales presentation experience. It should not be an afterthought, hastily prepared in a few minutes. Remember that your hand-out will remain with the customer long after you've left so it should reflect your level of professionalism.

2. Decide On A Purpose. Hand-outs can range from a one-page executive summary up through a complete hardcopy of a PowerPoint with notes to culminating in pages of reference and backup materials. So decide on the purpose – does your handout summarize, or does it guide and reinforce or does it act as a reference? The more you try to do with it, the less effective it will become.

3. Build The Brand. Make sure your contact information and company name or logo goes on every page. While you do not need to do this for the presentation, you do for the hand-out. Label appropriate material confidential or proprietary and add the name of your customer into a header or footer on the pages.

4. Don't Just Print Out Your Slides. That is lazy, inefficient and ineffective. Either make liberal use of the notes section if it is a PowerPoint deck, or for a demo add boxes, arrows and highlights to make your screenshots a guided tour. Although you should always have a full copy of your slides with you in case of equipment failure.

5. Theme and Format. Remain consistent. If your presentation is titled "Left-Handed Solar Widgets" then your hand-out should have the same title, and a sub-title like "Summary" or "Key Slides", "Reference Material" or "Full Presentation with Notes". Keep your font, format and images consistent to avoid a clash between the visuals of the presentation and the hand-out.

6. Last Thing First. If your hand-out is more than 3 pages, put the most important part of the hand-out at the front, right after the title. Don't bury the lead and hide it in the middle of the paperwork. Whether you are presenting the results of an evaluation or answering a capability checklist <u>put your claim of success at the start so it cannot be missed.</u>

7. Reinforce The Message. I am a big fan of the Residual Message, which is the one thing the customer remembers about you after they have forgotten everything else in two weeks. Your hand-out should contain and reinforce the Residual Message you want to push into your customer's subconscious.

8. Split The Duty. The answer to "before or after" can sometimes be "both". If there is a key screen, slide or ROI calculation you will be constantly referring to – that's a before hand-out. Distribute everything else when you are done.

9. Spiel Cheek the Document. Enough said. Don't relay on wavy red lines.

10. The Final Question. "Does this hand-out help me sell?" If not – why not and can you fix it? See Best Practice #2.

Summary

The much-maligned hand-out is a powerful tool for an SE, when used the right way in the right situation. Do not use it as a data dump, but as a way to focus your customers mind on your key messages and differentiators. By using your head, your hand-out can help you get a foot in the door of your customer's mindset.

"The difference between try and triumph is just a little umph!"

Napoleon Hill.

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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