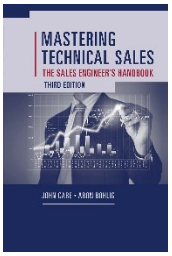

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Handling The Zero Discovery Demo

"Stop Me If You See Something You Like"

We've all been in that situation when you walk into the conference room or start up your webcast, and you have no idea what the sales call is about or what the customer needs. It's known as the "*spray and pray*", the "*dog and pony show,*" or "*the three-hour tour*."

We also know that although it is usually a complete waste of your time, these calls happen in real life, and the professional SE needs to be prepared to deal with them. This is a standard, successful and good sales practice for some single-product companies. So, two days from now, you are meeting a customer, and the only information you have is the name and address of the company and the guidance of "*they just want a general overview of our products and what we do.*" What happens next?

Before You Start

1. Check Your Attitude! You are probably ready to choke your salesperson, complain about a non-communicative customer and moan about life in general. So go ahead and get it out of your system, update your boss about the event, and then pick up your attitude as if this was a critical multi-million dollar opportunity. Be positive.

2. Conduct The Research. Ignorance is no excuse for poor preparation. Check out the customer's website, run a Google search, visit a financial site if they are publicly traded. This data may be in your CRM/SFA system, or the rep may provide it (at least ask the rep to research if they own any of your solutions at other sites or subsidiaries) – but if you do not have it, you should. At a minimum, you should know what their primary products are, where their significant locations are, essential finances (profit, revenue, and margin), who they compete with, and who they are most similar to within your current customer base. Between Google and LinkedIn, you should be able to research the names of the customer contacts.

3. Contact The Customer. OK, maybe the rep said not to contact the customer – but you need to decide on preparation. Ask for a technical contact to call so that you can validate connectivity, environment, and wireless coverage. Make something up if you need to – but try to reach the customer, techie-to-techie, and while you have them on the phone, drop in a few relevant discovery questions. "*Hey, as I have you on the phone, can I just ask you….*" Do not make your salesperson look like a bumbling idiot, as you are a sales team, but do play up the technical part of your title.

4. Balance Education v Selling. Your goal is to ensure the customer understands how they could use your solution in their environment, the benefits they would gain, and the pain they may avoid. The goal is not to educate them on every nuance of using your product. If your demo is “click here, drag this,” then it is a functional navigational demo, and you are teaching them how to use your solution as opposed to what it does. Clicks = Complexity

5. Don’t Forget *Do Nothing Inc*. 50% of deals are lost because the customer does nothing. Make sure you have a list of compelling reasons for them to act because you will need them during the call. You do not want to make that stuff up in the middle of the meeting.

6. Prepare Handouts and a Memorable Leave-Behind. Build a simple summary handout of your presentation/demo. Focus on a couple of critical slides or screens, a customer success story, and a memorable takeaway. That takeaway might be a Mnemonic, a Set of Power Numbers, or a simple diagram such as a 3x3 grid. In effect, you are giving them a 60-second summary of your meeting based on “if they can’t repeat it, they don’t get it. And if they don’t get it, they won’t buy it.”

Once The Meeting Starts

Do not start presenting or giving a demo. You are now in the position of having to perform some discovery on the fly. (The #1 reason inside/telesales SEs should get more respect than they do!) This will require some flexibility on your part, so consider it a challenge. Here are some techniques I have found helpful to ‘provoke’ the customer into disclosing useful information.

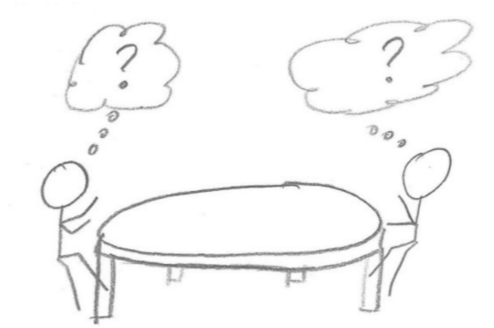
1. Trade Your Story For Theirs. The rep probably has a strong desire to start with a corporate overview. Although I am not a big fan of “broadcasting” who we are and what we do, you can offer to exchange your corporate story for their version of what brought them into the room today.

2. The Pain and Gain Sheet. Think of this as a slide with many questions on it. These are important questions that you know your solution can answer. Examples vary depending upon what you are selling, but they are along the lines of *“how can we reduce our backup window?”* or *“do you know what your exception rate is on invoices and how much that costs you?”* Here is an example of a pain sheet I once used for determining presales metrics to run a business.

3. The “A Customer Like You” Story. Start with 2-3 stories about customers just like them. For example, if you are selling to a small-medium community bank, then make it another small financial customer, another small-medium customer, and another customer in the same

city/location. You seek either a "that sounds just like us" or a "we don't have that problem" style response.

4. The Staff Meeting Conversation. When working with a manager and a group of her direct reports, try the "last staff meeting" question. I draw a picture of a table and a couple of stick figures and ask, "*when you talked about <what you do> at your last staff meeting – what were the items that came up for action?"* This works particularly well if you sell "IT Plumbing" solutions or equipment varying from servers to heat pumps to medical devices.



5. The Demo/GPS Roadmap. When called in to perform a generic (out-of-the-box) demo, give the customer some control over what you show. I've written before about a Demo/GPS Roadmap – which graphically shows the customer, step-by-step, what they are going to see. Hand this out to customers and ask for feedback regarding what would be important to them and what isn't. Choose the one or two items they say are essential and ask, "*how do you do that now?"* with as many follow-up questions as you can before they start to get impatient. Try to have them draw something for you to explain their current state.

6. Just Ask! Play the technical/doctor card. "*Listen, I can talk for hours about this subject and all the great things that my solution can do, but I'd like to narrow it down so I can focus on those things that are important to you. Can I ask you a couple of questions before I start?*" If you get some resistance, use the doctor analogy about understanding all the symptoms so you can get a complete picture.

Summary

Just because you have to make the zero-discovery sales presentation does not mean it has to be zero-discovery. Do your research. Once you start the meeting, position your questions as beneficial to the customer, so you do not waste their time. Obviously, this is not sales or customer behavior you want to encourage. Yet, if the technical part of the call fails, it is often the technical part of the team that gets the blame, regardless of the circumstances. So be prepared.

"In Sales, just as in Medicine, Prescription before Diagnosis is Malpractice."

Jim Cathcart, SFA Pioneer

Talking Points is a random 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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