

How to sell big ticket items to an IT director

By Richard Lowe

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Richard Lowe
articles@internet-tips.net

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Author: Richard Lowe, Jr.

Contact Author: <mailto:articles@internet-tips.net>

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Over the last couple of months, I've been working on a major project at my day job. I have decided that it's time to replace our backup system with what's called an enterprise backup solution. This means we want to be able to manage all of our backups from a central location.

We are getting near the end of the bidding process for this project. It's been very interesting what with the recession and all. A year ago, when I asked for a price reduction on anything I was often laughed at or given just a token discount of a couple percent. Now I am getting deep cuts of thirty to fifty percent! One thing that I am learning is that while recessions are not good things, they do give the buyer more of an advantage than in a strong economy.

Where was I? Oh yes, I've been gathering information, bids, competitive data and lots of other things that I need to make a decision. You see, this is not a cheap solution and the problem is complex. Thus, I want to be sure that I can honestly sell the whole thing to my boss. When he asks me questions I want to be able to answer immediately.

The salespeople are getting very frustrated with this process. They are, quite frankly, not used to selling. My staff and I have noticed that salespeople in the computer business are, well, fat, dumb and lazy. Even though we are talking about a quarter of a million dollar project, the people just don't want to do any work.

Finally one of the salespeople came right out and told me he was very frustrated. He did not understand why I had not yet purchased his product. He had given me price quotes, a competitive

analysis and a product specification. In his mind, he had done everything he needed to do.

I sat back in my chair for a minute, thinking about his question. It didn't take me long to formulate my thoughts.

"Tim", I said, "What I want is for you to sell me your product."

Tim was very surprised by this answer. He explained that he thought he was already doing that.

"No Tim", I replied, "what you are doing is giving me canned presentations, printing prepared specifications and comparisons off your web site, and pulling numbers from your price sheet. You are not selling me anything."

Tim honestly didn't understand - what was wrong with his approach?

Here's what I want from a salesperson. Listen to me and my staff. Really listen. Don't be thinking about the sale, about your wife or your commission. No, listen to me. I have patiently explained what problems we are trying to resolve, and I have asked my staff to explain what they want. We are very good communicators so you should be understanding what we are trying to say.

Now if you've been listening so you should know exactly how to solve our problems. Go back to your office, sit down at your desk and turn off your phone. Type on the computer exactly how your product will solve the problems and concerns that me and my staff have presented to you.

Don't tell me why people want your product and don't tell me about your product. Tell me how your product solves the problems that we have explained to you.

Yes, I need to see the specifications, but you need to explain why your product is better at meeting our requirements than anyone else. You say you've listened, okay, then prove it.

We want an enterprise backup package. Why? Tell me what problem we are trying to solve, then tell me how your product solves that problem. Is it going to save us time and money? Is it going to improve reliability? Is your product going to make it easier to restore files? What makes your product shine?

What the salespeople have been doing is telling me to buy their products. They have not been selling. I already know all about their products, their companies and their services. I don't need them to tell me this information again, especially since it already exists on their very own web sites.

No, what I need to know is how are our problems and requirements are met by their products.

Let me give you an example. A few months ago I went into the Saturn dealer to buy a new car. The salesperson came over and greeted me personally, then asked me what I was looking for.

As I explained my requirements she asked lots of questions. What kind of financing was I looking for? What color? Did I have kids? A wife? Was I looking for something conservative or flashy? One thing she found out right away is I have a big concern about maintenance costs. Another important issue is comfort. On the other hand, the look of the car is not all that critical. This question and answer period went on for over an hour. It was pleasant and not stressful by any means - in fact, it was great just telling the gal what I wanted from a car.

Now it was her turn. She spent the next hour showing me cars which met the specifications and qualifications that I had given her. She showed me under the hood, and explained how Saturn cars

are easier to maintain than others. She showed me how the car is dent-proof by hitting a sample automobile with a hammer.

She didn't spend any time at all on the look of the car - she knew (because she listened to me) that this is not very important to me. Instead, she spent the time telling me how a particular Saturn model met my needs - the needs that I had just been telling her.

Needless to say, she got the sale.

What the computer salespeople have been doing is showing me pictures of computers, sending me specifications and explaining to me how wonderful their products are.

What they should have been doing is listening, then responding. Instead, they were simply presenting canned presentations. Much like the Toyota salesperson that I visited only thirty minutes before the Saturn dealer. Needless to say, the Toyota dealer didn't get the sale.

So what's the moral of this story? Computer salespeople need to get to work. The fat, lazy days of the last ten years are gone - we are entering a recession folks. Recessions are buyers markets. You've had it easy, now roll up your sleeves and really sell.

The other lesson is equally simple - listen. Once you've listened, ask some questions, then listen some more. Do this until there is nothing else to listen to. NOW, after listening, tell me which of your products best solves those requirements that we have just told you and why.

That's what I want from salespeople.

'Nuff said.

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