

Small Businesses Need to Show Why They're Unique

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Many small businesses would like to think they are so different from the pack that a prospective customer can't help but do business with them.

Maybe you, for instance.

But chances are your product or service isn't that different from your competitors'. Still, being able to show customers your unique value proposition is key to getting an edge over the competition, particularly in today's commodity filled marketplace, say sales and training experts.

"With the competitive market, there's probably not an obvious difference between the features and benefits of your product over the next guy," says Richard Isaac, president of Sandler Training in Hauppauge. "You have to find something else to differentiate yourself and stand out from the crowd."

That something else could be the way you interact with the client or the ideas you bring to the table, say sales trainers.

It's not enough to say, "We're better than the rest."

"Every salesperson will say we're better than the next guy," says Isaac. "The prospect doesn't believe you."

Instead, the best way to describe your unique benefits is not by giving a direct pitch, but rather sharing examples and stories of situations where you were able to help others fix problems similar to what the prospect may be facing, he says.

You want to do some research ahead of time to see what issues their industry could be up against. So you might say: "We hear very often when we talk to manufacturers like yourself that they've had a problem with x, y and z. I was wondering if you've had any of these problems," says Isaac.

You can also get them talking by saying, "I'll tell you a little bit about what I know about your company and you tell me about what you know about mine, but I'd like to spend the majority of time talking about the issues you or your company are facing," says David Fagiano, chief operating officer of Dale Carnegie Training in Hauppauge. This way they know you did your homework and you can clear up any misconceptions they may have about your own company, while getting to the root of their issues, he says.

The bottom line is you want to ask strategic questions, notes Fagiano.

After all, you can't offer solutions unless you know what their needs are, adds Adrian Miller of Adrian Miller Sales Training in Port Washington.

"Make sure what you're offering is important, wanted and needed by the person you're trying to sell to," advises Miller. "What makes you different may not be of value to that particular prospect."

You should always have a list of six well-thought-out, open-ended discovery questions to ask the customer in every sales discovery session, says Paul S. Goldner of the Sales & Performance Group in Katonah, N.Y., and author of "Red Hot Customers: How to Get Them, How to Keep Them" (AMACOM, \$17.95). A sales discovery session is where you meet with customers to learn about their needs, he explains. You can check out some of Goldner's suggested questions at <http://redhot>

[sales.com/content.asp?id=144](http://redhot.sales.com/content.asp?id=144).

What you never want to do is sell yourself by knocking the competition, notes Goldner, particularly since the prospect may already be working with them. It's like saying the prospect made a bad decision, says Fagiano.

But you can acknowledge the competition, explains Stephan Schiffman of DEI Sales Training in [Manhattan](#).

Chances are they're already working with someone and it's important for you to understand what the prospect is doing now and why they are buying their product from someone other than you, he says.

"The real key in sales is thinking out the idea," notes Schiffman. "Come in with ideas that will help them do something better than they're currently doing."

Anything less and you're just wasting their time.

SALES DO'S AND DON'TS

Do listen. Often, salespeople talk about themselves or their company and never get to the critical issues facing a company.

Do ask strategic questions to get to these critical issues.

Don't knock the competition.

Don't just say you're better. Pinpoint key issues and come up with suggestions on how you can help clients improve upon what they're doing.