

Denver Business Journal - July 17, 2006

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## DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, July 14, 2006

# How to avoid stalls that prospects will throw in your path

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

Salespeople hate to hear the dreaded sales "stall" -- meaning, the potential customer is delaying making a buying decision.

The message is a disappointment and can come over the phone, through e-mail, voice mail and even in a face-to-face conversation.

More often than not, it's something like "we're putting this on the back burner" or "we've decided to move in a different direction."

The old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" applies here. Stalls are easier to prevent than to correct.

Avoid the sales stall and protect yourself by following the practices of top performers. These are:

- Make no assumptions by qualifying the need more thoroughly.
- Identify budget issues and decision-makers up front.
- Bring up obstacles at the beginning of the sales cycle, and resolve them.

(1) First, qualify the stated need. Salespeople often move too quickly through this step.

Rarely do top sales performers take a statement of need at face value. They dig deeper and, like good detectives, look for the evidence below the surface. They take the time to thoroughly understand the buyer's need, and clarify the implications, implied and unseen, that drive that need.

Buyers can more easily see value of what you're selling when they compare your solutions to both their best- and worst-case scenarios.

Think of how you usually make buying decisions. Most of us have a long list of things we really need, but with a defined budget, only the most pressing items -- the ones having the greatest impact -- take priority.

Make no assumptions about the stated need, and tactfully uncover the underlying implications.

Get the evidence to justify your efforts before you invest your time and resources. Rather than relying on your customer's excitement about your offerings, use the implications of their situation to assess the likelihood of their buying.

(2) Second, know that the "back-burner" message may be driven by financial reasons, and those are more easily detected before you hear the stall than afterwards.

Think of your buyer from two perspectives. First, regardless of how much they need your services, can they logistically pay you now? Second, even if they have the necessary budget, assuming they see the value, are they willing to pay your price?

Willingness to make the investment also can surface as a late stall. Prevent the back-burner stall and help your prospect save face by having comprehensive budget conversations before your solution goes to final decision.

Smart sellers thoroughly discuss budgets, the prospect's willingness, ability and authority early in the sales process. Not doing so dramatically increases the risk of rejection.

Identify and get commitment on budget levels and priorities from all decision-makers before trying to close the sale. It can help prevent hearing disappointing news later.

(3) Third, not dealing with identified obstacles or problems before the sale goes to decision is a sure way to get the stall.

Top performers are good at sniffing out problems and roadblocks early. They think ahead and bring up obstacles, often before the customer does.

It's easier to address them during the process for several reasons. For one, communication is usually more open and decision-makers more available. At the end, decision-makers tend to retreat and become less available.

Additionally, once the stall is given, the potential customer is unlikely to change their mind.

Examples of problems are decision-makers unknown to the seller, potential price matching by a current vendors and strong existing relationships.

Ask early:

- "Who besides you is involved in the process?"
- "How will you handle your long-term relationship with your current vendor?"
- "What will you do if my competitor meets my price?"

These questions can help you build credibility, shorten the sales cycle and reduce stalls at the end.

Of course, there are thousands of reasons for delays; the challenge is to identify them. Many potential customers stall because they don't want to feel the pressure of being re-sold.

While there's no universal answer, the best tactics to prevent stalls are tightening up qualifying skills and building enough trust. That makes the prospect feel comfortable about disclosing their real concerns.

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