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## What to do when buying decisions are put on hold

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

Cries from the field about delayed purchasing decisions are increasing.

The challenge is determining if the delay is a disguised objection, an unresolved concern, an excuse or real. Most importantly, how can you get to the truth, and move the sale forward?

Buyers are like Wall Street: Neither likes uncertainty. Understanding risk can help you smooth the progress toward a decision. Caution is an indication of risk aversion and it's rampant right now. Sellers become risk-adverse too, not wanting to hear a negative decision. It is naturally easier to continue chasing than to give up.

But consider that getting a negative decision now is better than getting a negative decision after investing time, energy and resources pursuing a prospect for weeks or even months.

Try facilitating a discussion around best-case and worst-case scenarios. What is the worst case if they do nothing, and what is the best case if they move forward? What is the worst-case scenario if they buy now, and what is the best case if they delay the decision? Having this conversation gives you the opportunity to influence their thought process and provide input into the scenarios.

Three common themes emerge as reasons for delayed decisions, which are:

- Incomplete or poor initial qualification.
- Unanswered concerns.
- Changes in priorities.

Here is what you can do to diagnose where you are and what to do next.

First, did you just take the prospect's word that they could benefit from what you're selling? Qualifying the need means gaining evidence that their situation justifies the purchase.

For example, everyone wants new office furniture, but how does not buying it now affect the company? It could range from lost productivity to poor market image to no effect at all.

If there's good evidence of significant impact, the urgency to make a purchase is real.

It's also important to acquire the perspective of all the involved decision makers to identify potential roadblocks. It's rare for everyone to agree on needs and priorities within a company. Without this information, it's difficult to implement a strategy to move forward.

Opportunities that need funding or that are waiting for funding are less likely to close than those that have a budget already allocated.

Risk-adverse sellers avoid having the early crucial conversations about budgets and money. Hoping that traditional benefits will carry the decision is riskier than having a direct and frank discussion about the investment requirements early in the sales process.

There is a difference between not having the budget and being unwilling to invest the budget. One is a logistical problem while the other is a perceived value problem. You can't fix logistics, but you can address value. In a cautionary climate, you must run an "A" game and qualify thoroughly.

Second, a presentation or proposal that is premature will automatically generate a stall. Buyers unconsciously go through three major phases of buying. First, they evaluate if they have a need that is severe enough to fix. Once a need is clear, the assessment of options occurs. You know the buyer is in this mode when they're talking to competitors, have a committed budget, or a committee or person is actively working on the problem.

Communication is usually active and open during this phase. Avoid presenting until prospects are assessing options.

Delays and stalls frequently start when a decision is close internally. A form of pre-buyer's remorse occurs. The fear relates to the consequences and difficulty of correcting a wrong decision.

The risk compels many to go with a known vendor even if their solution isn't the best.

Minimizing or dismissing concerns at this point will surely result in failure. Rather than push for a decision, reassure by using existing

customers to convey confidence, provide testimonials and, if possible, offer guarantees, insurance and assurance options to build confidence in the buyer's mind.

Third, priorities do change, and what was painful 30 to 60 days ago may not be the most pressing concern now. You can't control outside events, but you can continue building your relationship and look for additional reasons to elevate your solution. Asking "what if" questions can help you assess whether the delay is real or just a putoff. Examples might be, "What if the other priority gets fixed quickly, where does that put this deal?" Or "What if A, B or C happens?" Ask, "Should we terminate this file or should we keep it open?" to determine the extent of the delay.

Prospects are reluctant to provide negative information voluntarily. The best option is to avoid investing time and energy on unlikely opportunities and finding those that have a greater chance of success.

In summary, you can reduce delays with better qualifying, by giving presentations and proposals at the right time, and using questioning techniques to assess the reality when priorities change.

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