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Sales

Getting past buyers' indecision and their inability to commit

Premium content from Denver Business Journal - by Garry Duncan

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"Refusing to commit has never been easier, and it says a lot about us," Elizabeth Bernstein wrote in a recent Wall Street Journal article. Bernstein describes the increasing trend for people to say "maybe" instead of "yes" or "no."

This is no surprise to the thousands of selling professionals who hear it daily.

Selling success depends upon the ability to get a decision.

The semantics change from maybe to some form of think it over, such as "I need to sleep on this," or "Can you follow up in a week or two?"

So why are buyers indecisive — and what can you do about it?

Some are cautious and need time to assess and gain comfort, while others just don't have the courage to say "no." Still others want to know if a better option or price is available.

Let's examine this in more detail:

- **Consider the buyer who needs time to get comfortable.**

The challenge is distinguishing them from someone just stalling. Ask how they made buying decisions in the past. Buying behavior tends to repeat itself.

Some car buyers decide in one visit of two or three hours, while others need several visits over several days or weeks.

Behavioral research validates that the analytical and low-risk buyer will make decisions cautiously and slowly. Recognize them by their need to have precise information and their quiet, calm and non-expressive manner. Pushing for a fast decision is sure to generate a stall.

To close, these buyers talk openly about how much time and information they need to get comfortable. Set an end point together.

One buyer said, "I need a relationship first, before I feel comfortable moving forward." The obvious next question, "How do we do that?" created a process that led to a sale.

Ensure your presentation is accurate, precise and well-organized, which creates comfort for this buying style. Any hint of an impending rebuttal will send them into hiding. Nurture, patience and comfort will enable easier decisions from this buyer.

- **Other buyers have little or no intention of moving forward or buying, but have a hard time saying "no."**

Think of parents, bosses and friends who say, "Let me think about it," and "maybe" to protect relationships and soften the underlying "no."

That flows into the buying process. Tire kickers and noncommitted prospects often are in a hurry, results-oriented, or talkative and expressive with a lot of enthusiasm.

If you can't gain quality evidence around the reasons for a prospect's alleged needs, they're most likely not ready to buy.

For those who are well-qualified, their stalls mean you didn't sell them. For those qualified buyers, accept their "maybe" or "think it over" as "no."

A host who couldn't get a firm "yes" to an invitation realized that it was "no" and obtained closure by saying, "Perhaps you can come next time."

Likewise, finding a way to say "no" for them can facilitate an easier decision. You can say, "I am not sold you are sold," or "I get the feeling you want to say no, but don't know

how." These and similar responses make it easier for the prospect to own up and tell you the truth.

• **Finally, there are shoppers who want the best deal or best price and must always compare.**

Differentiate between those unsure if they need to make a change, and those who are seriously buying. Simply ask, "Is this something you have decided to do, or are you still unsure?"

You can try to eliminate a shopper's need to compare with guarantees, added incentives or a small concession in exchange for a "yes" or "no."

Asking for a last look and second chance often is a good option.

For those seriously comparing, help them determine decision criteria that are favorable to your offering just as you would write specs in a request for proposal that competitors find difficult to match.

Any "maybe" or "think it over" is disappointing because they leave the seller in limbo while the buyer retains control.Reduce buyer indecision by asking for a clear "yes" or "no" answer.

One seller tells buyers if they feel they need to think it over, just say "no," which is a good option for those who struggle saying "no."

Rather than an ultimatum for the cautious buyer, establish a mutual deadline for a decision.

Doing so provides more success capturing those cautious thinkers. If you can't get a decision, don't hesitate to make the decision for them. Say, "It sounds like this is not the time or right solution for you," and that you are going to consider their indecision a "no."

The majority will fess up or move forward. This way you get a decision and save time.

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