



# Perfect Pitch

Tips for delivering a sophisticated and successful sales presentation

By Brendan O'Brien

**B**ill Weidmaier remembers a time, decades ago, when salespeople were trained to do canned sales presentations. New salespeople were instructed in exactly what to say and what questions they asked, according to the 40-year sales veteran and president of Iowa-Des Moines Supply Inc., in Des Moines, Iowa.

"By using the proper phrases and statements in the proper order, you would trick them into saying yes to an order and to a sale," he says. "Today, however, purchasing agents are a lot more sophisticated, a lot more professional and a lot more knowledgeable."

Sales presentations should follow suit in terms of being sophisticated, professional, knowledge-based events that are created and refined by salespeople throughout the jan/san supply industry. The pinnacle of a solid sales presentation is the ability to leverage the relationship with the client, according to several sales experts.

✂ "If you do not have a good relationship with your customers and have not built trust in your customers, I don't care how good of a product you bring in, it's going to be a heck of a lot more difficult to get in front of them and get the right people there to take you seriously," says Weidmaier.

✂ For a salesperson to accomplish this, they need to view themselves as a sales and product consultant who can solve their clients' problems, not as a product peddler.

"Those who have built a consulting base and who have solved solutions in the past for their customers, they are going to listen to them far more quickly and put a lot more credence in what they got to say than somebody who has not solved many of their problems," Weidmaier says. "They are just going in and taking orders."

According to Dave Kahle, president of DaCo Corp., in Comstock Park, Mich., the salesperson must understand their customer in depth and detail before attempting to create a presentation.

✂ "The key piece to making a persuasive presentation is to match the presentation to your best understanding of the needs and desires of the customer," Kahle says. "Those two pieces — understanding the customer and presenting to those needs — are absolutely intertwined like two twines of a rope. It's almost impossible to pull them apart."

Although having a relationship with a purchasing agent is an effective practice, Weidmaier says that an optimal relationship has depth in which the salesperson has a multitude of relationships with personnel throughout the company.

These relationships will allow salespeople to explore the nooks and crannies of the client's company where there are more opportunities to solve problems, according to Weidmaier.

✂ "Today, you are selling products based on solving problems," he says. "You are selling solutions to their problems."

### Two-way Street

✂ Understanding the needs and uncovering the problems that a client faces is an evolving process that should extend into the

## CleanLink

Find More Info Online

### Get More Sales Info

**D**id you know Dave Kahle, president of DaCo Corp., Comstock Park, Mich., writes a monthly sales column for *Sanitary Maintenance*?

Topics already covered by Dave in his online column "Ask The Sales Expert" include: teaching sales leaders how to break the sales comfort zone; why straight commission plans don't work; and motivating complacent sales reps.



To read Dave's most recent column, visit [www.cleanlink.com/sm/salescolumn.asp](http://www.cleanlink.com/sm/salescolumn.asp) or scan the QR code

actual presentation. A salesperson must be willing to have a two-way conversation with the client during the presentation to allow them to articulate what problems they need solved.

"One of the negative characteristics of many salespeople is they want to do all of the talking and they don't do enough listening and exploring the situation to understand the motives...which would result in you getting the sale," Weidmaier says.

Maurice Dixon, of Dixon and Associates, a sales consulting firm in Minneapolis, suggests making a list of questions before going into a presentation. These questions should be based on the client's needs and incorporated into the presentation. Learning about the client's needs can be accomplished by learning through research on the Internet and through previous experience with the client.

## the pinnacle of a solid sales presentation is the ability to leverage the relationship with the client

"You need to start asking some questions and get some listening skills," Dixon says. "The listening skills of some salespeople falter."

In addition to developing a list of questions, salespeople who are preparing their presentation should focus on benefits rather than features of their products. Benefits are categorized by what the product can do for the client while features are only product specifications.

This is a major component of a persuasive sales presentation, according to Kahle, because most products have too many features to talk about in the first place.

"You can't talk about everything," Kahle says. "You have to select the features that are most appropriate for that particular customer."

Another suggestion when scripting a sales presentation is to make sure that half the words that are used are about how the product impacts the customer, according to Kahle.

"That brings us to one of the problems salespeople have. They present the product without any attempt to relating it to the customer," Kahle says. "This is a particular issue for new salespeople. This is what gives sales a bad name. We have all of these people running around pitching their products and the customers are saying, 'So what.'"

In terms of preparing for a sales presentation, Weidmaier suggests making a concerted effort to have the decision maker present at the meeting. This will cut down on the time for a

decision to be made on the part of the client.

It will also eliminate the scenario in which personnel within the client's enterprise sells a product to a decision maker, a situation that salespeople should avoid, according to Weidmaier.

"Your purchasing agent is not going to sell your product to his boss or the person who will make the decision," Weidmaier says. "You would like to think that they will not be as effective in selling the product as you would be. He is not going to learn the product as well as you should know it."

### Get Hands On

Presentations, when possible, should consist of a hands-on demonstration of the product. The product, according to Kahle, can sell itself when it is in the hands of the client. If that is impossible, videos and pictures of the product at work would suffice during a presentation.

"Let them spray it, squirt it and wipe it and talk to them as they are doing it. That is the most effective," Kahle says. "Bring the product."

Sales managers should also be taking a more active role in their sales staff's presentation. Dixon admits this is tough to do for many sales managers these days who are stretched thin because of their own quotas they need to meet. But, he says, it's vitally important.

One of the ways sales managers can improve their staff's presentations is to have them practice in front of their peers and high-level individuals in their own company. This role playing can hone in on confidence and technique issues the salesperson may have with their sales presentation.

### Improve Speaking Skills And Demeanor

Ed Stasiak, vice president of KSS Enterprises, Kalamazoo, Mich., insists that his company's salespeople have boardroom presentation skills, strong speaking skills and a professional demeanor. He also instructs the sales staff to talk about a number of items in a sales presentation, including risk management and economic trust.

"We use all kinds of buzz words and build their business acumen and that is how we go in and present in today's world," Stasiak says. "We are such a small component of any organization's business on the product side. But what

we can do to enhance their facilities and create safety awareness is much more powerful to an owner of an organization than whether we have cheap urinal blocks."

Jan/san distributors sell commodities which are almost impossible to differentiate, says Stasiak. As a result, a solid sales



presentation should focus on a distributor's value-added propositions.

KSS Enterprises recently published a new brochure in which no products are promoted. Instead, it focuses on the information the organization believes a business owner would need in evaluating a vendor. The same approach is used in sales presentations at KSS Enterprises.

"It is not going in and saying that your urinal blocks are better than the next guy's," Stasiak says. "You sell yourself first, your organization second and products will come third."

The sales staff at KSS Enterprises have access to a PowerPoint of eight slides that walks the client through who the company is and what it has to offer by differentiating it from its competition.

All salespeople in the company are trained to do the presentation, Stasiak says. The sales staff has it handy when they feel they need to introduce the company to a client. After the company PowerPoint, they then enter into the product phase of the presentation.

Another presentation recommendation is for salespeople to dress for success. Suits should be worn with a shirt and tie that matches. Shoes should be shined and belts should be crisp and without worn-out notches.

"I think at times our industry can lack a little professionalism in the way that sales staff represent themselves in their choice of attire," Stasiak says. "They need to be well-groomed, well-dressed and well-prepared. You sell yourself first and then your company and then you get into products."

During the pitch, salespeople should take notes, a major component of a solid presentation, says Dixon. If salespeople are unsure if the client approves of them taking notes, they should just ask, according to Dixon.

"I have never had anyone say not to take notes," Dixon says. "I may have some questions already on that table that I want to ask and subjects that I want to cover and I write down what they say to me."

A sales presentation should involve open-ended questions that provoke explanations and descriptions of problems from the client's perspective. Another skill that salespeople need to have is the ability to handle objections during a presentation.

"Some salespeople are afraid of objections, but we preach that they need to know what they are. They have to smoke them out," Dixon says. "They're hidden objections. If you do not know about them, you will not get around those and you will not make the sale."

At the end of a solid presentation, the salesperson should attempt to close the deal. This depends on the salesperson's style, but asking for the client's opinion is a good place to start to close the sale, says Dixon. After the objections are dealt with, the salesperson should ask for a decision.

"When they say they think the product looks pretty good, then you say, 'let's go ahead with it, OK?'" says Dixon. "If they say yes, just shut up and write the order." ■

*Brendan O'Brien is a freelance writer based in Greenfield, Wis. He is a frequent contributor to Sanitary Maintenance.*