

Contact:
John Graham
GrahamComm
jgraham@grahamcomm.com
617.774.9759

Marketing and Sales Sales Pitches That Don't Sell

By
John Graham

Sales pitches are short-cuts that save time and don't require thinking. They're the stock-in-trade of salespeople, rolling off the tongue easily and unconsciously. They once worked well with customers, but not so much today. Here are some of them:

"How can I help you?" This one gets top billing on the list, and deservedly so. It's leftover from the last century, when customers needed assistance and relied on salespeople and marketers, as well as the iconic Sears catalog, to point them in the right direction, followed by the ubiquitous shopping mall. While the former is long gone, the latter is fast going dark.

When you think about it, "How can I help you?" is insulting, a turn off and a crutch, as if customers lack the ability to identify what they want and then to find it. A more adult approach would be, "Let's talk about what you have in mind." The role of salespeople and marketers is no longer that of a guide, directing customers to what they want to sell them. Those who make sales are coaches, who take the time to figure what's in the customer's best interest.

"We are the competition." While it may work for Ferrari, this one is nothing more than a self-serving attempt to raise the "look no further" flag. A company that believes it's out in front of the pack can back up the claim by comparing their product or service so customers can make that judgment for themselves.

There are no secrets today so attempts at obfuscation or pulling the wool over the customer's eyes is self-defeating.

"I have just what you're looking for." This might be described as the "Presumptive Opening" or, more accurately, as the "This is what I'm going to sell you, so save time by getting your wallet out now" strategy. Rather than attempting to engage customers, it's more akin to browbeating than anything else. On top of that, it's repulsive and demeaning to customers.

"We've been in business for 37 years." There was a time when longevity made a compelling statement for customers, sending a message of stability and that somebody was doing something right. Not now. In fact, it may be just the opposite in the customer's mind, as companies merge, fail, and, more likely, fall behind.

Old is out. Today, customers flock to start-ups, the new, and the innovative, particularly if the CEO is 23, not 63.

“You’re going to love this.” Whether it’s a house, an engagement ring, or a refrigerator, telling customers what to think can mean trouble. It’s demeaning, particularly when a stranger, such as a salesperson, does it. And it can come back to bite you. Even though customers make a purchase, they can come to resent being told how they should think about what they buy—and then comes a cancelled order or a quick return. And no more sales.

“You’ll never do better than this price.” Sure, everyone in marketing and sales is justifiably concerned with price, more so every day. But that’s no excuse for arrogantly announcing to customers that they’re, in effect, stupid not to buy from you.

Such tactics may have worked in the past, but today’s customers don’t respond positively to such tactics. They want the evidence and they feel capable of their own research, even as they’re talking to a salesperson.

“Time is running out. Once they’re gone, they’re gone.” Yes, and you might want to throw in “Order now. Only 11 in stock.” Scarcity gets attention, as psychologists tell us. We balk at losing something we already have for the possibility of greater gain. This can help explain the appeal of mutual funds vs. buying individual stocks.

Yet, we also don’t want to lose something we don’t have, particularly if it’s in scarce supply. It’s not surprising that such pitches as “Prices going up in 2 days” and “Only 3 left in stock” are irresistible, and, like magic, compel many customers to hit the “Buy now” button. While there are takers, the more thoughtful and better-informed buyers say, “Thanks, but no thanks.”

“I can see you know what you like.” Customer want to be treated with respect, but today’s customers avoid manipulation by fake praise that’s designed to create a “bond” with the salesperson. Instead of dwelling on ways to get the sale, it’s far better to focus on listening thoughtfully to what a customer says and the questions they ask.

“I don’t know how long that’s going to be available.” An upscale retailer had a one-day furniture sale and the place was jumping. Months later, there was a two-day sale event for customers. Much of the same merchandise was shown at the original “special price.”

Playing games with customers destroys buyer confidence and can have long-term negative consequences. No one wants to be played for a fool.

“Your friends will love it.” This one is used as the “persuader,” when selling everything from clothing to homes, cars, furniture and jewelry, and the like. It’s aimed at the unsure, the indecisive, the confused, and those who don’t trust their own judgment. It’s as if the customer’s friends got together to give their permission to say yes, a ridiculous idea.

“If you can get a better deal, take it.” This sounds as if a salesperson is daring the customer to find a better price. Not so. In reality, the purpose is to get the customer to back down, to give up and capitulate, and buy now. Today’s savvy customers don’t take the bait. Instead they take the advice, track down a better deal—and take it.

So, what? Thoughtful salespeople and marketers are aware of the words they use with customers. Do they send the right message? Are they helpful in closing more sales? Or, are they repeated endlessly without thought or meaning?

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of “Magnet Marketing,” and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, “No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas.” Contact him at jgraham@grahamcomm.com, 617-774-9759 or johnrgraham.com.