



the SWEET smell of success

• WHAT YOUR BUYERS (REALLY) WANT •

EDITORIAL | BILL BROOKS

The quote is so common because it's unquestionably true! Of course your prospects would like a low price. But nine times out of ten they know that "low price" can often translate into "poor quality." The fact is your prospects value many *other* things besides low price, some of which can be just as persuasive, whether you sell products to end-users or services to major corporations.



In addition to price, there are countless other factors that get people to buy. Let's take a look at some of the most fundamental things you can provide to your prospects that will encourage them to buy from you, even if your price is higher than your competitor's.

An Easy, "No-Brainer" Relationship

When it's easy to do business with you, your customer's life is easier. If you can provide your prospects and customers with a relationship in which they get what they want, when they need it, on time and in good shape, you'll most likely find it easier to sell to them at full price, rate, or fee.

Reliability and Dependability

It's simple. People like to know that they can rely on you. It is a foolish (and rare) customer who will drop a known provider to save a few pennies buying from an unknown source. If you have a solid history of reliability and dependability, you are in the position to remind your customers that they can rely on you when they are considering buying what you sell from one of your competitors.

Predictability

Customers not only like reliability, they like predictability. Most people who study behavior will concur — what someone has done in the past likely indicates what they'll do in the future. So if all of your actions and behaviors have been consistently professional and your sales are always handled effectively and efficiently, your customers will be able to say you are "predictable" based on your past relationship and reputation.

Reaction to Their Needs

"You don't understand: Our business is different from those other guys'," is a very common refrain I hear from our prospects. Most people like to think of themselves as being a little bit different from everyone else; and to some degree, they're right. If you can find ways to acknowledge your customer's uniqueness, and be flexible and responsive to their specialized needs, you will almost always earn a purchase order, even if your price is higher than your competitor's.

Short Delivery Times

Even those prospects and customers who do not say they need "just-in-time" delivery still like short delivery times; that is true no matter what the product or service is. Everybody wants it yester-

day, and if you can provide it sooner than your competitor, you can charge a higher price for it. In fact, this is one of the best ways to sell at premium prices (or rates or fees).

Breadth and Depth in Quality

You stand a much better chance of building a valuable, long-term relationship with your customers if you do everything you can to provide not only a quality product or service, but also to ensure that your customers achieve maximum use of the product or service they're buying from you. Your customers are hoping to use your product or service to achieve a goal. They want to know that you have depth in your understanding of the things they're trying to accomplish — and not that you are just out to sell them more.

Knowledge, Competence, and Follow-Up

We all like to know that we're in good hands. Salespeople who are serious about following up on orders, making sure that everything's right, and are thorough in processing, expediting requests and being available after the sale is made find that these activities give them an opportunity to sell at a premium price — and the opportunity to make more sales to their existing accounts.

Your Willingness to "Go to Bat" for the Customer When Problems Arise

All customers like to have somebody on their side. Your customers will appreciate — and likely pay a premium price for — genuine help if and when any kind of problem arises. Even though your employer is the one who

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pays your commission or salary, your customers should be able to expect you to advocate for them with your employer, if necessary. You can win customers for life when you are willing to help them in crisis situations.

Salespeople Who Know Their Product Line

Your customers expect you to know a lot about what you're selling. If you do, they will believe that you can assist them in making the best choice in buying what it is that they want or expect to buy from you. If you don't know your own product line, you're not going to be very convincing to a customer as to why he/she should buy from you — particularly at a premium price, rate, or fee.

Ease of Interpretation of Your Price Lists and/or Quotes

If you can point out to your prospect exactly what the price is in simple, understandable terms, you are more apt to get the order. It's this simple: A confused prospect buys nothing! If prospects have to sort through a lot of paperwork, or ask you a million questions to ascertain the real (or total) price, they're likely to give their business to your competitor who

gives them a simple, quick, clean and easy-to-understand quotation.

Early Notice of Shipment or Product Problems

If you ever see that shipping or product problems are coming up, let your customers know about them as far in advance as possible, and let them know up front how you are going to help them get through the difficulty. If there's nothing you can do to help them, you've got to give your customers the opportunity to find some other source of the product or materials so that *your* delay doesn't cause *them* a delay. Of course, it's hard to maintain customers when you force them to look for other sources, but it's probably impossible to retain them when you give them too many nasty surprises.

Advance Warning of Discontinuance of Items

Again, people don't like surprises. If you are going to discontinue a product or service that your customer has been using, it's important to give them ample time to cover their own self-interests, relative to the unavailability of that product or service. Can they phase it out of their inventory? Can they avoid building an expensive

marketing campaign around a product that isn't going to be available for them to resell? Can they avoid the expense of designing your software into their offering and then discovering that it's no longer available for them to use in making their system work? How about a financial product that is factored into a business benefit package and it is suddenly taken off the market?

What's the bottom line? Your prospects are realistic enough (and smart enough) to know that they are, in the final analysis, going to get what they pay for. They know that if they buy from your lower-priced competitor, they will probably be setting themselves up for problems, some of which ultimately will be intolerable. So you should never compete on low price. Instead, concentrate all of your efforts on providing your customers with what they want and need — when they want it — and on charging them a premium price for it. ❏



BILL BROOKS

Bill Brooks is CEO of The Brooks Group, an international sales training and business growth firm based in Greensboro, North Carolina. For more information visit www.thebrooksgroup.com. If readers would like to receive The Brooks Group's free monthly email *Sales or Sales Management* newsletter, email arbara@thebrooksgroup.com or call The Brooks Group at 336-282-6303.

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 One Spectrum Pointe, Suite 150
 Lake Forest, CA 92630-2283
 Phone: (949) 859-4040
 Toll-free: (877) 626-2776
 Fax: (949) 855-2973
 E-mail: MANA@MANAonline.org
 Web site: www.MANAonline.org
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