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Sales Solutions

How to overcome objections and get first meeting

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Question: What suggestions do you have on how to overcome common objections when trying to schedule the first face-to-face meeting with a new prospect?

Answer: None of us likes to hear the word "no," but for those of us who have chosen sales as a career, we've had to deal with it more than the average person. As you know, "no" comes in many forms, and as you mention in your question, a form of "no" commonly known in the sales arena is what we call common objections.

The objections we hear most often when trying to schedule the first meeting with a new prospect come in four main categories which I have listed below:

- Not interested
- Happy now (also known as the status quo)
- Send literature
- Bad experience

First of all, it's important to mention that when making that first phone call to a new prospect, your goal is to schedule a meeting to discuss your products and services, and not to sell them over the phone. (For those of you who do sell over the phone, I recommend reading a book called "Telesales," second edition, by Stephan Schiffman, Adams Media, 2003.)

The basic formula for getting the first meeting with a new prospect is to overcome the objection and then ask for the meeting.

Many times when prospects say they're not interested the first time you call them, it is more of a knee-jerk reaction more than anything else, as a result of being called by a salesperson who is unknown to them. Oftentimes, the person you've called to ask for that first meeting is in the middle of something and your call is an interruption. Telling you they're not interested is just a way to get you off the phone.

The key to handling the not-interested objection is to refer to another customer of yours who said the same thing when you first called them, but has since become a happy customer and enjoyed a specific benefit as a result. Immediately following this statement, ask for a meeting on a specific day and time. To simplify, think: not interested equals benefit.

Next, the "I'm happy with my current provider," also known as the happy now, or status quo objection, should be handled by stating that your products and services might complement what the prospect is currently having delivered by another provider. You may also say that your products and services may be a backup to their current solution, or that you "don't mind being second." When you position your products and services as a supplement or complement to the prospect's current solution, you come across as genuinely trying to be of help to that prospect, rather than trying to compete with their current solution. Again, after overcoming the happy now objection, ask for a meeting on a specific day and time. To simplify, think: happy now equals complement.

"Why don't you just send me some literature?" Ever get this one? We all know in this day and age of Web sites that sending literature is really a thing of the past and an obvious "blow-off" from the prospect in an effort to get you off the phone. When getting the just send literature objection, here's what I say. It takes a little moxie, but it works: "Sure, I'd be happy to send you some literature. Just so you know, it will come in a package that's 5-foot-8, weighs 150 pounds, and has dark hair! How about I deliver it at 10 a.m. on Wednesday?" Obviously, the "package" I'm referring to is me. It always gets a laugh and usually gets the meeting.

If you're not comfortable using humor to overcome the send literature objection, try this instead. "Actually, any information I would send you is readily available on our Web site. Tell me about what is it specifically you're most interested in." Then, use the fact that they want more information as the reason you should meet. Again, suggest a specific day and time to get together. To simplify, think: send literature equals tell me about.

Finally, the last objection you might hear from your prospect when trying to get that first meeting is, "We once had a bad experience with your company." If you hear this one, talk about how your company has changed since the prospect's bad experience. Now, if the prospect had a bad experience with your company yesterday, you're out of luck, because your company hasn't changed overnight; but if their bad experience was some time ago, you can talk about how your company has changed since the bad experience. Again, ask for the meeting next by suggesting a specific date and time. To simplify, think: bad experience equals we've changed.

For more ideas on how to overcome common objections, check out Stephan Schiffman's book, "Cold Calling Techniques...That Really Work!" (fifth edition, Adams Media, 2003).

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